North East India

People, History and Culture

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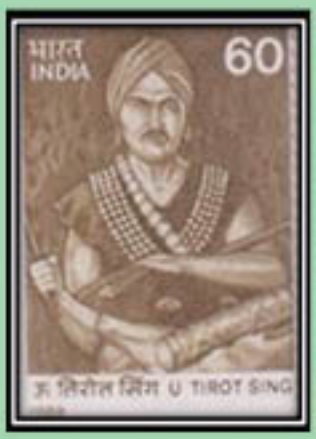
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North East India

People, History and Culture

विद्यया ऽमृतमश्नुते

एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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Foreword

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) brings out diverse teaching-learning materials with a view to promote inclusive development of school children in the country. The supplementary reader, *North East India: People, History and Culture*, is an endeavour in this direction. The objective is to create and enhance awareness about north-eastern states of India among young children, particularly those living in other parts of the country.

The book contains write-ups on eight states of North East India. It gives an account of the land, people, history, culture and other aspects of these eight states. Though the states have contiguous geographical location, they are distinctly diverse in ethnic composition, historical background and cultural heritage. The states are also strategically located as they share a large part of the country's international land boundary.

This reader, a compilation, is developed with the hope that it will help learners acquaint themselves with these states of India, their people, history, role in India's freedom struggle and cultural diversity. It is supplemented by pictures to make an interesting read. The NCERT appreciates the work of its faculty members in developing this publication.

As an organisation committed to systemic reforms and continuous improvement in the quality of its product, the NCERT welcomes suggestions for its refinement and improvement.

Hrushikesh Senapaty
Director
National Council of Educational
Research and Training

New Delhi
20 March 2017

Preface

Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim are eight states located in the North East of the country and command special importance in India, not only because of their location but also their cultural and historical uniqueness. The landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity make these states quite different from other parts of the country. They are known as eight siblings and referred to as 'eight sisters' or 'seven sisters and one brother'. These states cover an area of 2,63,179 sq. km, approximately eight per cent of the country's total geographical area and house around 3.76 per cent of the total population the country. Around 98 per cent of the boundary of these states has international borders.

Surrounded by hills and beautiful rivers, these states fall in the category of eastern Himalayan ranges and Patkai-Naga hills along with Brahmaputra-Barak river systems and valley plains. The hills and basins are a mixture of mountain ranges, plateaus, low hills and valleys. Rich in natural resources and flora and fauna, the region is a gateway to east and South-East Asia.

The states have distinct cultures and multiple ethnic groups and are a fine example of unity in diversity. The variety of ethnic groups, languages and religions reflect the multi-cultural character of the states. The region houses over 200 of the 635 tribal groups in the country, speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects. States like, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are predominantly inhabited by tribals with a certain degree of diversity among the tribes. States like, Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim are inhabited by people of various religious denominations like, Hindus, Christians and Muslims and a combination of local tribes and communities.

The region has remained isolated from the rest of the country because of its location and terrain and has failed to secure equal benefits in the process of development. This has resulted into social-political disturbances and unrest for a few years. While the region has a lower level of industrial and economic development, it has abundant forest resources. Petroleum and tea are two significant resources harnessed in the region. At the same time, agriculture, horticulture and handloom continue to be the main activities of these states.

Arunachal Pradesh is the largest among the north-eastern states in India. Ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity is a noticeable feature of the state. Tawang, having one of the largest and the oldest Buddhist monasteries in India, is located here.

Assam, a land of scenic beauty, with rivers like Brahmaputra and Barak, is the second largest but most populous and developed state in the North East. Assam houses two of the UNESCO World Heritage sites—the Kaziranga National Park and the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary. The state produces some of the finest tea in the world. It is also known for Kamakhya temple, one of the most revered *Shakti-Peeth* in India, and Srimanta Sankardeva who was one of the most versatile saints in the Indian history.

Manipur is a beautiful state located on the eastern boundary of the North East, bordering Myanmar, and having a chequered history of culturally advanced kingdoms. Reportedly, the game of 'Sagol Kangjei' (Polo) originated in Manipur. 'Ras-Lila', a dance form of the state, is recognised as one of the classical dance forms of India. In recent times, the state has been known for the contribution and role of its women in social reforms and sports. The INA Memorial, Loktak Lake and Ima Keithel are some of the major places of interest in the state.

Meghalaya, with Shillong as its capital, is a plateau with different elevations and has been known as the 'Scotland of the East'. Mawsynram, in the southern slope of Khasi hills of the state receives the highest rainfall in world. The state has a matrilineal system, which is unique in many ways.

Meghalaya has some of the best schools and colleges in the region and the literacy rate is very high.

Mizoram is a hilly state in the North East and is characterised by the presence of homogenous tribal population. With Lushai as their common language, almost all Mizos follow Christianity. The state is credited with having emerged as a peaceful and stable polity and has shown a high degree of social and economic development in recent years.

Nagaland, a predominantly tribal state on the eastern border, is mostly hilly and enjoys the reputation of being a home to Nagas, a brave group of people in the region. Its capital Kohima was an important battlefield during the World War II, when the Japanese invaded British India. The Kohima War Cemetery, made in the memory of soldiers killed in the Battle of Kohima in 1944, is a major tourist attraction.

Tripura, bordering Bangladesh, has significant cultural linkages with Bengal and tribal regions of Assam and Mizoram. The Tripuris are the largest tribal community in the state and constitute the core of its society. A predominantly hilly region, the state has a warm and humid tropical climate and is an agriculture-based economy. Noted musician S.D. Burman and gymnast Dipa Karmakar have brought fame to the state and the country.

Sikkim, a small bowl-like state, with as its capital Gangtok, has a hilly terrain and is accessible from the plains of Bengal. It is distinguished by its Himalayan flora and fauna and Buddhist monasteries. The state produces Temi tea, a unique variety of tea, and is a major tourist attraction for visitors because of its Himalayan location.

Diverse ethnic origin of people inhabiting the eight states of the North East make it truly a wonderful region. Though the legends, myths, folklore and customs of the area are woven with those of the neighbouring regions of the country, there has been a rapid change in these states with the modernisation of economy and expansion of education. These states present a picture of modernisation in a relatively difficult and disadvantaged region and deserve to be recognised for their historical and cultural uniqueness, successes and achievements in a complex and diverse society.

It is often noticed that there is a general lack of awareness about these states of North East India among young children, particularly those living in other parts of the country. This hinders the inclusion of the children and people of the region in mainstream of India and integration with the country. It is hoped that the book will be helpful in increasing awareness and understanding about these states among the children of India.

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Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is an Act of the Parliament enacted to protect the interests of consumers in India. The Act protects the consumers against unfair practices in respect of price and quality of goods and services bought by them. The Act gives to the consumers six basic rights:

1. **Right to safety** for protection against the marketing of goods and services, which are hazardous to life and property.
2. **Right to be informed** about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services.
3. **Right to choose** the goods and services for being assured of their quality and price.
4. **Right to be heard** by representing their complaints in various forums for their welfare.
5. **Right to seek redressal** against unfair trade practices and unscrupulous exploitation of consumers.
6. **Right to consumer education** for acquiring knowledge about their rights and exercising them.

Consumer courts and other agencies have been set up under the Act to hear grievances of consumers.

For further details log on to http://consumeraffairs.nic.in/

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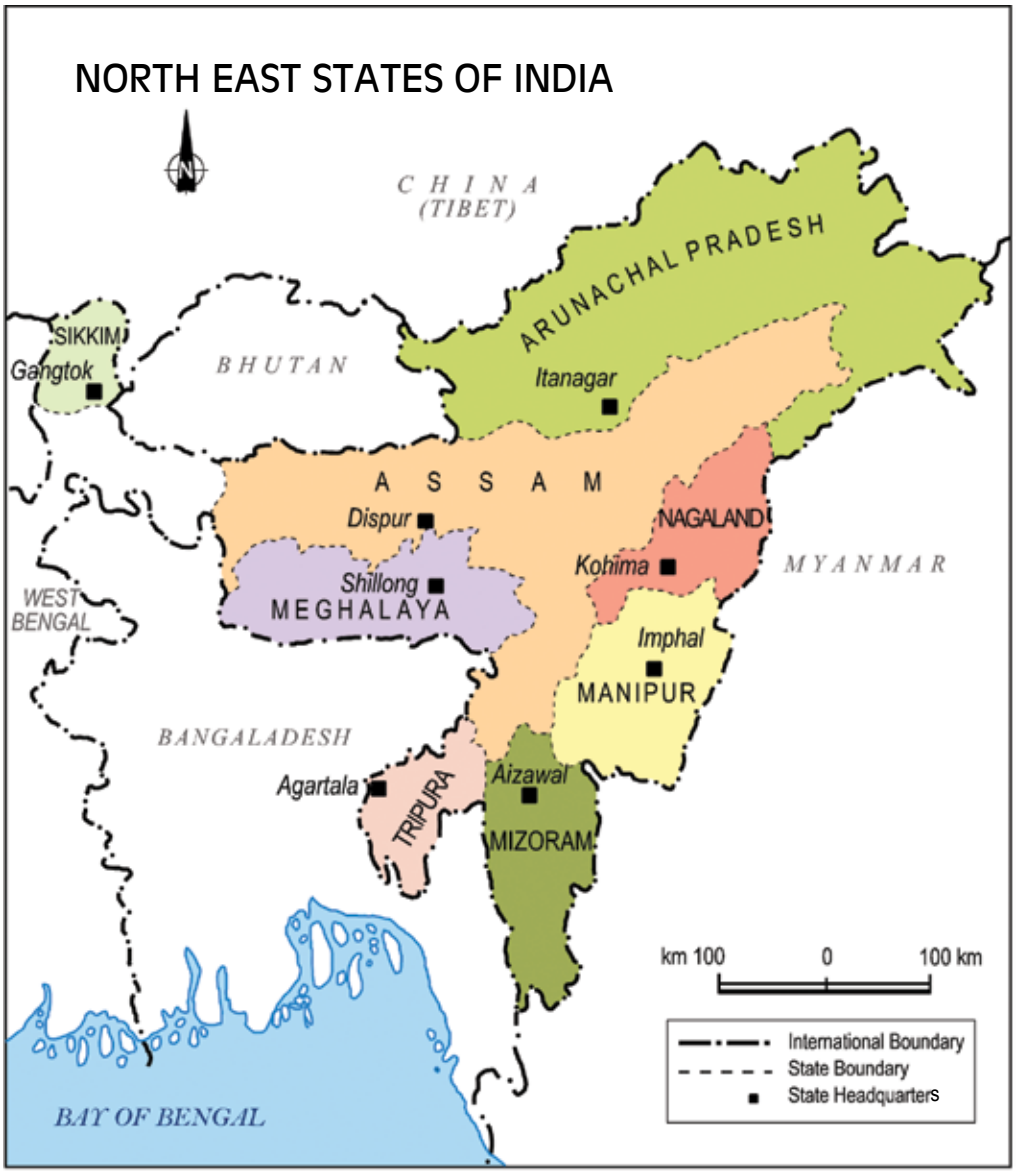

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The territoral waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line.
The boundary of Meghalaya shown on this map is as interpreted from the North-Eastern areas (Reorganisation) Act. 1971, but has yet to be verified.
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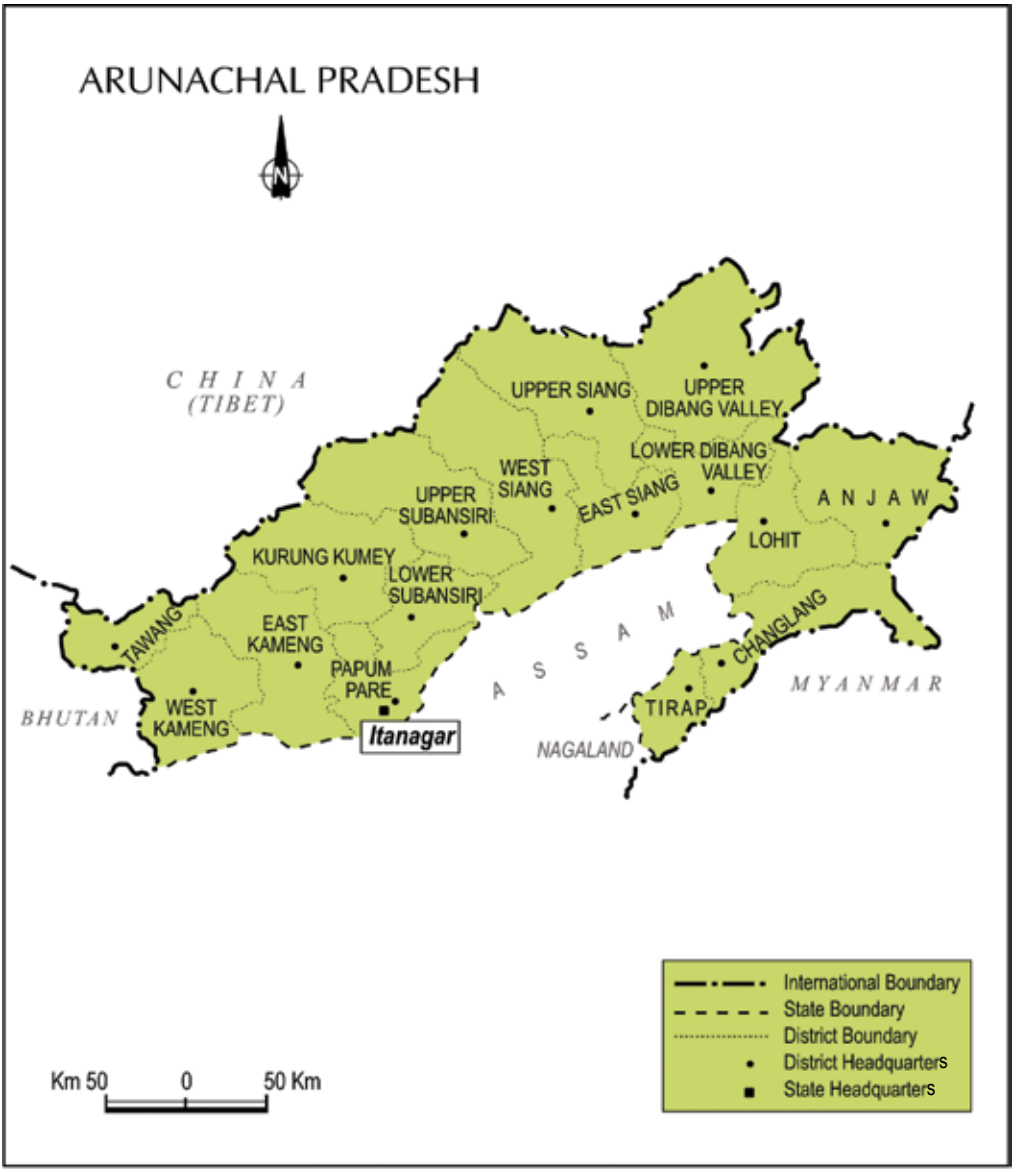

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Arunachal Pradesh: Dawn-lit Mountains

Arunachal Pradesh literally means land of dawn-lit mountains. Carved as a full-fledged state in 1987, the evolution and formation of Arunachal is a testimony to the idea of federalism in modern India. Arunachal has a diverse culture, mountainous terrain and scenic beauty. It is an enthralling place and a perfect example of micro-India representing the idea of unity in diversity.

With an area of 83,743 sq. km, Arunachal Pradesh is the largest among the north-eastern states of India. Arunachal is sparsely populated, the total population being 13.83 lakh as per the Census 2011.

Arunachal is comparatively a new state. Before it got its statehood on 20 February 1987, it was a Union Territory (UT) for 15 years since 1972. The name Arunachal Pradesh was first given then. Prior to that, it was known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and was under the direct administration of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

Statehood day celebration

1. Land and People

Arunachal is a border state of India in the North East. It shares international borders with four countries — Bhutan in the west, Myanmar in the east and Tibet and China in the north. Only Assam and Nagaland are its entry points to the rest of India. Because of such a strategic location, the state has always been in political and public gaze in the country.

Arunachal is home to some 30 communities and their 47 sub-groups. The list of Scheduled Tribes includes 25 tribes. Of the remaining five communities, Meyor, Mikir, Mishing and Lisu, have been given the facilities due to the Scheduled Tribes, but are not recognised as such by the state government. The fifth, i.e., Chakmas, is regarded as a non-tribal community.

Going by the settlements, the state is divided into five cultural zones. The first is the Tawang and Kameng regions, where the tribes settled are Buddhist Monpas, Sherdupens, Akas, Mijis and Khowas. The second zone lying to the east of the first covers the area of East Kameng and Lower and Upper Subansiri. The tribes settled there are Nyishis, Banginis, Sulungs, Apatanis, Nas, Tagins Mikirs and Hill Miris. The third zone covers some parts of the Upper Subansiri and the East and West Siang districts, where the Adis, a major tribe, dominate. The Adis have 15 sub-tribes, namely the Ashing, Bori, Karko, Milang, Padam, Pangi, Ramo, Tangam, Bokar, Gallong, Komkar, Minyong, Pailibo, Pasi and Shimon. The Dibang valley and Lohit regions constitute the fourth cultural zone, where the major tribes include Khamtis and Mishmis. The fifth zone spreads over the Tirap and Changlang regions and includes tribes like Noctes, Wanchos, Tangsas and Singphos.

By and large, the Arunachalis are animists, worshipping the nature god. They believe in a supreme god, who is not only omnipresent and omniscient, but also just and benevolent. For example, the Adi group of people worship 'Donyi-Polo' (the sun-moon god), who they believe observes every minor development and upholds the truth in the world. Oath taken in his name becomes most binding of all. On every ritual, his name is invoked. Donyi-Polo as a religious faith has become a unifying force for people in large parts of Arunachal. In the regions bordering Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar, the Monpas, Sherdukpens and the Khamtis follow Buddhism. As it happens in every religion, the practise of Buddhism in Arunachal has been greatly impacted by the local tradition of nature worship and food habit, etc. Christianity and Hinduism in a major way and Islam, Jainism and Sikhism in smaller ways have also established their presence in the

state in the last few decades. This is so, because there is a large community of migrants from the rest of India in the field of trade, construction and in various administrative offices. All these people have also brought in their religious faiths and cultures to the state.

Village is the centre of community life in Arunachal Pradesh. Every village has a council to maintain the social order. The customary laws guide the functioning of the village council. The Adis term the village council as *kebang* and the inter-village council as *bango*. The latter is meant for the settlement of bigger disputes involving more than one village. There is a village headman, but the decisions are believed to be coming from the *raij* (people) as a whole, with strict impartiality towards both the contending parties. The headman is called *gaon burha*, because of his rich life experiences and respectability for giving elderly counselling. His position is hereditary but if needed, he could be replaced, the decision for which could be taken by other village elders. The women generally do not take active part in the council matters. The disputes are mainly related to non-payment of bride-price, marriage, theft, etc. Capital punishment is generally avoided and penalty either in cash or kind is preferred. The political and judicial system in traditional Arunachal is generally democratic, simple and effective. However, in contemporary times, the basic structure of customary governance is being overtaken by formal administrative and judicial system.

In the begining some anthropologists like Verrier Elwin (1902-64), who worked in Arunachal Pradesh, advocated a policy of isolation. However, this has now been replaced by a policy of inclusive development of the state.

Verrier Elwin

1.1 Festivals and Dances

Festivals are plentiful in Arunachal. Each tribe has its own festival, which provides a creative forum for expressing the distinctness of their art forms, dresses, designs, dance

forms, musical instruments, etc. The festivals are generally related to agricultural activities like sowing and harvesting. There are collective rituals performed and celebrated in public by the community as a whole. Both women and men dance during the festivals. The songs of the festivals show that they are celebrated for the harmony and prosperity of the people and fertility of the land. The women actively and publicly participate during the time of festivals, work in the fields and engage in the trade of buying and selling goods in the market without any discrimination or insecurity. In recent times, the presence and participation of women in offices is also quite pre-ponderous. Some of the local festivals are—'Solung' celebrated by the Adis in Siang and Dibang valley, 'Nyokom' celebrated by Nyishis, 'Mopin' by Gallongs, 'Lossar' by Monpas, 'Dree' by Apatanis, 'Loku' by Noctes and 'Boori-Boot' celebrated by the Hill Miris, etc. Like the dance which takes place in all festivals, prayers and sacrifices are also common. The indigenous dress, which is a product of local people's long interaction with their ecological settings, makes the festivals exceedingly lively and colourful.

Nyokum Celebration by Nyishis

Nyokum Celebration by Nyishis

In Arunachal, Durga Puja, Vishwakarma Puja, Christmas, Baisakhi and Eid are also celebrated with equal zest and fervour, especially in urban centres like Pasighat, Ziro, Itanagar, Along, Tezu and Bomdila, where there is a visible presence of non-Arunachali population. A common feature of all

Nyishi man in traditional dress

festivals, including tribal festivals is that while the festivals may be organised by the followers of a concerned faith, people from all walks of life participate in them enthusiastically. This is a product of the co-habitation of innumerable tribes and sub-tribes in the region coupled with their distinct religious faiths, and above all their growing interaction with others in modern times.

1.2 Language and Literature

Linguistic heterogeneity is a noticeable feature of Arunachal. The total population is not large, but dialects spoken here are as many as 42. Most of the languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. People of each community living in a specific cultural zone speak a distinct language. Sometimes the dialect is unintelligible to the other communities of the state. Arunachalese (earlier known as Nefamese, a name that originated from NEFA), a mixture of Assamese, local languages, Hindi, etc., serves as the link language among local people as well as between the locals and the outsiders.

Of all the languages only the Khamtis, living mainly in the Lohit region, bordering Myanmar, have a distinct script. The Khamtis follow the Theravada sect of Buddhism and have intelligently used their script for preserving their scriptures. There are many scripture libraries in region. The largest such library is in Chowkham village. The other languages, which do not have a script, have traditionally preserved their literature, myths and legends in the oral form.

Scripture Library in Chowkham

However, now, Roman script is mostly used for inscribing their literature. In contemporary times, constructing the local history of different tribal groups by using and analysing the available oral literature could be an exciting area of study for the students of social sciences. With the development in trade, transport and communication in

recent times, the people there, especially the literates have naturally been multilingual. They communicate not only in their mother tongue and Arunachalese, but also in the language or languages of their neighbours. The linguistic diversities have led to a situation in which English has been the official language in administration as well as the medium of instruction in schools. Further, Assamese as the neighbouring language and Arunachalese as the link language have also been in use by the people here. The language spoken by an average literate Arunachali today is quite fascinating, for it is laced with words, metaphors and similies from diverse languages and dialects. Such multilingualism has been a great strength of the state and its people.

Scriptures in Chowkham Library

2. History

The ancient and medieval history of Arunachal remains shrouded in the mist of legends and mythology. Written references to local people in Arunachal first appeared in *Ahom Burunjis* (chronicles) and later in the *Mughal Chronicles* during the medieval period. Arunachal is full of hills and forests. Its plain area, which is scanty, was probably under the minimal possession of the Sutiyas and Kalitas of Assam in ancient times. Subsequently, the Ahoms brought the entire plain stretch under their control. This brought them in direct contact with the local tribal communities, and was followed by sporadic raids and plundering by tribals in the foothills and retaliatory measures by the Ahoms in the hills. Finally, the Ahoms decided to contain the tribals in their own hills and conceded to pay *posa*, a kind of tax, to some tribes for the purpose. The first historical account about the tribesmen of Arunachal could be seen in the writings of a Mughal chronicler, Shihabuddin, in 1662. While mentioning

about the Nyishis or Nishis, known as 'Daflas' then, the chronicler said, they knew no obedience to the Ahom kings of Assam. He also praised them for their physique. Though his observations were specifically meant for the Nyishis living in and around the Subansiri region, they are equally true of the other tribes of Arunachal as well.

Remains of Ita Hills

The British replaced the Ahoms in Assam in 1826. In the next 12 years (1838), the British fully consolidated their position over the entire region. In 1873, they introduced the Inner Line, a regulation meant for segregating the populace of the hills from those of the plains. The hills in the North East were made a Non-Regulation Province of British India. Going beyond this Line required a licence. The Regulation also earmarked rules regarding trade and possession of land, etc., within the Inner Line. Thus, the British brought the hills under their administrative control without much interference in the lives of the people there. In 1914, the hill area in the north of Assam, which later became Arunachal, was separated from the plains to form the North East Frontier Tract. After the Independence of the nation, the region was named North East Frontier Agency or NEFA in short in 1954.

There are a few ruins in the foothills, which indicate evidence of contact between the medieval rulers of Assam and the tribesmen living near the plains. Ita Hill is a ruin around which the modern capital city, Itanagar, is set. As legends say, it was the capital of the Mayapore kingdom of the Daflas, now known as Nyishis. Though there is no archaeological evidence to ascertain the date, the bricks found in the ruins date back to the pre-Ahom period. The pottery also shows traces of medieval Assam. Similarly, Rukmininagar and Bhishmaknagar in Dibang valley, Parashuramkund in Lohit district, the ruins of Bhalukpong in West Kameng, and Malinithan in West Siang also indicate the contact of

Arunachal people with those of the plains during the pre-modern times.

Going back to the British relations, in 1882, some sort of elementary administration began with the posting of an Assistant Political Officer in the foothill town of Sadiya in Assam. There were also British attempts to penetrate into the hills for exploiting its rich forest resources. However, this was not easy. The tribal people of Arunachal fiercely resisted the British on the latter's unwelcome moves. The tribals, though unaware of the British rule and its exploitative nature, considered the British as hostile to their society. This led to frequent clashes between the British and the tribal communities. In March 1911, one such British attempt was averted at Yagrung village near Pasighat in East Siang. A British officer named Noel Williamson and his Indian subordinate officials were killed by the villagers led by their village head, Jamoh. Following this, there was an unleash of British terror in the region. Known as the Abor Expeditition (1911) in modern history, it led to large-scale torture and suppression of the local tribal people. Before this, the Apatani people from Ziro valley had also resisted the British and had faced hard suppression in 1896. Despite such suppression, the Arunachal people could not be silenced, thereby, compelling the British to keep away from their society to a large extent. Thus, the British design to subjugate the local communities was often thwarted in Arunachal Pradesh at an early stage.

Abor Expedition, 1911

Women of Arunachal

A significant aspect of the history of Arunachal is that many tribes have shed

their old names and adopted new ones. The old names were given by others and were sometimes considered demeaning and insulting. Two such examples are—Adis and Nyishis. The term Abor given to Adis and Daflas given to Nyishis by outsiders are considered derogatory and disparaging as they mean uncivilised and indisciplined. The people prefer their own names, Adis and Nyishis, which give a sense of self-respect to them and recognise their distinct identity.

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

Most of Arunachal is covered by the Himalayan range. However, the Patkai Hills also cover parts of Lohit, Changlang and Tirap regions, bordering Myanmar in the east. The climate varies with elevation. Areas at high altitude in the upper Himalayas have a cold climate. The climate in the middle Himalayan range is temperate, while the sub-Himalayan region is sub-tropical with relatively hot summer and mild winters. Normally, the soil is not muddy because of hilly slopes. The state has a narrow belt of foothill plains along the border with Assam. There are also some beautiful valleys such as Apatani in the Lower Subansiri district.

Arunachal is covered by a dense evergreen forest. Forest products such as bamboo, cane, timber and medicinal plants are abundant in the state. Arunachal is a home to species of nearly 5,000 plants, more than 600 birds and close to 100 terrestrial mammals. The hornbill is a unique bird found mostly in the forests here. The *mithun* (bos frontalis), a semi-domesticated animal, is unique to the state. It plays an important role in the socio-cultural life of the people. In the past, when money economy was almost absent, *mithun* also served as the medium of exchange in the Arunachal tribal society. The yak in the higher region plays almost a similar role as that of the *mithun*. Besides elephant, bear, barking deer, porcupine, etc., there are innumerable species of butterflies, insects and reptiles. The mountain slopes and hills are covered with alpine, oak, maple, fir, sal and teak trees, etc. A large variety of orchids grow in the state, enriching its endowment of flora. Such biodiversities make Arunachal a paradise for both botanists and zoologists.

The major rivers passing through the state include Siang, Kameng, Dibang, Tawang, Dihing and Tirap. Besides, there are innumerable tributaries. There are only two seasons — winter and rainy. The average annual rainfall ranges from 300 to 400 cm. The rainy season generally lasts from April to October. The transport and communication systems often get disrupted during the period. The temperature in the plains and foothills could even go as high as 40 degrees Celsius, whereas it can be as low as zero degree Celsius in higher altitudes.

The state is rich in mineral resources like dolomite, quartzite, graphite, limestone, coal, marble, oil and natural gas, etc. A crude oil extracting plant has come up at Kharsang in the Changlang district. Most of the people in the state live on agriculture. The practise of shifting cultivation was prevalent, but is on a decline now because of people's concern for the fast-depleting forest cover of the state. In the Ziro valley, the Apatani community has been quite proficient in combining both wet rice cultivation and pisciculture.

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Dying Ering (1929-70) was a political leader from Pasighat in the East Siang district. In 1963, Ering was nominated to the Lok Sabha from NEFA. He also served as a Deputy Minister in the Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru. A Commission, called Ering Commission, had been constituted under his chairmanship to suggest means for implementing the Panchayati Raj system in the country. Among other things, the Ering Commission recommended the introduction of modern democratic norms in Arunachal Pradesh. People were given the opportunity to exercise their franchise, a fundamental right given to all Indian citizens under the Constitution, in 1980. The Legislative Assembly was also constituted then. Due to all these, Ering is greatly revered in the state. A government secondary school and a wildlife sanctuary in East Siang district have been named after him.

Mamang Dai is poet, author, journalist and historian, who lives in Itanagar and writes in English. A former member of the Indian Administrative Service, she left the service to pursue

a career in journalism and writing. Her first book of Poems, *The River Poems*, published in 2004, marked her as a major emerging voice from the North East. Mamang's poems have featured in *Dancing Earth*, 2009, Penguin's anthology of poetry from the North East. She is firmly rooted in the soil of her birthplace. Her poems are a revelation of her bonding with the destiny of her place and people.

Mamang Dai

Nabam Atum is a reputed social activist of Arunachal Pradesh, who is known for his fearless voice and opinions. He is actively involved with several organisations in the state such as Arunachal Vikas Parishad and Indigenous Faith and Culture Society. He was conferred with the prestigious IFCSAP Ratna Award on the occasion of Indigenous Faith Day celebration at Nirjuli, Arunachal Pradesh.

Dibang, born in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, is a well-known TV personality and Hindi journalist. He has won many awards for anchoring and documentaries and has also acted in some acclaimed films like *Madras Café* and *Pink*.

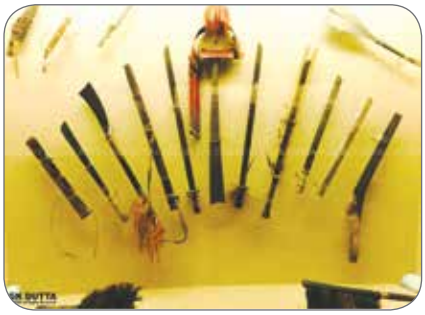
Gegong Apang, from Rumgong district of West Siang, is a well-known politician and is among the influential leaders of Arunachal Pradesh. Apang was the first Chief Minister of the state after its formation in 1980. He was the second longest serving Chief Minister in the country with a record 22 years.

Tine Mena, is the second Indian to hoist the Tricolour on Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world. She is also the first person from the North East to achieve this feat. She scaled the mountain on the 9 May 2011 after climbing continuously for 16 hours. Undeterred by the bad weather and strong winds, she reached Mount Everest from the southern side of the mountain and spent 25 minutes on the top and prayed for peace in her home state.

5. Places of Interest

Arunachal Pradesh has a rich tourist potential with numerous captivating places. Tawang in the west is a beautiful hill town. Located at 10,000 ft. above sea level, it

has the largest and one of the oldest (400 years old) Buddhist monasteries in India. Roing in the Lower Dibang valley is full of beautiful lakes and waterfalls. It is the district headquarter of Lower Dibang valley and is mythologically identified with the birthplace of Rukmini, the wife of Lord Krishna.



Artifacts on display in museum

State Museum of Arunachal

Itanagar taking its name from the medieval fort city of Ita Hills has developed as the largest town in the state with the State Secretariat, Governor House, museum, a lake, a zoological park, etc. The museum has a large collection of the tribal heritage of Arunachal Pradesh. Bomdila is another hill town, which is also called the 'Shimla of the North East'. Tipi, near Bhalukpong, has a unique Orchidium, housing hundreds of variety of exotic orchids grown in the state. Kaho is a small village in the eastern-most tip of Arunachal, the last village on the India-China border, which is also the first place in India to be kissed by the rays of the rising sun. The Arunachal University, later named Rajiv Gandhi University and the North East Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) are the major hubs of education in North East India.

Tawang Monastery

Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh

The McMahon Line has been the boundary line between Tibet and India since 1914. Henry McMahon, the British Foreign Secretary, was its architect. The line extends 890 km from Bhutan in the west to 260 km in the east to the great bend of Brahmaputra river. China as a party disputes the McMahon Line of 1914, which led to conflicts.

6. Conclusion

Arunachal is a small state in terms of population. But there is a lot to know about it and learn from its people. The family system, community life and handicrafts, etc., could be of great interest to visitors. Arunachal with a diverse land and culture is a fit case to exemplify the idea of unity in diversity, a main feature of modern India. Arunachal Pradesh is a proof that the diversity can be experienced at all levels, including in the most north-eastern corner of the country. Generally, a tribal society is seen as pre-modern. But Arunachal is no less modern in any measure than many other states of India. In the area of modern education and administration, Arunachal has taken long strides in recent years. This is despite the serious transport and communication problems in the state due to its topography and climate. The presence of women has been quite visible in various fields, including education. There are a lot of captivating places in the state. A more detailed and a broader study about the state would, hopefully, take the readers nearer to flora and fauna, and people of this great land of dawn-lit mountains.

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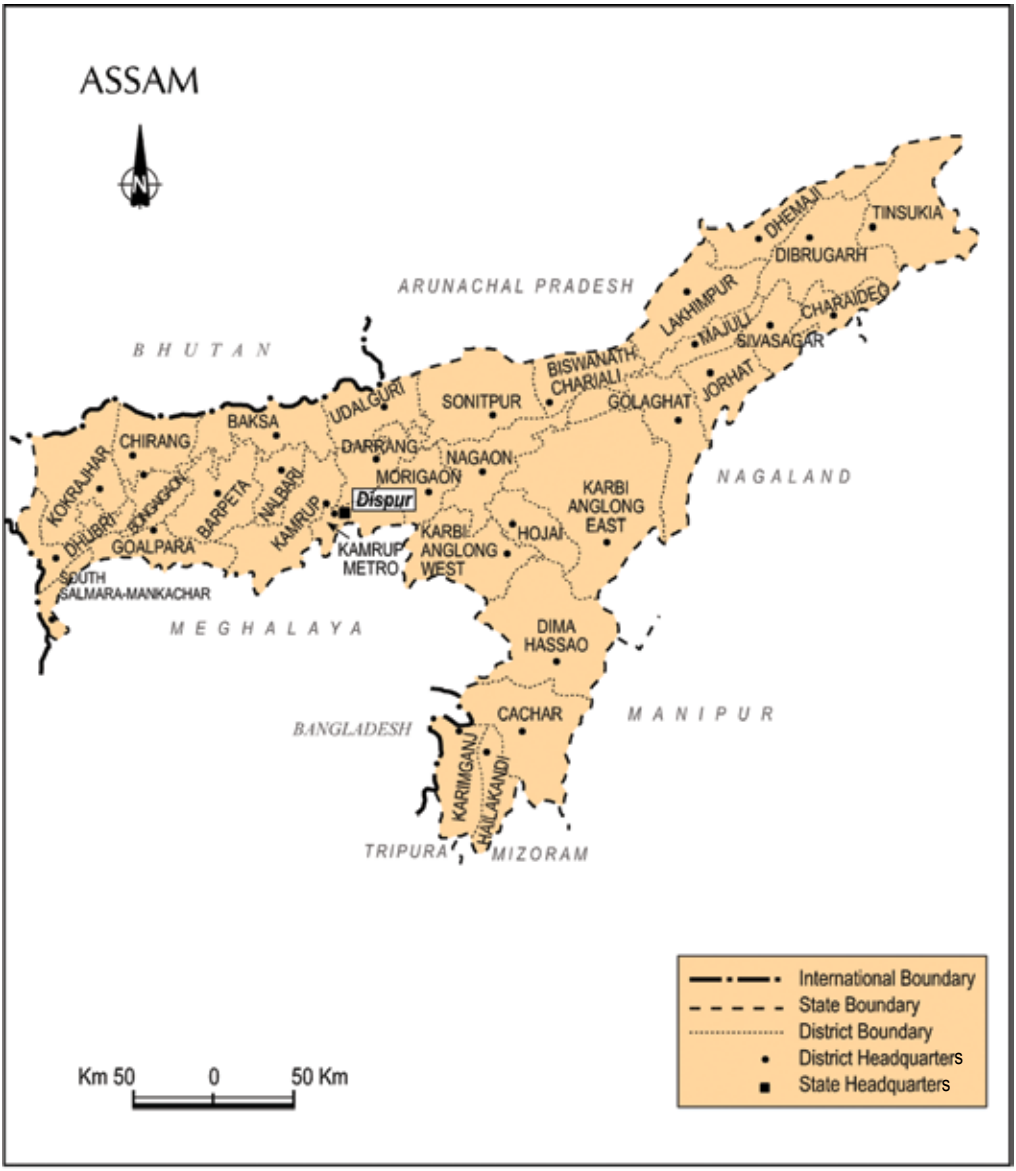

"Based on the Survey of India with the permission of the Surveyor General of India"
The boundary of Meghalaya shown in this map is as interpreted from the North-Eastern areas (Reorganisation) Act. 1971, but has yet to be verified.
Responsibility for correctness of internal details shown on the map rests with the publisher.

Assam: Gateway to North East

Assam is a land of scenic beauty, which yet has unexplored mountain ranges, evergreen forests, rare wildlife, mesh of rivers dominated by the Brahmaputra and Barak, expansive tea gardens, oilfields, varied fairs and festivals and pilgrims' trails.

Located in North East India, between the latitude of 24° and 28°N and longitude of 90° and 96°E and at the south of the eastern Himalayas, Assam or Axom has an area of 78,440 sq. km. Squeezed amidst the young mountains in upper and south Assam and old mountains in lower Assam are the valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. Geographically, Assam is connected to the rest of India via a 22-km land strip in West Bengal, popularly known as 'Chicken's Neck', near Siliguri. Assam shares an international border with Bhutan and Bangladesh.

1. Land and People

Assam's human landscape is as colourful and varied as her physiography. It has been the meeting ground of diverse ethnic and cultural streams. People from various traits, including Austro-Asiatics, Dravidians, Tibeto-Burmans, Mongoloids and Aryans have all made Assam their home, enriching the people of the state. The ethnic groups of Assam include Bodos, Dimasas, Karbi, Tai-Ahom, Mishing, Rabha, Deori, and Tiwa. The total population of Assam is 30.57 million, according to Census 2011.

Assam is mainly an agricultural state, where generally two varieties of paddy, namely winter paddy and autumn paddy, are grown. Jute is also cultivated in the low-lying areas. The major industries in the state are petroleum and natural gas, coal, limestone, granite, tea, and tourism. Some other industries are fertilisers, sugar, paper, rice mills, food-processing and sericulture. Some traditional industries are bell-metal works, bamboo and cane works, spinning of *endi, muga* and *paat* silk, wood-carving, carpentry, metal work, pottery, weaving, etc.

Silkworm rearing, reeling, spinning and weaving have been age-old practices in Assam, handed down from one generation to another. *Muga*, extracted from the rare silk moth *Antheraea Assama*, has been in use in Assam from the Vedic age. During the Ahom dynasty, it was made obligatory for every household to weave silk.

Muga, Paat and *Eri* (Endi) are the basic raw materials for hand-woven silk fabric in Assam. *Muga* has a natural golden colour and rare sheen that becomes more lustrous with every wash. *Paat* is the white mulberry silk, while *Eri* is warm silk suitable for winter. Each ethnic group of the state has its own distinctive design and style.

Sualkuchi, around 35 km from Guwahati, is the biggest silk-weaving centre in Assam. There are more than 3,000 weavers in and around this silk cluster village, often referred to as Manchester of the East. Weavers in Assam produce *mekhela-sador* and *riha* (traditional apparels for Assamese women), *sarees, dhara, jainsem* (traditional dress of Khasi women), *dora-sador* (bridal dress) and *gamosa.* The handloom sector contributes significantly to the economy of the state.

In 1946, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Sualkuchi village, he watched the weavers in their loom and said, "Assamese women weave dreams on their looms."

Besides these, Assam has a rich tradition of crafts. Cane and bamboo craft, bell-metal and brass craft, toy and mask-making, ivory work, pottery and terracotta work, wood craft, jewellery making, and musical instrument making have remained as major traditions.

Tea gardens in Assam do not follow the Indian Standard Time (IST). The local time in Assam's tea gardens, known as tea garden time or bagan time, is an hour ahead of the IST. The system was introduced during the British days, in view of the early sunrise in this part of the country.

Tea is considered as the most important crop in Assam. It has been producing some of the finest tea in the world. Assam contributes to about 51 per cent of the tea produced in India and about one-sixth of the tea produced in the world. The state of Assam is the world's largest tea-growing region, lying on either side of the Brahmaputra river, and bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar. This part of India experiences high precipitation during the monsoon and as such the daytime temperature rises to about 96.8°F, creating greenhouse-like conditions of extreme humidity and heat. This tropical climate contributes to Assam tea's unique malty taste, a feature for which it is well-known. Tea was declared the state drink of Assam in 2011.

There are 765 tea estates in Assam and more than 1,00,000 smaller gardens that together produce 570 million kg of tea annually. In Assam, the tea plant is grown in the lowlands, unlike Darjeeling and Nilgiris, where it is grown in the highlands. The Assam tea bush grows in a lowland region, in the valley of the Brahmaputra river.

The tea industry's contribution to the economy of Assam is significant as far as employment is concerned. It provides direct employment to more than half-a-million workers in the state, of which 50 per cent are women. This industry on an average employs about 531 thousand workers per day in Assam against 789 thousand across India.

Tea Garden

Oil Industry of Assam

Assam is the oldest oil-producing state in India. The major oilfields in North East India are those in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and its neighbouring areas. The important oilfields of Assam are Digboi, Naharkatiya and Moran-Hugrijan. Other oilfields have been discovered at Rudrasagar, Sibsagar, Lakwa, Galeki, Badarpur, Barholla and Amguri. There are four refineries in Assam, viz., Bongaigaon, Digboi, Guwahati, and Numaligarh. India established its first refinery in Digboi in the year 1901.

Digboi Oilfield

1.1 Festivals and Dances

The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic drapery of many races that evolved through a long assimilative process. Bihu is the most popular festival and represents the essence of Assam. It denotes a set of three different festivals of all people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, faith and belief. The word Bihu is derived from the language of the Dimasa Kacharis, who have been agrarian since time immemorial. Their supreme god is 'Brai Shibrai'. The first produce of the season is offered to 'Brai Shibrai' while wishing for peace and prosperity. 'Bi' means 'to ask' and 'Shu' means 'peace and prosperity' in the world. Hence, the word 'Bishu' gradually became 'Bihu' to accommodate linguistic preferences. 'Rongali Bihu' marks the advent of spring and the first day of the Hindu solar calendar. The first day of 'Rongali Bihu' is called 'Gorubihu', where the cows are worshipped. Rongali Bihu is celebrated with great pomp and grandeur and the famous mesmerising Bihu dance, on the beat of drums and flutes enthralls everyone. This joyous dance is performed by both young men and women, and is characterised by brisk dance steps, and rapid hand and hip movement. Another dance form during

the Bihu is 'Husori'. It is a kind of carol singing by a group of young men and women. The Husori party visits houses from one end of the village to the other, singing Husori songs with religious themes on the beat of drums, cymbals and a bamboo instrument called 'toka'. Bihu dancers wear traditional colourful Assamese clothing, the women wear *mekhela-sador, riha* and the men wear dhoti and kurta made of *muga* silk.

Bihu Dance

The traditional dance of the Bodos is Bagurumba. There are no specific days and times to perform this dance. In Kherai puja of the Bodos, in which they worship *Bathou* or Shiva, a girl must perform the religious dance in front of the altar. Likewise in 'Deodhani' dance, a girl dances on the beat of the *kham* (drum) and *siphung* (flute), propitiating many deities from Shiva to Lakshmi. The 'Dimasa' dance form is called 'Baidima'. 'Bishu' is an important festival celebrated by Dimasa. Tiwas in Dimoria have a traditional Bihu dance called 'Lalilang'. For Karbis, 'Rongker' is one festival held around January-February, in which entire village participates thanking various gods for the prosperity and well-being of the community. The 'Chomkan' (also known as *thi-karhi* and *Chomangkan*) is a festival unique to the Karbis. 'Sangken' is the main festival of Khamtis. The main festival of Mishing people is 'Ali-Ayé-Ligang'. It is a spring festival associated with agriculture, especially with the beginning of the *Ahu* paddy cultivation. It is celebrated by the Mishing ethnic community. The festival marks the onset of the sowing season. 'Me-Dam-Me-Phi' is one of the important festivals observed by the Ahoms from ancient times. It is celebrated by the Ahom people on 31 January every year in memory of the departed. It is the manifestation of the concept of ancestor worship that the Ahoms share with other people originating from the Tai-Shan stock.

1.2 Language and Literature

Folk tales and folk songs prevalent among various tribes provide foundation to the Assamese literature. Colloquial literature based on mantra's of tantric cult of the time also contributed to the process. *Bangeet, Bihu geet, Diha Naam, Bia-Naam*, etc., in written form became a part of the Assamese literature afterwards. On the other hand, *Ojapali, Dhulia Nach* and *Putala Nach* helped in developing dramatic literature.

As for the recorded existence of old Assamese literature, several masterly writers of the thirteenth century brought the Vaishnava Renaissance in Assam. Sri Sankardeva, the founder of neo-Vaishnavism, dealt with all aspects of life and culture of the land in his literary works. Translations from different Sanskrit sources enriched the literary tradition of the state in that period. Even before Sri Sankardeva, Madhab Kandali and others had laid the foundation of masterly literature.

In the sixteenth century, *Bhagawat* was rendered into Assamese prose by Bhattadev. It was a unique and pioneering attempt in prose-writing in India. Further, the Ahoms encouraged writings of chronicles entitled *Buranji* and, thus, introduced a new kind of prose literature. These *Buranjis*, recording achievements during the Ahom rule, formed the basis of secular literature in Assamese.

The first Assamese journal *Orunodoi* (1846) inspired new writers. Another journal *Jonaki* published in 1889 helped in the progress of Assamese literature. Late Chandra Kumar Agarwala with his weekly *Asamiya* (1918-58), followed by its daily edition under the editorship of Debakanta Barua and published from Guwahati (then Gauhati) started the foundation of journalistic literature, which was followed by a large number of newspapers and journals.

The modern Assamese literature has been enriched by the works of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Birinchi Kumar Barua, Hem Barua, Atul Chandra Hazarika, Nalini Bala Devi, Navakanta Barua, Mamoni Roisom Goswami, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Birendra Nath Bhattacharyya, Homen Borgohain, Nirupama Borgohain, Saurabh Kumar Chaliha, and others. The

complete work of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala has been translated into Hindi by Devi Prasad Bagrodia. Bagrodia has also translated Srimanta Sankardeva's *Gunamala* into Hindi.

In 1917, the Assam Sahitya Sabha was formed as a guardian of the Assamese society and forum for the development of Assamese language and literature. Padmanath Gohain Baruah was the first president of the sabha. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Mishing Agom Kebang, and Karbi Sahitya Sabha are also helping in the development of tribal languages of the state. Many Assamese writers have secured national awards for their literary works from the Sahitya Akademy. The Jnanpith Award was conferred to Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya in 1979 and to late Mamoni Roisom Goswami in 2000.

Indira Raisom Goswami, a Jnanpeeth Award winner, is popularly known as Mamoni Baideo. She is a poet, professor, scholar and writer. Some of her famous novels are Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howda, Chenabor Sro and Mamore Dhora Taruwal. She said, "The language, is a velvet dress in which I endeavour to cover the restless soul in the journey through existence".

Indira Raisom Goswami

2. History

The earliest name of Assam was 'Pragjyotisha' and its capital 'Pragjyotishpur' means 'Eastern Light.' The region came to be known as 'Kamrup' later during the Puranic times after the name of Kamdeva, the God of Love. Some attribute the origin of the word Assam to the Ahoms, who ruled the state for 600 years, while some believe that its 'uneven' (*asam*) topography, comprising hills and plains, gave it the name Assam.

From the fourth century A.D., we have a much clearer picture of the history of Assam with the help of available sources. Yuan Chwang's (Hiuen Tsang) travel accounts reveal that Pusyavarman of the Varman Dynasty ruled Kamrup

during that period. He was followed by other kings till the seventh century, when Bhaskaravarman (the contemporary of Harshavardhan) came to rule as the last king. After the Varmans, three other dynasties ruled Kamrup, beginning with Salastambha, followed by the Palas and then, the Khens. It is during the rule of the Khens that the Mughals first invaded Assam.

After the fall of the Khens, the Koches rose to power in 1515 A.D. By that time, the Ahoms were also expanding their rule from the east. The Sutiyas were ruling in the extreme north-east, the Kacharis in mid-Assam and in between them a number of chieftains called 'Bhuyans' were exercising hold over the Brahmaputra plains. The Ahoms subjugated almost all of them and consolidated the entire valley into one empire, which they ruled for almost 600 years. They became an integral and dominant force in the history of Assam. An offshoot of the Tais or Shans of Southeast Asia, the Ahoms had their roots in Thailand. They migrated to the Brahmaputra valley and gave shape to the population of Assam of today. The Ahoms, subsequently, ruled the land till the province was annexed to British India in 1826 with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo.

However, prior to the British invasion, the Mughals invaded and occupied the Ahom capital Gargaon in 1662, forcing the king, Swargadeo Jayadhwaja Singha, to flee to the hills. Subsequently, came the most towering personality of Assam history in the form of Lachit Barphukan, an Army General. Lachit set out for Guwahati in August 1667, and by November that year, ousted the Mughals from the last Ahom frontier—Manas. In January 1668, Aurangzeb again dispatched a large army under Raja Ram Singh's command to reoccupy Assam. Raja Ram Singh, encouraged by his initial success, launched a massive naval assault. The Battle of Saraighat was thus, fought in 1671 between the Mughal Empire (led by Kachwaha king Raja Ram Singh I) and the Ahom kingdom (led by Lachit Borphukan) on the Brahmaputra river at Saraighat, now in Guwahati. The battle lasted one full day and Lachit could not be thwarted this time. The huge Mughal army succumbed to defeat against a small contingent led by Lachit Barphukan.

The best tribute to the Assamese General came from Raja Ram Singh himself, who wrote: "Every Assamese soldier is an expert in rowing boats, shooting arrows, digging trenches and in welding cannons and guns. I have not seen such specimen of versatility in any other part of India...Glory to the Commander...One single individual leads all the forces. Even I, Ram Singh, was not able to find any loophole and an opportunity in his game plan to outdo him."

The Battle of Saraighat was the final battle in the last major attempt by the Mughals to extend their empire into Assam.

Colonial period

In 1816, the Burmese troops attacked Assam and then, again in 1819. For a very brief period, they virtually ruled the entire Assam from 1819 to 1824. A reign of terror was unleashed by the Burmese on the people of Assam, who fled to neighbouring kingdoms and British-ruled Bengal. The war concluded after signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 between the Burmese and the British, with the British taking control of Western Assam. Purandar Singha was made the king of Upper Assam by the British in 1833, the arrangement lasted till 1838. Thereafter, the British gradually annexed the entire region.

Tea cultivation was introduced on a commercial scale by the British. The discovery of Camellia sinensis, a variety of tea, which is different from the Chinese version, has a pivotal role in the historical past of Assam as well as the present day from 1839 onwards. However, a hybridised version of Chinese and Assam tea plants (Camellia Assamica) proved to be more successful in Assam climate and terrain. The breakthrough led the East India Company to initiate a long-drawn process of dispossession of agricultural land and forest owned by commoners through the infamous 'Wasteland Acts', allowing significant portions of the province originally possessed by private owners to be

transformed into tea plantation areas. The chief obstacles to the success of a truly commercial enterprise were the lack of labour and capital. Therefore, the prospects of tea industry made the rulers bring in labourers from eastern and central India. Today, this community is an integral part of Assam.

Decades later in 1906, Assam was made part of Eastern Bengal and Assam province. This was, however, revoked in 1911. In 1913, the first Legislative Council of Assam was formed, which transformed into the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1937 at Shillong, the erstwhile capital of Assam. With the partition of India in 1947, Assam became a constituent state of India. The district of Sylhet in Assam (excluding Karimganj sub-division) was given to East Pakistan (which later became Bangladesh) with the Sylhet Referendum held in 1946. These two arrangements caused large-scale migration into Assam.

Stilwell Road

Stilwell Road, whose original name was Ledo Road, a 1,736-km-long highway, links North East India with the Burma Road that runs from Burma to Kunming in China (of which 769 km is in India and Burma). During the World War II, the Stilwell Road, named after the regional commander of U.S. Army General Stilwell, was a strategic military route built by the U.S. Army engineers in 1942, to link the railheads of Ledo (Assam, India) and Mogaung (Burma). Chinese troops later aided the project and extended it to Kunming in China.

The highway crossed into Burma and was known as the Ledo Road until January 1945, when connection via Myitkyina and Bhamo was completed to the Burma Road at Mu-se. Chiang Kai-shek, a Chinese military and political leader, then renamed the highway in the honour of U.S. General Joseph W. Stilwell.

Assam's contribution to India's Freedom Struggle

Assam's contribution to the freedom struggle was evident from the days of Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Maniram Dewan, the first Assamese tea planter was interested in establishing private tea plantations in Assam. Due to the opposition faced from the British in establishing private tea plantations, he became hostile to the British and revolted by opposing their policies. When the Indian sepoys started an uprising against the British, he could see an opportunity, and together with other activists like Piyali Baruah, he conspired against the British. Unfortunately, their conspiracy came to light and he along with other leaders was arrested. Maniram Dewan and Piyali Baruah were publicly hanged by the British for conspiring against them during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. Their death was widely mourned in Assam and resulted in an open uprising, which was suppressed brutally.

At the turn of the century (1920), Assam joined the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Assamese patriots like Tarun Ram Phukan, Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Hem Baruah and others joined the National struggle for Independence. Even in the 1942 Quit India Movement, a number of martyrs laid down their lives, of which special mention may be made of Kanaklata, a teenaged girl who died in police firing while trying to hoist the National Flag at the police station of Gohpur. Kushal Konwar, another young freedom fighter, was falsely implicated in a train derailment case by the Britishers and was executed. Besides these, other incidents like destruction of a military air strip at Sorbhog by local villagers took place. In this way, people of different ethnic groups residing in Assam jointly participated in the freedom struggle. After Independence, Gopinath Bordoloi was elected the first Chief Minister of Assam.

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

Assam is dominated by alluvial plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak, apart from its tributaries. The Mikir Hills plateau (Karbi Anglong), the North Cachar Hills and marginal plateau and hills from the adjoining states make up the highland.

According to the legend, the Brahmaputra is the 'Son of Hindu God Brahma' and, hence, the name 'Brahma's putra' or Brahmaputra. It is denoted as a male river.

The Brahmaputra is a transboundary river, originating in the Chema Yungdang glacier near Mount Kailash in the northern Himalayas at an altitude of around 5,250 metres above the Mean Sea Level (MSL). It flows as Yarlung Tsangpo eastwards across Tibet. The river enters India in Arunachal Pradesh as Siang, descending rapidly onto the plains where it is called Dihang. It flows for about 35 km to meet the rivers Dibang and Lohit. From this point of confluence, the river becomes wider, upto 10 km in breadth, and is called the Brahmaputra. After flowing 918 km in India, the river enters Bangladesh as Meghna, before completing its journey into the Bay of Bengal. The total length of the Brahmaputra is around 2,900 km.

The Brahmaputra has over 120 tributaries and distributaries and that makes the Assam's Brahmaputra valley fertile. The magnitude of the Brahmaputra river system can be understood from the fact that it carries one-third of the entire surface water in the country. It has both been a boon and bane for Assam's plains. The river has been sustaining a multiplicity of ethnic entities since pre-historic times. Along with its tributaries, it contributes to the fertility of the soil and promotes agriculture, trade and cultural development of Assam, besides crafting its landscape. However, every year floods, due to the swelling of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, inflict damage to the state's economy.

Late Bhupen Hazarika has penned a song which reflects the Brahmaputra's contribution in the lives of the people of the North East:

'... Mahabahu Brahmaputra,
Mahamilanar tirtha,
Koto joogdhori ahise
Prokashi
Samonnoyorortho...
Mahabahu...'

'...Great river Brahmaputra,
Avast pilgrimage for
unification
Expressing through the ages
The meaning of solidarity
Great river...'

State Animal: One-horned Rhinoceros

The Barak originates at the Barail range south of Kohima at an altitude of 2,995 metres above the MSL and flows through South Assam. The river bifurcates into Surma and Kushiyara near the Assam-Bangladesh border. These rivers flow through Bangladesh and join an old channel of the Brahmaputra to form the Meghna.

Kaziranga is home to the endangered Indian one-horned rhinoceros, the state animal of Assam. The state is also a habitat for numerous other endangered and threatened species, including the white-winged wood duck or deohanh, the state bird, Bengal florican, black-breasted parrotbill, Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, pygmy hog, wild water buffalo, Indian hog deer, golden langur, Ganges river dolphin, and many others. The state has the largest population of wild water buffalo in the world. In addition to the above, there are other national parks in Assam, namely Dibru Saikhowa National Park,

State Bird: White-winged Wood Duck

State Flower: Foxtail Orchid

Nameri National Park, Orang National Park and Pabitora, Marat Longri and Dihing-Patkai wildlife sanctuaries. Assam also has many important bird sanctuaries. The best known being the Deeporbeel Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar Site under Guwahati's municipal limits.

Assam has as many as 51 forest types and sub-types and the species' diversity is spectacular. Hollong (Dipterocarpusmacrocarpus), the tallest tree of Assam and also the state tree, is the most predominant constituent of these forests. The associated species are borpat, jutuli, sam, dewa sam, nahar, teeta chap, bhelu, mekai, etc. In Assam, as many as 293 species of orchids are reported. The kopou (Foxtail orchid) is the state flower. The recently established Kaziranga National Orchid and Biodiversity Park boasts of more than 500 of the estimated 1,314 orchid species found in India.

Assam's capital city, Guwahati, also known as Dispur, became the first city in the country to have its own city animal after Kamrup metropolitan district administration declared the Gangetic river dolphin as its official mascot. The Gangetic river dolphin is locally known as *Sihu* and it is on the verge of extinction.

State Tree: Hollong

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568) was the founder of the Vaishnavite sect in Assam. He was perhaps the most versatile saint in the Indian History—a visionary, social reformer, dramatist, artist, etc. Sankardeva was born at a time when Assam was passing through a political turmoil—the Ahoms controlled the eastern part and the Koches the west—and myriad socio-economic problems. The land was divided among people of diverse religious sects and faiths. In 1481, he composed his earliest *borgeets*. He also began discussing his new concepts of the neo-Vaishnavism by holding regular discourses and prayers. These places became a centre for the establishment of the unique monastic institution called *Sattra*, which has influenced the Assamese the most. Sankardeva wrote *Chihna-Yatra*, his first play or 'drama with paintings' on Vaikuntha, Lord Vishnu's celestial abode. Followed by this, he wrote many other *bhaonas*, a unique form of drama. In 1516-17 A.D. when the Bor-Bhuyans came under attack from the Kacharis in the south, Sankardeva was forced to retreat to Majuli. In Majuli, he met Madhavdeva, his leading disciple and together the two carried forward the *bhakti* and *ekasarana* movement with tremendous vigour and momentum. They composed numerous plays and *borgeets*, and set up *sattras,* beginning the first one at Dhuwahat-Belguri, where they stayed for 18 years. Srimanta Sankardeva's *Gunamala* was later translated to Hindi by Devi Prasad Bagrodia.

The Ahom kings, who followed the Brahmanical order, did not approve of Sankardeva's teachings. So, he shifted to Kamrup, then ruled by Koch king Naranarayana, preaching the new faith and setting up *sattras* in various places. He spent his later life in Cooch Behar (now in West Bengal), under the patronage of Naranarayana and breathed his last there in 1568 A.D.

Maniram Dutta Baruah (1806-58), popularly known as Maniram Dewan, was an Assamese nobleman in British India. He was one of the first indigenous entrepreneurs to

establish tea gardens in Assam. A loyal ally of the British East India Company in his early years, he was hanged by the British for conspiring against them during the 1857 uprising. He was popular among the people of Upper Assam for his title as 'Kalita Raja' (king of the Kalita caste)

Rasaraj Laxminath Bezbarua (1868-1938), a well-known personality of Assam, who gave a new momentum to the Assamese literature. He was popularly known as 'Roxoraj', which means 'King of Humour'. Also, fondly called 'Sahityarathi', he dominated the Assamese literary area for almost half a century. During his lifetime, he devoted himself to reviving the lost glory of the Assamese literature. Laxminath Bezbarua is considered to be the pioneer of the modern Assamese literature and his contribution towards its upliftment is noteworthy. He started his literary career with slapstick *Litikai* serialised from the first issue of *Jonaki* magazine. He wrote a number of plays, autobiographies, buffoonery, historical works, biographies and one-act plays. He also wrote children's books and compiled folk tales of Assam (*Sadhukotha*). Besides, he wrote short stories, which covered the different features of the Assamese society with humorous sentiment, which fetched him the name Roxoraj. He was known as a patriotic playwright and wrote three historical plays, namely *Joymoti Kuwori, Chakradhaj Singha,* and *Belimaar*. He was the composer of *O Mur Apunar Des*, a patriotic song which is the state anthem of Assam.

Chandraprava Saikiani (1901-72) was a social reformer, writer and freedom fighter from Assam. She was the founder of the All Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, a non-governmental organisation working for the welfare of women in Assam and was a recipient of the Padma Shri in 1972.

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala

Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903-51) was another eminent personality who contributed immensely to the culture of Assam. He is the father of the Assamese film industry and produced the first film *Joymoti* as early as 1935. This was followed by other films in Assamese. He first set up a studio Chitraban in Bholaguri tea estate in

Tezpur in 1934. He also built a cinema hall Jonaki in Tezpur in 1937. Another contribution of Agarwala is the publication of the newspaper *Ahomiya* in 1944. He is popularly known as Rupkonwar of Assam. He wrote plays and composed the lyrics and music of a large number of songs, which are called *Jyoti Sangeet*.

Assam is known for producing several talented individuals in the fields of arts, literature and music. However, finding someone as talented and versatile as the late Bishnu Prasad Rabha (1909-69) is almost impossible. His contributions to folk, classical music, literature and dance are unparalleled. This earned him the title '*Kala Guru*', which means the 'Master of Arts'. A multifaceted genius, he was a talented writer, singer, dancer and poet. He wrote a number of Assamese songs and was regarded as a great *borgeet* singer of Assam.

Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011), widely known as 'Sudhakontho', was a lyricist, musician, singer, poet and film-maker from Assam. His songs, written and sung mainly in Assamese by himself, are marked by humanity and universal brotherhood and have been translated and sung in many languages. He is acknowledged to have introduced the culture and folk music of Assam and North East India to Hindi cinema. He received the National Film Award for Best Music Direction in 1975. Recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1987), Padma Shri (1997), and Padma Bhushan (2001), Hazarika was also awarded with the Dada Saheb Phalke Award (1992), India's highest award in cinema, by the Government of India. He was also a recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (2008), the highest award of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's national academy for music, dance and drama. He was posthumously awarded with the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award, in 2012.

Bhupen Hazarika

Upendra Nath Brahma (1957-90), lovingly known as Bodofa (Father of Bodos), although lived for only 33 years, will always be remembered for his visionary leadership and

the sacrifice he made for the cause of his people. Today, his name is a source of determination and sacrifice for the *Bodo* people. He is considered an icon of leadership, sacrifice and unity in Assam.

Gopinath Bordoloi (1890-1950) was the Prime Minister of undivided Assam and the first Chief Minister of the state after Independence. He actively participated in India's freedom movement and worked for peace and communal harmony in the state. He was awarded with the Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1999. The Guwahati airport is named Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport .

Gopinath Bordoloi

"If the foundation of school education remains weak and narrow, it is of no use to make elaborate preparations for higher education in the university," said K.K. Handique (1898-1982), a great Sanskrit scholar and Indologist. He was a renowned Assamese scholar and educationist. He was the principal of Upper Assam College (later J.B. College, Jorhat), and the Vice-Chancellor of the Guwahati University, the first university set up in the North East. He was awarded with the Padma Shri in 1955 and the Padma Bhushan in 1967.

K.K. Handique

5. Places of Interest

Assam has a profusion of national parks, sanctuaries and wetlands, besides reserved forests that house some of India's most endangered animals and birds. It is home to two of India's five world heritage

Kaziranga

sites—Kaziranga in central Assam and Manas close to the Bhutan border.

Kamakhya Temple is one of the most venerated Shakti shrines in India, associated with the legend of Shiva and *Daksha Yagna.* Located on Neelachal hill or Kamagiri, it is the abode of goddess Kamakhya, and a prime centre of tantric practices in the country. The temple was constructed in 1562 A.D. at the behest of Koch king Naranarayan. Lakhs of people from all over the country come to the shrine throughout the year to offer prayers. The most important annual festival here is Ambubachi, which is held every year in the month of *Ashada* (June).

Kamakhya Temple

The Brahmaputra has crafted and cradled Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island and the seat of Vaishnavism in Assam. It is situated 200 km east of Guwahati. Local people still speak Brajabali, the ancient tongue of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, suggesting cultural linkages between the two places. Majuli has 23 villages with a density of 300 individuals per square kilometre. A majority of the inhabitants are Mishing, a tribe that migrated from Arunachal Pradesh centuries ago. The Deori and Sonowal Kachari tribes too have a sizeable presence, as do the Assamese-speaking non-tribal people. For the islanders, the only mode of communication is a ferry service. Majuli has been the seat of Assamese civilisation since Sankardeva, the sixteenth century Vaishnavite saint, who established *Sattras* (monasteries) on it. Pottery made by the women of Majuli is famous for its striking similarity with the Harappan pottery. This

Majuli

similarity has made archaeologists draw a link between Majuli and the Indus Valley Civilisation. The island has been under threat due to extensive soil erosion at its banks. Reports say Majuli had an area of 1,150 sq. km in 1853. The Brahmaputra took away 33 per cent of this landmass by the latter half of the twentieth century. The rate of erosion increased after 1974 and it is reported that over 35 villages have been washed away since 1991, and the future of Majuli is threatened.

Sattras are institutional centres associated with the *Ekasarana* tradition of Vaishnavism in Assam and neighbouring regions. These *Sattras* are hundreds in number in Assam. They are generally independent of each other and are under the control of individual *Satradhikars* (chief). These centres maintain at least a prayer house (*Namghar*, or *Kirtan Ghar*), initiate people to the *Ekasarana* tradition and include them as disciples of the *Sattra* from whom taxes and other religious duties are collected. Many of the larger *Sattras* house hundreds of celibate and non-celibate *bhaktas* (monks), hold vast lands and are repositories of religious and cultural relics and artifacts.

Majuli Sattra

The 'Namghar' is an important institution Srimanta Sankardeva gave to the Assamese society. Every village has a Namghar, where apart from offering prayers, the community carries out cultural and social activities as well as resolution of disputes.

The 'Sattriya' dance form was introduced in the fifteenth century by Srimanta Sankardeva in the Vaishnava *sattras* of Assam. It is a dance-drama performance, which was

recognised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi as an Indian classical dance, along with the other seven forms in 2000.

Poa Mecca, meaning 'a quarter of Mecca', is a place of pilgrimage for Muslims in Assam. It is located at Hajo, near Guwahati. According to legends, an Iraqi prince-turned-preacher, Ghiyasuddin Auliya, is said to have brought a lump of earth from Mecca and enshrined the same at a spot here in the twelfth century A.D. Subsequently, the mosque was built by Sujauddin Mohammed Shah in 1657 A.D. It is held by the Muslims that by offering prayer at this mosque one gains one-fourth spiritual enlightenment of what could be gained by praying at Mecca.

Poa Mecca, Hajo

'Rang Ghar' or the Royal Pavilion was first built by Swargadeo (Heavenly King) Rudra Singha (1696-1714) and later developed by his heir Pramatta Singha in 1744 at Rupahipathar in Sivasagar. Rang Ghar's northern and western sides are longer, each with three large and two small openings. The building has two storeys, each divided internally into one large central room flanked by two smaller ones at the eastern and western end. Earthen mounds surrounded the Rang Ghar where the people used to sit. Rudra Singha formalised the events of sports as were prevalent during the time. The king, his queen and his officials used to enjoy the games and sports from the upper storey of the Rang Ghar, while the common people enjoyed sitting on the earthen mounds.

Rang Ghar, Sivasagar

'Kareng Ghar' is one of the most striking examples of the Ahom architecture. It is located in a place called Gargaon,

Sivasagar, in Assam. The palace structures are made of wood and stones. From east to west, several rooms run along a long corridor, and from north to south are smaller wings. The ground floor served as stables, storerooms and servant quarters. The royal apartments were on the upper storey, of which only a few rooms now remain. There are stairs leading to the terrace. The earliest constructions were during the time of Swargadeo Rudra Singha in 1698 A.D. After his death, the Kareng Ghar, which together with the underground Talatal Ghar constitutes the Rangpur Palace, went through many architectural alterations.

Kareng Ghar, Gargaon, Sivasagar

6. Conclusion

The Assam landscape presents a picturesque golden-green view of rice fields and beautiful tea estates. One should visit the state to experience the beauty of nature and the culture of the people. It has a unique example of celebrating the diversity of the land. People belonging to various culture, race and faiths live here. It has been a home to various crafts as well. A hospitable population, a distinctive cuisine and an artistic heritage add to its amazing natural beauty marked by exotic dance forms. A string of elegant temples tops its list of its innumerable attractions.

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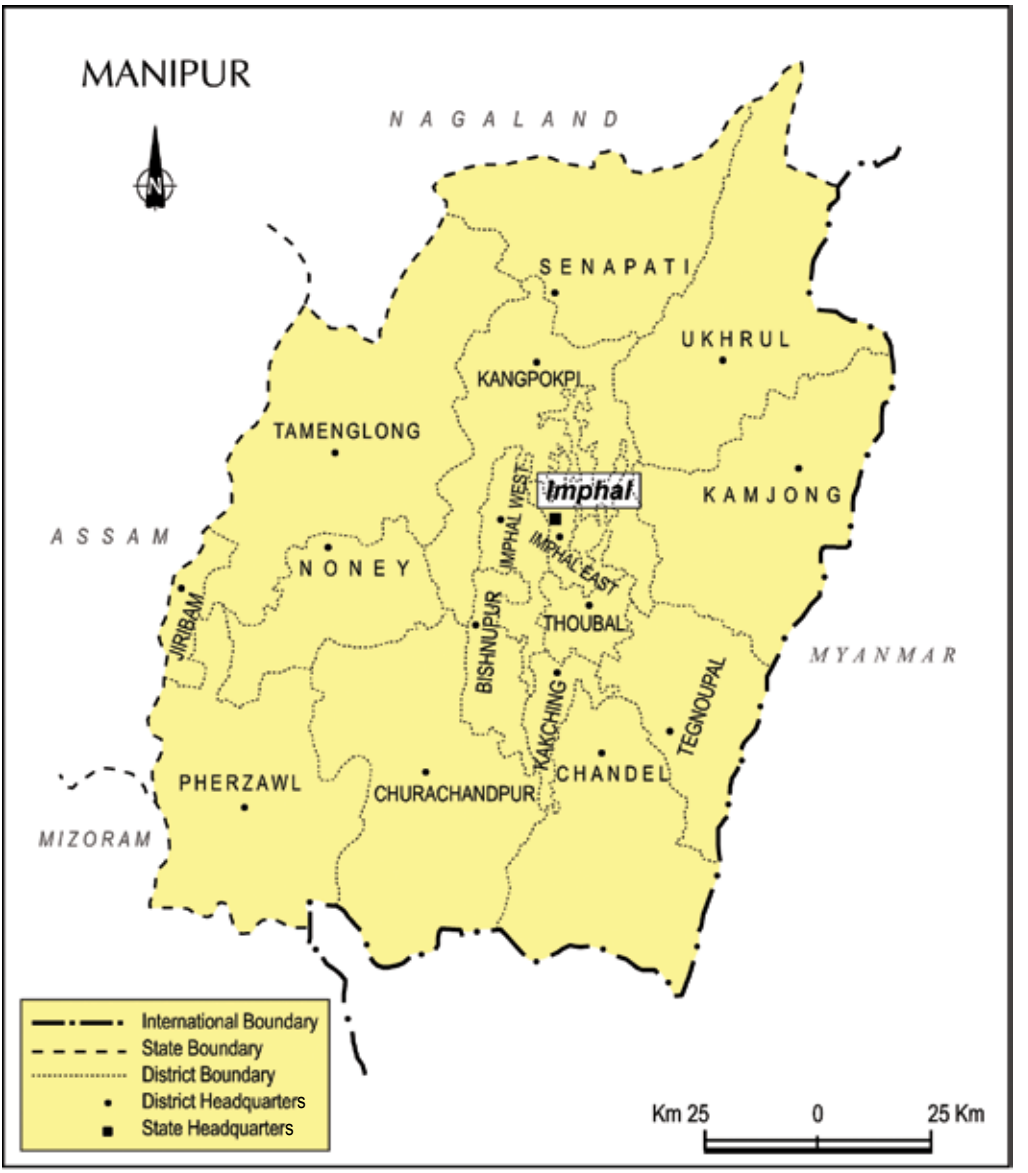

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Manipur: Jewel of India

Manipur is a beautiful state surrounded by hill ranges and was rightly called the 'Jewel of India' by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Known as 'Kangleipak' or 'Sanaleipak' (golden land) to its inhabitants, it has an area of 22,327 sq. km, and is bounded by Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west, Mizoram in the south-west and Myanmar in the east and south-east. The valley is a plateau; its height above the sea level is about 2,600 ft. The hills and mountains of Manipur are offshoots from the Himalayas, which form the northern boundary of India. The state has a population of 27.22 lakh (Census 2011).

1. Land and People

Manipur comprises 16 districts—Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishnupur, Jiribam, Kakching in the valley, and Ukhrul, Churachandpur, Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, Kangkpokpi, Kamjong, Tengnoupal, Noney and Pherzawl in the hills. These districts are divided into sub-divisions and community or tribal development blocks. While the villages in the valley districts are grouped under Panchayats and Zilla Parishads for development purposes, the hill districts have been provided with Autonomous District Councils to administer their social and developmental affairs.

About 41.4 per cent of Manipuris are Hindus. Vaishnavism school of Hinduism became a dominant force in Manipur in the eighteenth century when king Pamheiba or Raja Garib Niwaj declared it as the official state religion. This was the Vaishnavism of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Bhakti preacher of Bengal, which stressed on Krishna Bhakti. Prior to the introduction of Vaishnav Hinduism and to some extent even now, the Meitieis, the largest group of people in Manipur, worshipped 'Sanamahi', the Sun God. Early Manipuris worshiped a supreme deity, 'Lainingthou Soralel', and followed their ancestors. 'Umang Lais', the ethnic deities, are worshipped in sacred groves. The Hindu population

is concentrated in the Manipur valley. Christianity is the religion of the majority of the population in the hill districts, where it was introduced by the Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century. In the valley, there is also a section of Manipuri Muslims, known locally as 'Pangals' who belong to the Sunni sect.

The staple food of people in Manipur is rice, fish and vegetables. *Ngari*, a type of fermented fish, is a favourite food item. *Iromba* is a special delicacy consisting of *ngari* and bamboo shoots. Among the sweets, *kabok,* made of molasses and rice, is notable. Country wine, *Sekmai,* named after a village of the same name in the north of the valley, is also quite popular. Some of the other popular dishes and preparations are — *yongchaak singju*, *bora* (a kind of pakora), *kanghau*, etc.

Meitei Traditional Costume

Manipur is distinguished by its unique and traditional costumes. A traditional Manipuri costume for women is a wrap-around called *phanek* and *inaphi*. Traditional dress of men from the valley is *dhuti, kurta* and white *pugree* (turban). The tribal people of Manipur wear a wrap-around, alongwith a shawl, with their traditional tribal pattern. Colourful costumes are worn during festivals and dances. There are separate costumes for each of these. *Potlois* and *kumins* are the traditional costumes for 'Raslila', a classical dance performed by professional and accomplished dancers. Other traditional dresses worn during the festival dances are *koks*, *phurits*, etc. Some other dress forms used by different tribes in Manipur are—*saijounba, ningthouphee* and *phiranji*.

Kuki Traditional Dress

Sagol Kangjei (Polo)

Manipur has a rich history of traditional games and sports. The modern game of *Sagol Kangjei* (Polo) is reported to have originated in Manipur. The game is played in both styles—the old Manipuri style (*Pana*) and the new style (*Polo*). In the past, it had the support of rulers and nobles. Another popular local sport is *Hiyang Tannaba* (boat race) normally held in the month of November at the Loktak Lake and Thangapat. The boats used in this game are called 'Hiyang Hiren'. The people of Manipur believe that the boats are endowed with spiritual powers. *Mukna* (Manipuri wrestling) is also another popular and highly regarded game, which enjoyed royal patronage in the olden times. This game is played between two male rivals by the display of physical strength and skill.

Sagol Kangjei in 1890s

Today, the state is well-known for its unique and exemplary love for sports. A large number of players from the state represent the country in national games, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, Olympics, etc. The players participate in hockey, football, boxing, weightlifting, judo, etc. The potential of sports is very bright and with adequate and proper infrastructure, sports can become a major activity for youth empowerment in the state.

Manipur is endowed with rich natural resources. Lush green forests in the hills, fertile alluvial soil in the river basins, swift-flowing rivers and streams, a large number of fresh water lakes, including the Loktak, and an optimum climate influence the economy of the state. Manipur's economy is based on agriculture, forest produce, industries, mining, business and tourism.

Agriculture has a significant share in the state's domestic product and provides the largest share of employment. A

majority of the population in Manipur lives in villages and over two-third of it is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for sustenance. About nine-tenth of the total cultivated area is under cereals, mainly rice. Maize in the hills, pulses, oilseeds, particularly mustard and sunflower, as well as sugarcane is grown in various parts of the state on a limited scale. Food and cash crops are grown mainly in the valley region.

The state is well-suited for horticulture due to its hilly terrain and climate. A large variety of vegetables and spices grows in the valley and the hills. The central valley is ideally suitable for fruits like papaya, banana and mango, and the hilly areas for pineapple, orange, banana, pear, peach and lemon. Orange, banana and lemon grow well on the western hills, especially in Tamenglong district. Pear, peach and plum are grown in Senapati and Ukhrul districts. Pineapple is widely grown on the hill slopes in Churachandpur and Chandel districts. Chillies and ginger are cultivated on a commercial scale in Churachandpur district and potato in Tamenglong district.

Handicraft is another important industry in the state. It has its own unique identity among various crafts of the country. Cloth embroidery, cane and bamboo, ivory, stone and wood-carving, pottery and metal crafts, dolls and toys are some of the well-known Manipuri handicrafts. Since cane and bamboo are abundantly available, basketry is a popular occupation of the people. Pottery flourishes in Andro, Sekmai, Chairen, Thongjao, Nungbi and parts of Senapati districts. Cane and bamboo crafts, *kauna* crafts and pottery have a high potential of growth in the state. Handloom is the largest cottage industry and the state ranks high in terms of the number of looms in the country. A large number of weavers, especially women, are employed in the handloom industry. Sericulture is popular for making traditional wedding wear and other dresses. The state's agro-climatic conditions are also suited for the food-processing industry.

Women play a key role in the socio-economic and political life of the state. British administrator, T.C. Hudson (1908)

gave a detailed account regarding the economic role of women. "The women hold a high and free position in Manipur, all internal trade and exchange of the produce of the country being managed by them", he had said.

Ima Keithel (women's market) is one of India's largest markets run and managed by women in Imphal for items of daily use. *Ima Keithel* is a unique institution and a symbol of women empowerment. The market demonstrates the independence of women who, despite hailing from well-to-do families, pursue their occupation. This is the space where women assert their independence and identity. The market is also the site of the two women's war or *Nupi Lan* where the women defeated the British.

Meira Paibis (women torch-bearers) are a group of women in the civil society of Manipur, who carry fire torches and march silently, keeping a vigil against social evils, including atrocities against people and human rights violations. The word derives its name from *mei* (fire). *Meira Paibis* have a large network, and have been leaders in civilian movement fighting against drug abuse, alcoholism, crimes against women, and at times waging battle on political issues.

The Nupi Lan (women's war) fought against the British by the women of Manipur, is well-known in history. The first Nupi Lan (1904) was a revolt against the British administration for enforcing Lallup (forced labour) on Manipuri men. Women protested and razed the state bungalow of the British agent and set the market stalls in Khwairamband bazaar ablaze. During the Second World War in 1939, there was another protest against the export of rice from the state when it was struck by famine.

Nupi Lan

1.1 Festivals and Dances

Manipur is a land of diversity, where several cultures, ethnicities and religions co-exist. Hence, there are several festivals celebrated throughout the year. The most popular celebration is 'Yaoshang' (Holi), which is celebrated for five days, commencing from the full moon day of *Falguna* (February-March). 'Thabal Chongba', a type of Manipuri folk dance, where boys and girls hold hands and sing and dance in a circle, is primarily associated with this festival.

Yaoshang (Holi)

'Kut', also known as 'Chawang Kut' or 'Khodou' among different tribes at different places, is a festival of harvest of Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups. The festival, marked by cultural events such as traditional dances, songs, sports and fashion shows is observed on the 1st November every year. 'Gang-Ngai' is the festival of Kabui Nagas, which is celebrated for five days in December or January and comprises common feasts, dances of old men and women, boys and girls, and presentation of farewell gifts, etc.

'Lui-Ngai-Ni', a sowing festival is the collective festival of the Nagas, observed on the fifteenth day of February and marked by gatherings, songs, dances and rejoicing. 'Cheiraoba' is the Meitei New Year, which is celebrated by offering special festive dishes to the deities. During the festival, a part of the ritual entails people to climb the nearest hilltops, in belief, that it will enable them to rise to greater heights in their lives.

'Kang' (Rath Jatra), parallel to the Rath Yatra in Puri, is one of the greatest religious festivals of Hindus and is celebrated for 10 days in July. 'Heikru Hitongba', a celebration in the month of September when narrow boats carrying idols of lord Vishnu are rowed by a number of rovers in rivers or canals, is also popular. 'Chakouba', celebrated on the second day in the month of Hiyangei (November), is a special festival of the Meiteis, when *Ningol* or married sisters or girls are invited to feast and offered gifts in their parental homes. The

festival plays a great role in strengthening the bond of Meitei solidarity. Christmas is the biggest festival for all Christians in Manipur, which is observed with joy and gaiety. Eid is also celebrated with equal enthusiasm by Muslims in the state.

'Sangai' festival is organised every year in Manipur from 21-30 November to showcase the uniquenes of the rich cultural heritage of the state. The 10-day tourism festival is a combination of a variety of events. Art, handloom, cuisine, crafts, fairs and cultural shows from within and outside the state and country are organised.

Pung Cholom

Dances and music are a way of life for the people of Manipur. Dances are associated with deities and festivals and are performed in temples, accompanied by vocal music and instruments. These are also associated with ceremonies and rituals, like the birth of a child, marriage, *shraddha* (last rites), etc. These dances have soft steps and are graceful, leaving an emotional impact on devotees. 'Laiharaoba' is performed during March and April in the temples of Umanglai (sylvan gods and goddesses) of the valley in strict accordance with the early tradition. 'Pung Cholom' is a unique classical dance which is the soul of 'Sankirtana' music and dance traditions. The dancers play the *Pung* (drum) while dancing. The dance is marked by a gentle rhythm, which gradually builds up to vigorous movements. Dancers use these acrobatic effects without breaking the rhythm or flow of music. It borrows elements from the Manipuri martial arts

Raslila

'Thang-Ta', 'Sarit Sarak' are the traditional 'Maibi Jagoi' dance. 'Nupa-Pala', is a group performance of males, who wear large white turbans and sing and dance with *mridanga* and *pung*. It is performed in accordance with the Vaishnav traditions, 'Raslila', the epitome of Manipuri dance form, is performed depicting scenes of the Raslila of Radha-Krishna. It is performed in a group of Krishna, Radha and Radha's friends (sakhis). Traditionally, it is performed in the *mandop* of the temples on the nights of *mera purnima* (full moon). 'Khamba-Thoibi' is a duet dance form which tells the story of Khamba, or poor brave lad of the Khuman clan who fell in love with Thoibi, a princess of Moirang. 'Thang Yannaba' is a martial act, which shows the skill of self-defence using swords in a continuous series of aggressive and defensive gesture and artistic movement of body.

Khamba-Thoibi dance

The tribal dances are part and parcel of Manipur's dance forms. These dance forms are closely related to nature. The men wear a coloured loincloth around the hip, a scarf with multicoloured bands crossed on chest, hanging down the front and back and they carry *dao* (spear) in the hand. The dances of Nagas are very popular. In 'Hansengav', the boys and girls form a circle, beginning the dance with a slow movement and increasing the tempo gradually. In 'Toonaga Lomna', the girls and boys make pairs and dance in a circle facing each other. In 'Heng Naga Toona', boys and girls form two parallel rows and dance. The hands are clasped by the two opposite each other. The dance, 'Chan Lam', is performed only by men forming a circle and moving forward and backward. While they move, everyone shouts ho!ho!ho! The Lushai girls of Churachandpur perform a beautiful dance called 'Cheraw' (bamboo dance).

1.2 Language and Literature

Manipuri or Meiteilon is the official language of the state and is recognised under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. Manipuri language has its own script, which is known as 'Meitei Mayek'. The Manipuri language is also written in Bangla script. There are many dialects spoken in the state as every tribe has its own dialect, all of which are written in Roman script.

The Manipuri literature is enriched with short stories, novels, dramas and poems written by several writers from the nineteenth century onwards. In the pre-Independence period, Kh. Chaoba Singh's (1885-1950) historical novel, *Lavanglata*, is considered to be an outstanding work in Manipuri. L. Kamal Singh's *Madhavi* (1930) is recognised as the first modern Manipuri novel. His collection of poems called *Lal Pareng* (1931) is acclaimed to be the most significant poetical work of this century. A. Dorendrojit Singh (1907-44) is another pioneer poet and dramatist, whose works include three dramas, namely *Moirang Thoibi*, *Bhagyachandra* and *Kaurav Parajay* and two epic poems, namely *Kansa Badha* and *Subhadra Haran*. The Manipuri poets and authors in the pre-Independence period mainly dwelt on mythological and religious themes. Modern Manipuri literature in the post-Independence period has diversified to include social and political themes such as aggression, conflict, identity, darkness and transition in the changing times. Renowned poet, E. Nilkanta Singh's poetry *Tirtha Yatra* won him the Sahitya Akademi Award. H. Guno Singh, R.K. Shilajit, L. Ram Singh, Thoibi Devi and M.K. Binodini Devi are some of the prominent modern novelists. Women novelists have depicted the pain and agony of women due to the class and caste system, royal culture, etc. Two of the most acclaimed feature films, *Ishanou* and *Imagi Ningthem*, are based on the short stories of M.K. Binodini.

The state is credited with a successful film industry, which has evolved in the last three decades and produced a large number of feature films as well as documentaries. Matamgi Manipur, the first Manipuri feature film produced

in 1972, won the best feature film award at the 20th National Film Awards. During the last 30 years, films from Manipur have won nine international awards and 10 national awards. Imagi Ningthem (1982) received an award for the best feature film in regional languages at the 29th National Film Festival and also bagged the Grand Prix Award for the best feature film. Padma Shri Aribam Shyam Sharma is one of the famous film directors and composers. Ishanou (1990), directed by Aribam Shyam Sharma, won an award at the Cannes International Film Festival.

2. History

In Mahabharata, the reference of Arjun's visit to Manipur and his marriage with princess Chitrangada is well-known. During his second visit to Manipur, Arjun is said to have been defeated by his own son Babhrubahan.

Manipur is a fabled state that finds mention in *Mahabharata*. The archaic literature of the Meiteis, the largest community of the state, preserved in the form of *Chietharol Kumbaba* or the royal chronicles, claims an uninterrupted line of kings since 33 A.D. However, Manipur appears to have emerged as a well-established kingdom under King Kyamba in 1467-1506.

The general features of the people are mongoloid. But, there are also some traces of Aryan features. They are believed to have originally migrated from a territory in the north near the tri-junction of Tibet, China and Myanmar and come to the country through the mountainous region, east of Assam. This eastern migration, mixed with the people coming from west and the old nomadic tribes has led to an ethnic evolution of the present day Meiteis in the valley. Originally, there were seven principalities in the valley, namely, Ningthouja, Angom, Khuman, Moirang, Luwang, Sarag-Leishangthem and Khaba-Nganba. Each of the seven clans had an independent principality and a well-defined region in the valley. Gradually, the Ningthouja clan proved

its dominance and adopted the Meitei title which now applies to all seven clans.

During this period of evolution, the hills were occupied by people of other tribal identities such as Nagas (bearing ethnic similarity with their brethren in today's Myanmar) in the north and east and Kuki-Chin tribes in the south and south-east. Naga tribes have been more static and territory-bound.

By the early fifteenth and sixteenth century, Manipur was distinguished by the presence of a well-developed formal power structure and cultural symbols. The association of Meiteis with the kingdom of Pong, located between the frontier of Yunnan in China and Burma, finds a mention in the *Royal Chronicles* from the time of early fifteenth century. However, the first notable king who extended the frontiers of Manipur to the Banks of Irawadee river in Burma was Pamheiba or Raja Garib Niwaj (1714-55). He is also credited with the cultural transformation of Meitei people by accepting Vaishnav Hinduism.

The later period of 150 years in the history is replete with incidents of successive Burmese invasions and Manipur's attempt to overthrow their domination. Burmese king, Alungpaya, invaded Manipur in 1752 and occupied the kingdom. Manipur regained its freedom with the help of the kingdoms of Tripura and Assam. However, internal squabbles in the Manipur's royal family led it to suffer another Burmese occupation from 1819-26 called 'Chahi-Taret Khuntakpa' or 'seven year's devastation'. Although the kingdom continued to be embattled with Burma for a larger part of its history, it grew as a martial race and culturally advanced society during this period. People had acquired important skills as textile weavers, silversmiths, horse-riders, painters, etc. Soldiers were highly valued as skilled cavalrymen.

By the middle of nineteenth century, the English had established themselves as the paramount power in India. The British gained initial foothold in Manipur, following requests of the kings for help in their hostilities with Burma, first during the reign of Raja Bhagyachandra (1763-98) and later during the reign of Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1826-54). This

period was also marked by remarkable contributions by the two kings to the growth of Manipur as a culturally advanced and politically strong state. The English, who had their own independent scores to settle with Burma in the course of their colonial expansion, made overtures to Manipur, but slowly assumed the role of an arbiter in relations between Manipur and Burma. The relations between Manipur, Burma and the British came to be determined largely by the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) signed between the British and the Burmese, under which the king's title to Manipur's throne was recognised but territorial disputes persisted. The vagueness in the political status of Manipur in the Treaty of Yandaboo gave an opportunity to the British to interfere in its affairs through their political agents. The British began, hereafter, to exercise larger influence in its political and foreign relations. This culminated in the Manipur Rebellion of 1891, when three British officers were killed in a conflict. This resulted in an open warfare and seizure of the Manipur throne by the British and its annexation into British India.

The 'Kuki Uprising' also forms a part of the history of Manipur. The inhabitants of the hills comprise numerous ethnic groups having different tribal affiliations. They are broadly categorised as Nagas or Kukis. Kukis include old Kukis such as Aimol, Chothe, Chiru, Koireng, Kom, Anal, Lamkang, Moyon, Monsang, Gangte and Vaiphei, and new Kukis such as Thadou, Simte, Paite, Hmar, Zou, etc.

Since 1907 (after the British had become the de facto rulers of Manipur in April 1891), the British political agents began to exercise powers of the Maharaja or the President of the Manipur State Durbar, which was traditionally ruled by village heads or chieftains in the Kuki areas. The British gave the first blow to the traditional administration through the introduction of compulsory house tax on every household, irrespective of their status in the hill village. This was resented by the village chiefs, as it interfered with their authority. The British also started raising free labour, called 'Potthang', a compulsory form of labour for the villages by turn. This affected every single individual in the hills. The enforcement of arm licensing control by the British in hill areas, although aimed at controlling law and order, infuriated the Kukis

further. The firearms were very popular among the Kukis, who used them for hunting and protection. The last major event was the outbreak of the World War I, which led to the British imposing a compulsory levy of 2,000 non-combatant porters to be raised from Manipur. They were to be employed in labour battalions in France and England. This served as the trigger for general uprising among the Kukis known as the 'Kuki Rebellion'. Upon a call of the Kuki chiefs of Mombi and Ngulkhup, they defied both the Maharaja and the British and went to war against the British. The rebellion spread in all Kuki-inhabited areas of the state, the adjacent areas of Chin Hills (present by Myanmar) and also the neighbouring Cachar Hills of Assam. The rebellion started in May 1917 and it took two years for the British to control it.

Manipur has been the principal overland route for trade between India and Myanmar since olden times. During the World War II, it was also the arena of three fierce battles between the Japanese and the allied forces. The Indian National Army (INA), led by Subhas Chandra Bose, entered Manipur and touched Moirang during this period, but had to retreat after the Japanese suffered reverses in the World War II. Netaji hoisted the National Flag at Moirang on 14 April 1944. The INA Martyrs' Memorial Complex stands in Moirang. After liberation from the British, Manipur merged with India in 1949 as per the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947. It enjoyed the status of a Union Territory for about 25 years till 1972, when it became a full-fledged state.

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

Forests, consisting of short and tall trees, cover about 77 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The state has four river basins: Barak river basin (Barak valley) in the west, Manipur river basin in central Manipur, Yu river basin in the east and a portion of Lanye river basin in the north. The Barak river, the largest in the state, originates in the Manipur hills and is joined by tributaries such as Irang, Maku and Tuivai. The Manipur river basin has eight major rivers: Manipur, Imphal, Iril, Nambul, Sekmai, Chakpi, Thoubal and Khuga. All these rivers originate from the surrounding hills.

The state has sub-tropical monsoon climate. The period from June to September accounts for a little over half of the annual rainfall. The rainy season starts in April and continues till September-October. Sometimes, there is a considerable amount of pre-monsoon rain. The annual rainfall ranges between 1,100 mm and 3,500 mm. The rain is normally abundant and almost equally distributed throughout the state, though there is some variation between the hills and the valley areas. The hill areas normally receive higher rain than the valley areas.

State Bird: Nongin

State Tree: Toon

Ecologically, North East India forms a part of the South-Asian tropical rain forest belt, which is known for its infinite variety of wild plants and animals. The forests in Manipur have the distinction of having a wide range of types, comparatively in a small geographical area. Teak, pine, oak, *uningthou*, *leihao*, bamboo and cane are important plants and trees grown in hill areas. In addition, rubber, tea, coffee, orange and cardamom are grown in hilly areas. These forests and the numerous swamps and valleys in the state are home to wide ranges or flora and fauna. The Keibul Lamjao National Park, situated in the south-eastern fringes of the Loktak Lake, is the only home of marsh-dwelling brow-antlered deer, 'Sangai' (Cervus eldi eldi) of Manipur. A variety of migratory birds from places as far as Siberia visit the Loktak Lake and other lakes in the valley every year. The state is also a home to approximately 500 varieties of orchids.

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Tikendrajit Singh (1856-91) was the commander of the Manipuri army and leader of the palace revolution that led to events known as the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. Called

the 'Lion of Manipur', Tikendrajit fearlessly fought the British. After the war, he was arrested and executed by the British, along with his co-warriors Kulachandra and Thangal General. The ground in Imphal where he was hanged has been renamed as Bir Tikendrajit Park. Manipur observes 23 May, the day of his hanging, as Patriot's Day.

Bir Tikendrajit Singh

Rani Gaidinliu, a Kabui Naga from Rongmei tribe, was born on 26 January 1915 in Tamenglong district. She joined a movement launched by Jadonang, a Naga leader from Tamenglong, against the British at the age of 13. In December 1932, Gaidinliu was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. From 1933 to 1947, she was in several jails in Imphal, Shillong, Aizawl and Tura until Independence. Jawaharlal Nehru who had met her at the Shillong Jail in 1937 had described her as a 'daughter of the hills' and called her the 'Rani' (queen) of her people. After release, she continued to work for the upliftment of Zeliangrong people and died in her birthplace Longkao on 17 February 1993 at the age of 78. The Indian Coast Guard commissioned its inshore patrol vessel by naming it 'Rani Gaidinliu'. The vessel is the first-of-its-kind to be named after a freedom fighter from any state of India.

Rani Gaidinliu

Rani Gaidinliu

Hijam Irabot Singh, a politician and social activist, was one of the founder leaders of the Communist Party of India in Manipur. In 1939, when the second Nupi Lan broke out in Manipur, he was arrested and deported to the Sylhet Jail and was released on 20 March 1943. Irabot returned to Manipur in March 1946 when he formed a new party called the Manipur Praja Mandal and the

Manipur Krishak Sabha. Although elected to the first Manipur State Assembly, his activities were considered prejudicial to the state by the Manipur State Council and he was forced to stay out of the state, in Cachar. He continued to work for the Peasant Movement and formed an underground Communist Party of Manipur on 29 October 1948 to carry out armed struggle against the government. He died on 26 September 1951 at the foothills of Anggo Hills.

Hijam Irabot Singh

Mary Kom, an Olympian, has made Manipur and the country proud. From a farmer's daughter to an Olympic bronze medalist in 2012 and a five-time consecutive winner of the world championship in boxing, she has changed the perception about boxing as a male sport. She has repeatedly won several silver and gold medals at the World Women's Boxing Championships. She is the first woman to win the Asian Women's Boxing Championship for three years in a row. For her singular achievements, she has been bestowed with Arjuna Award (2003), Padma Shri (2005), and Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, the highest honour in sports in India (2008). A Hindi film titled *Mary Kom* based on her autobiography, *Unbreakable*, was made in 2013. Mary is also called 'Magnificent Mary' by the International Boxing Association.

Mary Kom

Ch. Rani Devi, a master weaver, has an iconic status in the handloom industry of the state. Her contribution to the field of handloom industry has been well-recognised as all good quality silk in Manipur is known as Rani Phi. She used to weave traditional garments for women like, *mapalnaiba phanek* (formal sarong

Ch. Rani Devi

which is usually worn during marriage). She specialised in weaving cotton and silk *chaddars*, *saris* and *chunnis* and appliqué work, where she used her artistic imagination to develop new designs and patterns. Born in 1932 in the Wangkhei locality of Imphal town, Rani imparted training to hundreds of weavers and many of her students have already won awards in artistic textile. For her work, she had won numerous awards and citations.

Ratan Thiyam, a renowned dramatist, has established Manipur on the drama map of India. Thiyam is a multifaceted artist, music composer, choreographer, playwright, painter and poet. A graduate in dramatic arts from the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi, he rose to be the Director of NSD and also the Vice-Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. He received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1987 and the Padma Shri in 1989. He founded the famous theatre group named 'Chorus Repertory Theatre' in Imphal in 1976, which has been home to some of his reputed theatre shows, namely Uttar Priyadarshi, Ritusamharam, Manipur Trilogy.

Ratan Thiyam

5. Places of Interest

INA Memorial is situated at Moirang in Bishnupur district of Manipur. It is a memorial built in the memory of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, freedom fighter and leader of the Indian National Army (INA) in the World War II, when he reached Moirang and unfurled the National Flag for the first time on Indian soil. The memorial has a museum, and a library where rare weapons, maps, letters, photographs and books related to Netaji are preserved.

Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in the north-eastern region. The wetland is swampy and is home to

Loktak Lake

a number of species, including Sangai, the unique brow-antlered deer which is also known as dancing deer. The biggest island is located at Sendra, from where people can get a beautiful view of the lake and the *phum-di* (floating masses) of water hyacinth. The fishermen and their families live on these floating masses, which makes the view spectacular. It is one of the most attractive tourist spots. Keibul-Lamjao National Park is a floating sanctuary of rare birds and animals. It is the only national park in the world made of floating masses of grass.

State Animal: Brow-antlered Deer (Sangai)

Sri Govindaji Temple is the most famous temple of the state and is situated in Imphal near the palace which was constructed after the relocation of the king from Kangla, the old citadel. The deities in this temple are Radha-Krishna. The temple has a rectangular medieval style structure with a large courtyard. Raslila, Yaoshang and other religious and social festivals/functions of Manipur are celebrated in the courtyard of the temple.

War Cemetery in Imphal, maintained by the Commonwealth, is a memorial of the officers and other ranks of the Indian army, who sacrificed their lives during the World War II. It is well-maintained with rows of stone and bronze markers, on which their names with a brief introduction on them are inscribed.

Ima Keithel at Khwairamband Bazar is a unique shopping centre, where only women shopkeepers sell their products.

Shiroi Lily, a rare species of lily found on the Shiroi peak of Ukhrul district, 2,568 metres above the sea level, is on the verge of extinction. The flowering time of this lily is May-June. The flower has a combination of seven colours and looks brown in sunlight. Khang-Khui Lime caves are also situated in Ukhrul district.

Moreh in Chandel district is the border town with Myanmar. It is the only feasible land route for trade between India and Myanmar and other South-East Asian countries, which is a great tourist attraction, and is regarded as India's Gateway to the East.

State Flower: Shiroi Lily

6. Conclusion

Manipur is distinguished by its ethnic diversity, historical link with Vaishnavism and the remarkable role played by women in all aspects of the society. The state is a microcosm of modern India where different communities have tried to find their space in a composite culture. The location of the state on the axis of trade route to South-East Asia gives it a unique advantage and importance in the country.

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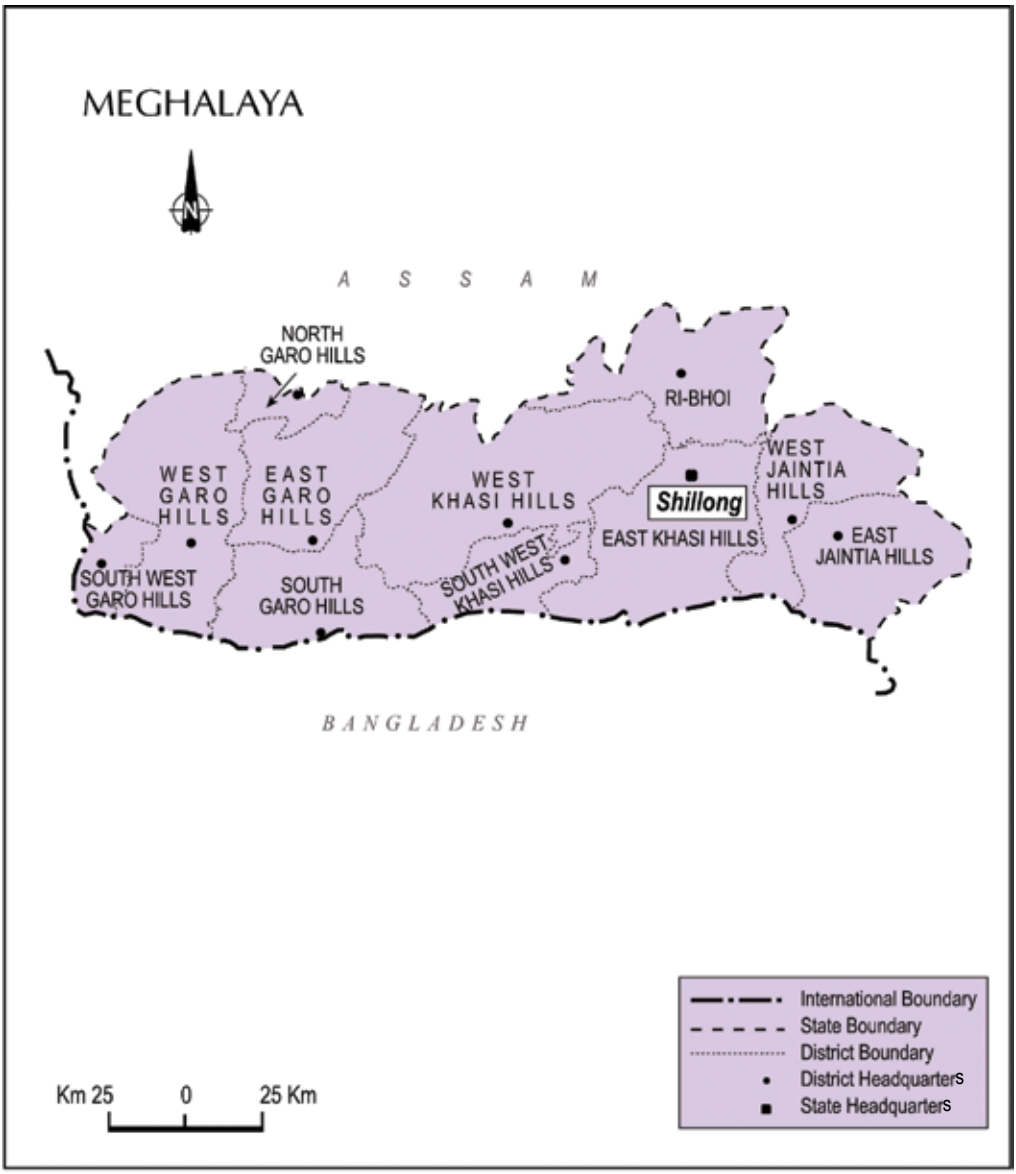


"Based on the Survey of India with the permission of the Surveyor General of India"
The boundary of Meghalaya shown on this map is as interpreted from the North-Eastern areas (Reorganisation) Act. 1971, but is yet to be verified.
Responsibility for correctness of internal details shown on the map rests with the publisher.

Meghalaya: Abode of Clouds

Meghalaya is a Sanskrit word, which means the 'abode of clouds'. The state with its capital Shillong, located at an elevated range of 4,908 ft. (1,496 metres) above the sea level is famed for its beauty. During the Colonial period, Shillong was described as 'Scotland of the East' and selected as the provincial capital of Assam for its scenic beauty and pleasant climate. Even today, the state continues to mesmerise visitors as they come across picturesque surroundings, lush green hills, beautiful waterfalls and a visit to Sohra (Cherrapunjee) and Mawsynram, the wettest places on earth.

Nohsngithiang falls—Cherrapunjee

1. Land and People

The state of Meghalaya, formed on 21 January 1972, was carved out of the state of Assam. Meghalaya comprises the United Khasi Hills, Jaiñtia Hills and Garo Hills. The total geographical area of the state is 22,429 sq. km with a population of 29.67 lakh (Census 2011). It is home to three major tribes—Khasis, Pnars (Jaiñtias) and Achik (Garos). 'Khasi' is a generic term that includes Khynriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Lyngngam and Diko people. 'Achik' is used for Garo people. Among the north-eastern states of India, Meghalaya is the only state which practises matrilineal system, where the lineage is traced through the mother. Women have a privileged status and the youngest daughter is the custodian of the ancestral property. However, the maternal uncle is the counsellor, who gives the final decision in all matters.

Meghalaya has recently produced well-known celebrities and institutions. It is the centre of musical talents, such as the famous Shillong Chamber Choir, which won TV show India's Got Talent in 2010. They were invited to perform in Delhi (8 November 2014) during the visit of U.S. President Barack Obama to India.

Shillong Chamber Choir with founder Padma Shri Neil Nongkynrih

Keishing Clifford Nongrum, a young Indian Army officer, was posthumously awarded with the Maha Vir Chakra, India's second-highest gallantry award for exemplary valour during combat operations in the Kargil War.

Bust of the Kargil War Martyr

The exposure to education, initiated by the western missionaries, was instrumental in the emergence of a new class of western educated elite. As the administrative capital of Assam during the Colonial period and, thereafter till 1972, Meghalaya has had the advantage of having some of the best schools and colleges in the region. Some of the prestigious schools and colleges such as Loreto Convent,

St. Mary's, St. Edmunds, St. Antony's, Don Bosco, Lady Keane, and Government Girls High School were set up during the Colonial period. After India's Independence, the state has seen the creation of new institutions such as North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS). Students from across the region and even from across the country visit the state. The North East Regional Institute of Education (NERIE), one of the regional centres of NCERT, is located in Meghalaya. Shillong also houses an Indian Institute of Management (IIM), a coveted educational institution of the country.

Meghalaya is largely an agrarian state. However, the agro-climate conditions offer much scope for horticulture, handicrafts and use of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP). Meghalaya is particularly known for cottage and handicraft industries, with exquisite bamboo and cane products, weaving, wood-carving and pottery. These products have

Non-timber Forest Products

now received recognition both in the national and the international markets. Handicraft products such as *mula* (cane stools), *shylliah* (cane carpets), *khoh* and *shang* (cone and cane basket), wooden carvings, *siangdieng* (wooden cutlery), metal works, and traditional musical instruments such as drums, cymbals, flutes, etc., are notable in the state.

Handloom fabrics such as *thohsaru*, *ryndia*, *muka*, *dhara*, etc., are in special demand in the fashion industry. Local youths are combining the traditional fabric with modern designs to produce unique products.

Traditional local health practices are common in the state for meeting some of the basic health requirements. Meghalaya has approximately 850 species of medicinal plants, which are popular among the people. Horticulture or cultivation of flowers and fruits (jackfruits, oranges, guava, pineapples, cashew nuts, etc.) and agriculture add to the economy of the state.

Women weaving handloom fabrics

A model in traditional attire

The state has rich mineral resources such as coal, limestone, silimanite, iron ore, uranium, etc. Earlier, coal was an important commodity for mining and trade in the state. Trade in limestone is still important for the people. Huge deposits of good quality limestone are found in the southern part of Meghalaya from Jaiñtia Hills in the east to Garo Hills in the west, which is the basis of a large mining and cement-based industry in the state. The total estimated reserve is 15,100 million tonnes.

1.1 Festivals and Dances

Khasi Traditional Dancer

Meghalaya has four major festivals: 'Shad Suk Mynsiem', also known as 'Weiking dance' and 'Nongkrem dance' (Khasis); 'Wangala dance', also known as 'Hundred Drums festival' of the Garos, and 'Behdeiñkhlam festival' of Jaiñtia Hills. These are observed amidst elaborate feasts, gaiety and traditional dances with elaborate costumes, gold jewellery accompanied by troupes of musicians using traditional instruments.

'Nongkrem' and 'Behdeiñkhlam' are the festivals performed by the people. Nongkrem festival is performed at *Smit* in the courtyard of *Ka Ïing Sad* (the ritual house of the chieftain of *Khyrim*). This house is built without a single nail and no iron fixture is used in the building.

'Behdeiñkhlam' is performed at Jowai and Tuber. In this festival, men go around the villages and beat the roofs of only those houses, where members have not converted to Christianity or any other faith in order to drive away the plague (bad omen) from the village.

The state also observes festivals such as Durga Puja, Deepawali, Eid, particularly in Shillong, which has a lot of migrant population. Christmas celebration is the most notable in the state as majority of the people practise

Khasi girls dressed in gorgeous attire during the Nongkrem dance. (Right) The traditional wooden house in the background has been built without nails.

Christianity. There is a discernable European population comprising descendents of those who came to this part of the country during the days of the Raj and settled here. In December 2003, the tallest Christmas tree of the world was erected at Dobasipara, Tura (Garo Hills). Its height was 119.3 ft. It was covered by BBC and widely broadcast on television. The tree was decorated with 16,319 coloured light bulbs.

Christmas celebration

1.2 Language and Literature

English is the official and widely spoken language of the state, and Khasi and Garo are the associate official languages. The Khasis and Garos have a rich oral tradition. With the advent of written literature, there has been tremendous growth and development of both the languages. The pioneers of Khasi literature during the pre-Independence period were U. Jeebon Roy, Sib Charan Roy, Hari Charan Roy, Dinonath Roy, Morkha Joseph, Rabon Singh, Radhon Singh Berry, SosoTham, Fr. H.Elias and Mondon Bareh.

Some of the prominent contemporary writers are B.L. Swer, K.S. Nongkynrih, Sylvanus Lamare, Wan Kharkrang, Kitbor W. Nongrum and Chrystal D. Marak. Among the Garo writers Howard Denison W. Momin, Harendra W. Marak are prominent. The prominent women writers are Streamlet Dkhar, Minimon Laloo, Esther Syiem, Lucky Kharpuri and Alfidarie Kharsyntiew.

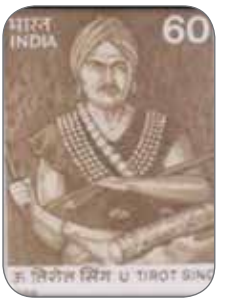
2. History

Oral tradition of the Khasis suggest that they came to India through the Patkai range and settled in Assam, before penetrating into the hills. Their presence in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam is assumed to be evidenced by the remains

of megaliths, and names of several places in the valley and adjacent areas, which also indicate Austric origin. Linguistically, Khasi belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family and the Garo to the Tibeto-Burman family. The names of several places in Assam such as Lumding, Darrang, Dibrugarh, Sadiya, etc., and rivers such as Kalanga (or Kolong in Khasi) and Dibong, appears to be Austric in origin.

Historical records reveal that a rich cultural interaction and a thriving trade existed between the people of the hills of Meghalaya and Sylhet (Bangladesh). In 1500 A.D., Parbat Ray a Jaiñtia ruler, shifted his capital from Sutnga to Jaiñtiapur a place in Sylhet. In Jaiñtiapur, the Syiems (rulers) adopted the Bengali script and Hindu officials were appointed for carrying out the administrative work. Many of the coins collected by Edward Gait and A.W. Botham bore Hindu symbols. Nartiang (Jaiñtia Hills) was the summer capital of the Jaiñtia kings and a Durga temple was built about 500 years ago, which still exists.

Capt. R.B. Pemberton (1798-1840) who was employed in survey and exploration work in the North-Eastern frontier, reported that Jaiñtiapur was a great trade centre for the inhabitants of the plains and Meghalaya hills. Items of export from the hills included betel nut, turmeric, bay leaf, fruits, wax, ivory, cloth, timber, gold, iron ore, metal tools and some of the finest quality limestone, in exchange of coarse rice, dry fish, and so on. Trade contacts facilitated cultural interaction and many of the tribes living in the southern slopes were well-versed in Bengali. Some of them such as U. Ram Singh, a wealthy trader, had ventured as far as Calcutta (Kolkata) even before the advent of the British.



U. Tirot Singh

The British East India Company's early contact with Khasis was purely commercial. Problems commenced when David Scott, political agent to the Governor General on the North-Eastern frontier of Bengal, sought to construct a road across the hills (through the Hima Nongkhlaw territory of the Khasis) to connect two important British headquarters, Kamrup (currently

Guwahati) and Sylhet. This permission was initially granted by the Syiem of Nongkhlaw, U. Tirot Singh, but soon the high-handedness of the soldiers at Nongkhlaw and realisation by the Syiem that the British were here to stay, provoked the Anglo-Khasi war of 1829-33. In spite of stiff resistance, the Syiems were subdued and Tirot Singh, who led the movement was captured and eventually died a prisoner in Dhaka. Khasi Hills was annexed in 1833. The British met with similar resistance in Jaiñtia Hills (annexed in 1835) and Garo Hills (annexed in 1873) where the names of indigenous heroes such as U. Kiang Nangbah (Pnar), and Pa Togan Nengminja (Garo), who met with a gallant death protecting their homeland, are noted. Their death anniversary is commemorated as a State holiday. In Garo Hills, the name of Sonaram R. Sangma is also revered as the patriot who was responsible for stirring political consciousness among the people.

U. Kiang Nangbah

After the annexation of Khasi Hills by the British, the 25 Khasi states were categorised as native states, but 35 villages were wrested from the parent state and assigned a separate administration which, henceforth, formed part of the British India. The native states were given autonomy in traditional administration, but were bound to certain obligations as coal mines and limestone quarries were leased by the government from these states. On the other hand, the British abolished the Jaiñtia Syiemship and instead divided Jaiñtia Hills into 12 Doloiship. The Jaiñtia Hill district was declared a British territory (non-state). Garo Hills was formed as a separate district in 1869 with Capt. W.J. Williamson as its first Deputy Commissioner. Initially, Sohra (Cherrapunjee) was selected as the headquarters of Assam, but it was later shifted to Shillong in 1866.

The advent of Christian missionaries in the hills was significant. The missionaries worked to convert the people to Christianity, while promoting education and healthcare. The first Christian missionary was William Carey from the Serampore Baptist mission. During this mission, William

Carey introduced the Bengali script for Khasis in 1813. Alexander B. Lish, a missionary from this mission established three schools, one each at Mawsmai, Mawmluh and Sohra. After the mission was closed, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission society decided to send Thomas Jones along with his wife who arrived at Sohra in 1841. Thomas Jones introduced the Roman script for Khasis, which continues till date.

The Garos, on the other hand, got the Roman script in 1902 from the American Baptist Mission by Rev. E.G. Phillips and M.C. Mason. The translation of the Bible and other Christian literature was done in local languages that were introduced in missionary schools.

There were, however, some Khasis who strongly upheld their own indigenous faith and did not convert to Christianity. One of those was U. Jeebon Roy (1838-1903), a broad-minded thinker, who believed that one should protect one's faith, respecting other religions too. He was well-versed in Sanskrit and Bengali literature. Some of the notable books written by him were *Ka Niam Jong ki Khasi* in 1897 *(The Religion of the Khasis)*, *Hitupodesa* (four volumes, 1898), *Ramayon* (1900), *Ka Kitab Chaitanya*, *Ka Kitab Ba Hikai*, *Pynshynna Shaphang U Wei U Blei (One God)* and the *Buddha Deb Charitra*. His son, Sibcharan Roy wrote the *Ka Bhagavad Gita* (1903) and other Khasi books. U. Jeebon Roy was the first Khasi to enter government service and was instrumental in starting the 'Seng Khasi' (1899) a traditional cultural body to protect Khasis' identity and culture. He also opened a school in Shillong in 1875 (known as the Government Boy's High School today) and the first local printing press (1896), known as 'Press', which still exists. U. Jeebon Roy was also a firm advocate of education and did not discriminate between boys and girls. Vocational education for the youth was another thrust area, as he was himself a wealthy trader. He even set up a training class on the press premises, where girls were taught the art of printing free of cost. Later, when some of the girls refused to attend classes, he employed his daughter to work, which became an eye-opener for others.

As the administrative centre of Assam, Shillong was always receptive to the influence of mainland India, such as the Brahmo Samaj movement, the Bengal Renaissance

and the Ramakrishna Mission. The Brahmo Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission not only opened several schools in Khasi Hills but also charitable dispensaries. In 1924, Swami Prabhananda of the Ramkrishna Mission came to Cherrapunjee and opened a school, which exists till date as one of the distinguished schools of Meghalaya. Babu Jeebon Roy was also greatly influenced by the Brahmo Samaj movement. Shillong also attracted an inflow of people from across the country, many of them came to Shillong for trade or service and settled permanently.

Notable personalities such as Swami Vivekananda and Subhas Chandra Bose visited Shillong during the Colonial period. Swami Vivekananda visited Shillong during April 1901 and gave an inspiring speech at the Quinton Memorial Hall, which was later known as the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Cultural Centre. Subhas Chandra Bose visited Shillong repeatedly from 1927 onwards. During his first visit, Bose selected a hill resort as the most suitable place to recover from an illness he suffered due to rigorous imprisonment in Burmese prisons. "The azure sky, green fields, the mountain ranges all around, the play of light and shade in the forests, the continuous roar of the waterfalls" as he wrote to his sister-in-law "all this keep me contented." Rabindranath Tagore spent quiet days on three occasions in Shillong during his active life. His iconic literary creations 'Raktakarabi' and 'Shesher Kobita' were written during his stay in Shillong.

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

Meghalaya is a plateau at different levels of elevation, ranging from 150 metres (490 ft.) to 1,961 metres (6,434 ft.). The highest point is known as the Shillong Peak. The monsoon-bred climate has a wide variation depending on the altitude and physiographic difference of landmass. While the Shillong plateau has a temperate climate which rarely goes beyond 28 degrees, the winters are cold with very low temperatures which sometimes go below zero degree. On the other hand, lower regions such as the War Areas adjoining the

Surma and the Brahmaputra valley have a tropical type of climate, experiencing high temperature for most of the year. Earlier, Sohra (Cherrapunjee) in Meghalaya received the highest rainfall in the world, but now it is Mawsynram (about 16 km west of Cherrapunjee) in the southern slopes of Khasi Hills district, which receives the highest rainfall at 11,873 mm (467in). Numerous rivers flow through Meghalaya and although most of them are not navigable due to steep slopes, they form wonderful waterfalls.

About 70 per cent of the total geographical area in the state is covered with forests, which contain various types of trees. Sal and pine trees are the most valuable. These forests are considered to be among the richest botanical habitats of Asia, supporting a vast variety of floral and faunal biodiversity, much of which is endemic to the state. There are 660 species of birds. Of these, many are threatened species. The great Indian hornbill is the largest bird in this state. There are also over 250 species of butterflies, nearly a quarter of the butterfly species found in India. A large variety of orchids—nearly 350—and an equally large variety of fruits, vegetables, spices, medicinal plants, including exotic plants such as the carnivorous pitcher plant (Nepenthes Khasiana) are endemic to the state. In addition, we find innumerable species of reptiles, insects and mammals such as elephants, bear, red panda, wild buffalo, barking deer, wild boar, leopard and a number of primates such as hoolock gibbon. The state also has two national parks, the Nokrek National Park and the Balpakram National Park, and two

Nokrek National Park

Hoolock Gibbon

Balpakram National Park

wildlife sanctuaries—Nongkhyllem Wildlife sanctuary and Siju Wildlife Sanctuary.

In Meghalaya, about 90 per cent of the forest land belongs to the community, individuals or clans and are regulated by the Autonomous District Councils. Of special significance are the small patches of forests known as 'Ki Lawkyntang' (sacred groves). These are ancient forests that have been preserved by local communities due to religious and cultural beliefs and protected from any form of exploitation. Plucking even a leaf from these forests is considered a taboo. The sacred groves harbour many rare plants and animal species. The sacred grove of Mawphlang village (25 km from Shillong) is well-known and has attracted tourists and researchers. Two notable botanists who studied this site were Sir J.D. Hooker in the nineteenth century and Dr. N.L. Bor in the twentieth century. Sacred forests are also found in Jaiñtia Hills. The famous ones are in Mukhla, Tuber, Jowai, Jaraiñ, and others. In West Garo Hills, the Selbagre Hoolock Gibbon reserve forest is well-known. It is protected by the community and the Garos do not kill or hunt the gibbon (it is the only ape species found in India). It is a belief that if a gibbon is killed, a famine or curse would befall the village.

Pitcher Plant

Mawphlang Sacred Grove

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh (1906-62) from Shillong began her political career in 1937 and was a member of the Assam

Legislative Assembly as an independent candidate. In 1939, Sir Muhammad Syed Sadulla, the Premier of Assam, invited her to join the ministry where she held the portfolio of health. During this period, she encouraged the induction of Khasi women as nurses in government hospitals. During the World War II, many of these women went overseas to take care of sick and wounded soldiers. After 1947, Mavis Dunn retired from politics.

Another personality, J.J.M. Nichols Roy (1883-1959), was Khasi representative to the Assam Legislative Council (ALC) in 1921. Nichols Roy was responsible for the formation of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council in 1954, which reintegrated traditional rulers to the modern political system, thus, guaranteeing the continuation of Khasi customary laws with subtle changes, under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution.

J.J.M. Nichols Roy

G.G. Swell (1923-99) and Capt. Williamson Sangma (1919-90) successfully led a peaceful and non-violent campaign for the bifurcation of several hill states of the North East. It was due to their efforts that the whole campaign was non-violent and successful. Swell was a political leader who led a movement for the creation of Meghalaya. Later, he served as the Indian ambassador to Norway, Iceland and Burma during the 1970s and 1980s. Williamson Sangma became the first Chief Minister of Meghalaya in 1970. Purno A. Sangma, another well-known political leader, was also the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

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Patricia Mukhim

5. Places of Interest

Sohra (Cherrapunjee) is the most visited place in Meghalaya. A number of waterfalls are found here and a few are connected with folklore such as Ka Kshaid Nohkalikai (Likai falls), and Ka Kshaid Daiñthlen (Dainthlen falls). Other beautiful falls in Sohra such as the Ka Kshaid Nohsngithiang, Kshaid Kynrem and Kshaid Laipateng Khohsiew are found in the slopes. In Pynursla, Mawlynnong was considered the cleanest village in Asia and has been acclaimed as India's first certified Green Village, along with the Raj Bhavan in Shillong.

A view of Umiam Lake

Landscape on way to Cherrapunjee

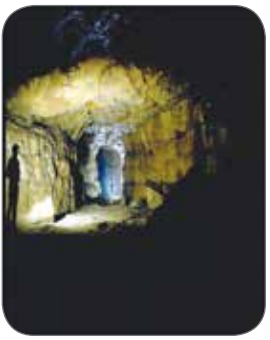
Dawki bridge runs over the Umngot river where an annual boat race is held. The Umngot river is also the natural boundary between Jaintia and Khasi hills. This is the gateway to Bangladesh.

The important places to visit in Jaiñtia Hills, about 66 km from Shillong, are Tyrshi waterfalls, serpentine view of Myntdu river. The Thadlaskeiñ and Syntu Ksiar are associated with the legendary story of Pnar people. But

Dawki bridge

Umngot river

the most important place is Nartiang, 24 km from Jowai, both for a Durga temple and the largest collection of monoliths found at one place. It is believed that the tallest monolith was carried by a person named U. Marphalyngki to commemorate the glorious events of the Jaiñtia kingdom. Other popular places of this area are Syndai Cave, Bangladesh view point (Muktapur and Sohkha), Dawki bridge, and others.



Siju Caves at South Garo Hills district. It is one of the longest caves in India.

In East Jaiñtia Hills, we have Dawki, where one can catch a glimpse of Bangladesh. Dawki is an important transit point for trade with Bangladesh. It is also important for its strategic location.

The Capt. Williamson Sangma State Museum in Shillong offers a fascinating glimpse of the history, culture and lifestyles of the tribal people of Meghalaya.

Places to visit in Garo Hills are Balpakram National Park, Tura Peak, Rengsangrap Falls, Wadadokgre, Imilchang Dare, Nokrek Peak, Siju Cave, Birds and Wildlife Sanctuary (Siju), Teteng Cave, Mahadei Hills, Pitcher Plant Sanctuary, Dombe Wari, Chisobibra, Rongbang Dare, Jolding Wari, Chitmang Peak, Kilapara War Memorial, Satsagre, and others.

Within Shillong city itself, there are numerous places to see such as the Wards Lake, Golf Link (the first 18-hole golf course in India), Don Bosco Museum, Shillong Peak, Elephant Falls, Butterfly Museum, and so on. Before entering Shillong, we first come across the Umiam Lake (22 km from Shillong) which is an artificial water reservoir.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the people of Meghalaya have a glorious past, rich cultural heritage and amazing landscapes. The state has

carved its name for prestigious educational institutions in the country from the British period. Being one of the most beautiful states of India, Meghalaya is a favoured tourist destination. Earlier Sohra (Cherrapunjee) and now Mawsynram are known to be places with highest rainfall on earth.

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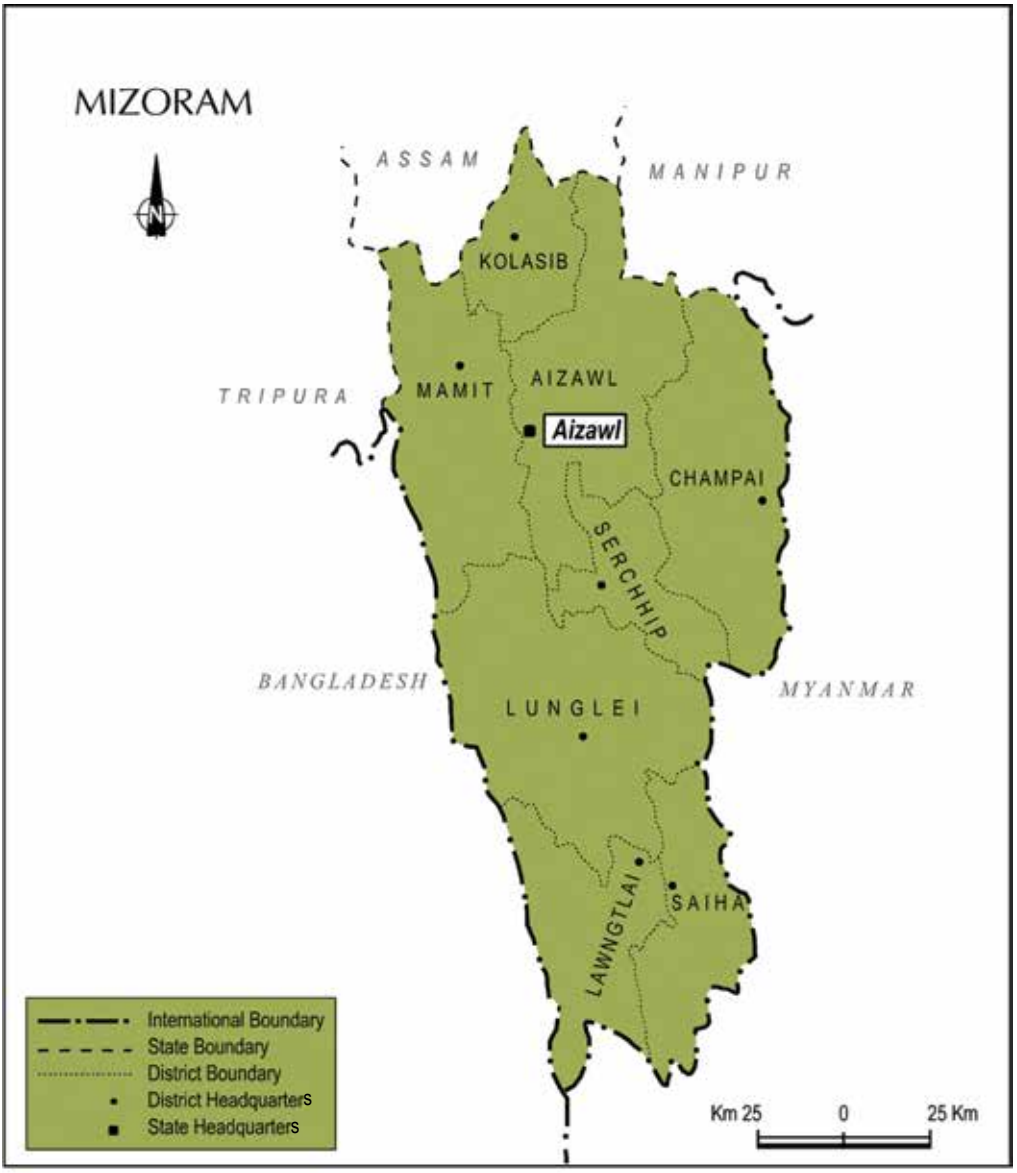

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Mizoram: Land of Blue Mountains

Mizoram is one of the hilly states of India, with Aizawl as its capital. It is situated in the extreme south of North East India. It shares international boundary with Myanmar in the south and east, and Bangladesh in the west, thus, occupying an area of great strategic importance. It is bounded in the west by Tripura, and in the north by the states of Assam and Manipur. The state has an area of approximately 21,087 sq. km. According to the Census 2011, Mizoram has a population of 10.91 lakh. It has the highest concentration of tribal people among all states in India.

1. Land and People

A majority of the people inhabiting Mizoram, collectively known as Mizos, consists of Hmar, Lushai (or Lusei), Paite, Lai (Pawi), Mara (Lakher) and Ralte. These groups are sub-divided into numerous sub-clans, for example the Hmars are divided into Thiek, Faihriem, Lungtau, Darngawn, Khawbung, Sote, and others. Mizo and its kindred people are found across North East India, Burma and Bangladesh. The Bru (Reang) and Chakma are the other tribal groups in Mizoram. There are also sizeable numbers of Nepalis scattered in various parts of the state.

Christianity is the major religion in Mizoram, which was introduced by Christian missionaries after the ocupation of Lushai hills (Mizo territory) by the British during early nineteenth century. The church plays a vital role in the life of the people, who are connected with it and its manifold activities. It is the practice

Solomon's Temple, Aizawl.

of most of the Mizos to attend the Sunday classes held in every church for the young and old. Some other religions practised here are Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. There are also several thousand people, mostly ethnic Mizos, who have converted to Judaism. Mizoram, therefore, is a land of multi-religious faiths.

Tlawmngaihna: This is an unique custom of the people of Mizoram by which one is duty-bound to help others. The idea is putting other's interest before one's own. Everyone tries to surpass the other in unselfishness and cooperation. It may be described as being kind, unselfish and helpful to others irrespective of one's own inconveniences. It permeates all spheres of life. For example, if a farmer or cultivator falls sick, it is the duty of others to cultivate the plots for him. Travellers would always get hospitality in villages from villagers. Fellow villagers would help repairing and rebuilding houses affected by natural calamities and also contribute food and other necessary items to the affected people.

The economic life of the people of Mizoram has always been centered around *jhum* or shifting cultivation, which involves cutting a large tract of forest and burning it for cultivation. The crops grown in the *jhum* are paddy, cucumber, beans, ginger, mustard, cotton, etc. Apart from the main *jhum* fields, small fields generally near the house or at the bottom of *jhum* areas where vegetables, maize, etc., are grown are also managed by most households. This is called *Leipui*. Wet rice cultivation is found in some parts of Mizoram, notably in Champhai. The practise of *jhum* cultivation has been discouraged by the state government. In its effort to curb this practice, the New Land Use Policy (NLUP) has been introduced by the government. Through this policy, permanent means of livelihood, self-sufficiency in rice, vegetables, etc., are sought to be achieved.

Nghah lou dawr' shop, which means shops without attendants are common along the highway in Seling, about 65 km from the capital Aizawl. The shop owners leave their shops open for customers passing the highway to pick up things of requirement. In these shops, vegetables, fruits, flowers and other items are kept for sale with the rate list and a container for the customers to put the money.

Nghah Lou Dawr' Shop

Mizoram is suitable for horticulture. The principal crops grown are orange, banana, pineapple and cash crops like coffee, rubber and tea. In the field of floriculture, the state is a significant producer and global exporter of Anthurium and roses. It is one of the leading producers of bamboo in India.

Lawm system is an integral part of the agricultural work partnership. In general understanding, lawm is a labour practice relating to jhum cultivation and is mostly confined to young unmarried men and women. Lawm has been a common practice of different tribes subsumed under the Mizo.

Mizos' skills can be seen in their wonderful cane and bamboo products of utility and decorative items as well as weaving. These traditionally-skilled artisans make bamboo products like baskets, utensils, hats, handcrafted furniture and flower vases as well as weave shawls and *puan* (wrap-around).

In the traditional Mizo society, women played an active role in the economic life, bearing all responsibilities of running the family. Early report of life in Lushai Hills indicate that "the work is done almost entirely by women." Besides, women were responsible for all domestic work. As there was

a sharp division of labour based on sex. Men concentrated on defence and hunting, while there was no holiday for women who worked incessantly from dawn to dusk. However, women were seldom given political and administrative responsibilities in the society. Besides, they did not have property rights and were given no share in important decisions.

Thul (basket) and Khumbe (hat) made of cane and bamboo

Weaving

The British colonisation and the introduction of Christianity had a far-reaching impact on the Mizo society, resulting in the changing status of women. Western education introduced by Christian missionaries opened avenues for formal education and salaried jobs for women. Initially, priority was given to boys' education in most of the families, and the benefit that education can bestow was first reaped mostly by men. Later, girls' education started on account of the initiatives taken by the missionaries. Today, educated women are in a position to hold an independent status in contrast to their traditional position in the society.

The custom of paying bride-price is practised by Mizo people. The marriage proposal among them is followed by the settlement of bride-price, which is paid by the bridegroom's family to the head of the bride's family. A part of it is paid during the wedding and the rest is paid over the years.

Football is the most popular game in Mizoram. A lot of emerging footballers of India are from Mizoram. Apart from football, there are other indigenous games like *insuknawr*

(rod-pushing), played only by men. *Inbuan*, which resembles combat-wrestling and games played by children such as *in-kawi-bah, in-u-len, tira mei kaih* (hold the mouse's tail), *bingte sairawka,* etc. *Inbuan* has been declared a 'Mizo State Game' by the Mizoram State Sports Council.

Insuknawr (Rod-pushing)

Jeje Lalpekhlua, noted footballer from Mizoram

1.1 Festivals and Dances

There are various festivals such as 'Chapchar Kut' (festival of spring, celebrated just before the *jhum* cultivation starts), 'Anthurium' festival, 'Alphaloni' festival, etc., celebrated in the state. Most festivals are celebrated collectively by the whole community. Festivals such as Chapchar Kut and Alphaloni celebrated by the Mizos and Chakmas, respectively, revolve around the stages of *jhum* cultivation or the seasons. Chapchar Kut is celebrated at the state level every year on the second Friday of March. It is the most joyful traditional festival celebrated by the Mizos. The celebration

Cheraw (Bamboo Dance)

Chai lam

of Chapchar Kut is usually heralded with 'Cheraw' (bamboo dance) performed by youths in their colourful traditional attire. 'Chai', the dance performed usually during Chapchar Kut celebration draws all people (young and old). The dance is characterised by people standing in circles and swaying from side-to-side to the slow moving tune of Mizo songs of yesteryears.

'Anthurium' is another festival of recent origin. The state government of Mizoram, with an aim to promote tourism in the state and also to encourage Anthurium cultivation in Mizoram, organises a three-day-long event every year in September. The festival is celebrated at a tourist resort in Reiek village at the foothills of the mystic Reiek Mountain. It is a popular festival and has slowly become one of the most prominent tourism festivals in Narth East India.

Young girls with baskets full of Anthurium

In the festivals, traditional dances such as Cheraw, Khuallam, Chheihlam, Chai-lam, Tlanglam, Sar-lam-kai, Chawnglaizaw, Bizhu, etc., are performed by the people fervently. Traditional dance of Chakma and Nepali are also performed. Festivals such as Christmas, Bishu, Buddha Purnima, Eid, etc., are also celebrated in Mizoram.

Traditional musical instruments such as *darkhuang (gong), Khuang (drum), dar (cymbals),* bamboo-based *phenglawng (flute), dhudhuk, tawtawrawt,* etc., along with *tingtang* (hollow guitar) are extensively used during festivals, religious occasions and other gatherings. Music and

Darkhuang (Gong)

song are a common source of entertainment among the people of Mizoram. Today, the young generation has taken to western music and dance with aplomb. Churches also play an important role in promoting and nurturing the talent of youths by imparting music lessons to children and forming choirs in churches.

Hnatlang (community work) is the practice in villages and towns where all able-bodied men and women are expected to participate and contribute in terms of labour. Construction of offices for community-based organisation and jhum-related activities are taken up during this occasion. One participant from each household is expected, failing which a fine in cash or kind is imposed.

1.2 Language and Literature

The major language spoken by the people of Mizoram is 'Lushai' (Duhlian), commonly known as 'Mizo'. It developed mainly from the Lushai language with significant influence from Pawi, Paite and Hmar languages, especially at the literary level. It belongs to the 'Kuki-Chin' group of languages, which is an important branch of the Tibeto-Burman language. It is also the official language, along with English. Languages other than Mizo are Bengali, Hmar, Lakher, Mara, Nepali, Pawi, Paite, Thadou, etc.

Mizo does not have a script of its own. The script for Mizo language consists of 34 letters in Roman alphabets. The literary trend set forth by the missionaries since 1894 became the foundation of the Mizo language and literature. The first book written in Mizo entitled *Mizo Zir Tir Bu* (*Mizo Primer*) was published in October 1896.

Since then, many prominent writers who have contributed to the Mizo literature are Liangkhaia, P.S. Chawngthu, L. Rokunga, B. Lalthangliana, Captain L.Z. Sailo (Padma Bhushan awardee in Literature and Education), Jamesh Dokhuma, Khawl Kungi, Lalsangzuali Sailo, Laltluangliana Khiangte, R.L. Thanmawia, Buangi Sailo, etc.

2. History

Prior to the arrival of the British in the Lushai Hills (presently Mizoram), the people lived in independent villages under chiefs called *Lal*, on whom all power of land and people rested. The chief appointed elderly men, *Upa*, to assist him in village administration and had a council that discussed all matters concerned with the village. The council decided both civil and criminal cases according to the customary law of the village. A chief, who governed strictly according to customs, could do almost everything without losing his followers, but a weak chief who tried petty tyrannies, soon would find himself without any subject. Besides the *Upa*, the chief also appointed village officials such as *Tlangau* (village crier), who announced in high-pitched voice all important notices to the public by going around the streets; *Thirdeng* (village blacksmith), whose duty was to make and repair tools of the villagers; *Ramhual*, who gave advice on sites for cultivation; *Sadawt* (priest), who took the lead in religious activies; *Bawlpu* (the medicine man), who performed sacrifices to propitiate evil spirits, and *Val Upa* (youth leader), who controlled the youth.

Serene dwelling in the midst of nature

The tribal Lushai chiefs of various clans used to undertake invasions and retaliatory expeditions to serve their territory. British military officers in the 1850s recorded a series of such events in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which was controlled during that time by the British. These persistent intrusions led to punitive British military expeditions between 1850 and 1892 and annexation of the entire Lushai Hills and it was formally declared part of the British-India by a proclamation

in 1895. In 1898, Lushai Hills district with Aizawl as its headquarters was created and it became a part of the Assam province. Through the Government of India Act, 1919, it was declared a Backward Tract and, later in 1935, it was declared an Excluded Area along with the other tribal districts of Assam.

During the British regime, political awakening among the Mizos in Lushai Hills started and on 9 April 1946 the first political party i.e., Mizo Common Peoples' Union, which was later renamed the Mizo Union, was formed. The Union demanded inclusion of all Mizo-inhabited areas adjacent to Lushai Hills. Though this demand was not met, a certain amount of autonomy was accepted by the government, following the Bordoloi Sub-Committee's suggestion and the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was created in 1952. Followed by the formation of the Council, the institution of chieftainship was abolished on 16 August 1954 with the passing of the Lushai Hill District (Village Councils) Act. This Act replaced the position and authority of the *Lal* (chief) with the Village Council.

In 1959, Lushai Hills was devastated by a major famine known in the Mizo history as 'Mautam Famine' for the third time. This was caused by the flowering of bamboo, which consequently led to an increase in rat population. After eating up bamboo seeds, rats turned towards crops and infested houses, causing plague in the villages. The plague and resultant famine led to large-scale starvation and people moving out to jungles or far away places. Many welfare organisations came up during this period to help the starving villagers and facilitate supplies to remote villages. The Mizo Cultural Society formed in 1955 began working as the Mautam Front and took a lead in demanding relief. In September 1960, the society adopted the name of Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) and gained considerable popularity as a large number of Mizo Youth of MNFF assisted in transporting rice and other essential commodities to interior villages.

The MNFF dropped the word 'Famine' from its name later and a new political organisation i.e., Mizo National Front (MNF), under the leadership of Shri Laldenga was

formed on 22 October 1961. The specified goal of this party was to achieve independence for Mizoram. On 28 February 1966, large-scale disturbances broke out in Aizawl, Lunglei, Chawngte, Chhimluang and other places simultaneously and the demand for statehood gained momentum again. The Mizo District Council delegation met then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in May 1971, demanding a full-fledged state for Mizos. The union government offered the proposal of turning Lushai Hills into a Union Territory (UT). The Mizo leaders were ready to accept the offer on the condition that the status of UT would be upgraded to statehood soon. On 21 January 1972, the Union Territory of Mizoram came into being. After several years as a UT, the Mizoram Peace Accord was signed on 30 June 1986 between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Union government, following which Mizoram became a federal state of India on 20 February 1987. For the past three decades, Mizoram has been one of the most peaceful states in the North East.

State Animal: Serow (Saza)

State Bird: Mrs. Hume's Pheasant (Vavu)

State Tree: Iron Wood

State Flower: Red Vanda (Senhri)

There are eight districts in Mizoram. The state also has three Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) for ethnic tribes in Mizoram, namely Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lai Autonomous District Council, and Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC). For administration at the village level, village councils are formed.

Mizoram Accord

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

Mizoram is a land of natural beauty, with its scenic landscapes of bluish hills and mountains, steep rocky cliffs, beautiful lakes, deep valleys of rivers and amazing waterfalls. Despite being hilly in nature, Mizoram also has some plain areas. The most prominent being Champhai on the border of Mizoram and Myanmar. Others are Thensawl, North Vanlaiphai and Chemphai.

Many of the rivers and streams run between the hill ranges and in plain areas. Rivers like Tlawng also known as Dhaleshwari, Tuirial and Tuivawl drain the northern portion of the land and fall into the Barak. These rivers were extensively used for transportation of people and material before the road to Mizoram was constructed and is still used for transporting bamboo and timber from interior areas to the plains of Cachar in Assam. The southern hills are drained by the Chhimtuipui also known as Koladyne on the east. Khawthlangtuipui also known as Karnaphuli and its tributaries form the western drainage system.

Several mountain peaks are located in Mizoram. Phawngpui also known as Blue Mountain at 2,157 metres is the highest peak. Many lakes such as Palak Lake, Tamdil, Rungdil and Rengdil are also located here.

The state has a pleasant climate throughout the year, with the temperature ranging from 11 to 21 degrees Celsius in winter and 20 to 30 degrees Celsius in summer. However, due to the influence of monsoons, heavy rain from May to September often makes the state vulnerable to landslides and other weather-related emergencies. It gets an average

rainfall of about 3,000 mm. Winter (November to February), on the other hand, witnesses little or no rain. Strong storms during March-April are also common.

Mizoram has 91.27 per cent of its area covered by forests. Out of this, 57 per cent of the geographical area is covered by different species of bamboo. About 27 bamboo species have been identified. A wide variety of flora and fauna is found in Mizoram. As almost the entire state is covered by different types of vegetation, there are numerous species of plants. A large variety of orchids are available here. Over 200 orchid varieties have already been identified. Further, the forests in Mizoram are a home to many endangered animal species, including tiger, stump-tailed macaque, Asian elephant, goral, clouded leopard, binturong and others. The state is also famous for birds. About 640 species of birds have been spotted. Some rare birds in India such as Mrs. Hume's pheasant (state bird), Blyth's tragopan, green peafowl, oriental white eye, greater racket tailed drongo, etc., are found here. To promote and preserve wildlife in the state, wildlife sanctuaries and parks such as Dampa Wildlife Sanctuary (tiger reserve), Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary, Khawnglung Wildlife Sanctuary, Tawi Wildlife Sanctuary, Phawngpui National Park, Murlen National Park, etc., have been established.

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Padma Shri Khawlkungi, Mizo Writer

Khawlkungi is a writer, essayist and dramatist from Mizoram. Awarded the Padma Shri in 1987 for her prolific contribution to the Mizo literature, she stands out in Mizoram as one who has enriched the literary world of Mizos, particularly children, in the last four decades. Sustained writing and presence of various genres of literature are the hallmark of her work.

Lalnu Ropuiliani was the female Chief of Mizos in the nineteenth century, a rarity during her times. Lalnu is known for her brave resistance and fight against the British colonial rule in the erstwhile Lushai Hills. She was arrested by the

British in 1894 and shifted from Lunglei to Chittagong jail. She died within two years of her incarceration in January 1895 in the jail.

Laldenga (1927-90) was an important leader of the Mizo National Front (MNF), who led a struggle of independence for Mizoram. After a struggle of 20 years, the Mizoram Peace Accord was signed with the Government of India in 1986, of which he, representing MNF, was a signatory. He, subsequently, became the first Chief Minister of Mizoram. His party i.e., MNF that was formed under his leadership is a recognised regional party.

C. Rokhuma (1917-2016) was a scientist, innovator, social worker and a writer. His research relating to cyclic bamboo flowering, which may trigger increase in rodent population and ultimately famine, led him to invent an insecticide named 'RK Mixture'. His campaign relating to this issue in mid-2000s was a huge success, which earned him the title of 'Mizoram's Pied Piper'. In 1992, he was awarded with the Padma Shri for his contribution in the field of social work. He also wrote a number of books, articles and also translated many of them from English to Mizo.

5. Places of Interest

Champhai, located 194 km from Aizawl, on the border of Mizoram and Myanmar, is a commercial town and an ideal shopping place for various imported goods. Rih Dil, the legendary lake associated with the traditional religion of the Mizos is located in the vicinity of Champhai. According to the ancestors of the Mizos, it was a corridor to their heaven called 'Pialral'. All souls destined to Pialral must cross the lake.

Rih Dil

Champhai

Thus, it is highly regarded by *Mizos* because of its cultural significance.

Thenzawl, located 43 km from Aizawl, was a dense forest with lots of wild animals before it was cultivated and inhabited in 1961. The Tropic of Cancer runs through this picturesque village. It is an important centre of traditional Mizo handloom industry where rich and colourful varieties of handlooms are produced. Indigenous weaving techniques of the Mizos can also be observed here. The Thenzawl Deer Park with deer living in natural environment and Chawngchili Cave are added attractions of Thenzawl.

Phawngpui or the Blue Mountain is situated near the Myanmar border on the curve of Chhimtuipui river. It is a sacred peak, considered to be the abode of gods. Abounding with diverse flora and fauna, Phawngpui has been declared a national park. Exploring the park requires trekking and one can get the most exciting views of Mizoram from the cliffs of Phawngpui. Exotic species of flora and fauna, especially orchids and rhododendrons, variety of birds, including the rare Blyth's tragopan, dark rumped swift and Hume's pheasant are found here. Some of the endangered mammals like slow loris, tiger, leopard, leopard cat, serow, goral, Asiatic black bear, stump-tailed macaque and capped langur make Phawngpui their home.

Phawngpui

Hmuifang, located 50 km to the south of Aizawl, is a mountain covered by virgin forests, reserved since the days of Mizo chiefs. The mountain has beautiful cliffs and offers a great view of the surrounding hills.

Hmuifang

The surrounding forests are abound with a variety of flora, including rare orchids and wildlife, especially avian fauna. From here, one can visit the Mizo villages situated on the hillsides such as Hmuifang, Sumsuih, Lamchhip, and Chamring and see the rural life of the Mizos. Hmuifang Tourist Resort, created and maintained by the Department of Tourism, is also located at the scenic peak of this mountain.

Zawlbuk (Youth Dormitory)

Reiek is a mountain and a tourist spot located 30 km to the West of Aizawl. The mountain is adorned with gentle slopes on its eastern side and also spectacular rocky cliffs with caves and caverns as well as natural forests preserved since the days of Mizo chiefs. A typical Mizo village (non-residential), consisting of distinctive traditional huts of different Mizo sub-tribes, the house of the chief and a bachelor dormitory (Zawlbuk in Mizo language) have also been created at Reiek.

6. Conclusion

Mizoram has evolved from various independent villages, which were under *Lals* (chiefs). The state has passed through different stages of struggles, including 'Mautam Famine', which led to armed insurgency. Today, Mizoram is considered to be one of the most peaceful states in the region and has attained increasing success in the fields of social and economic development.

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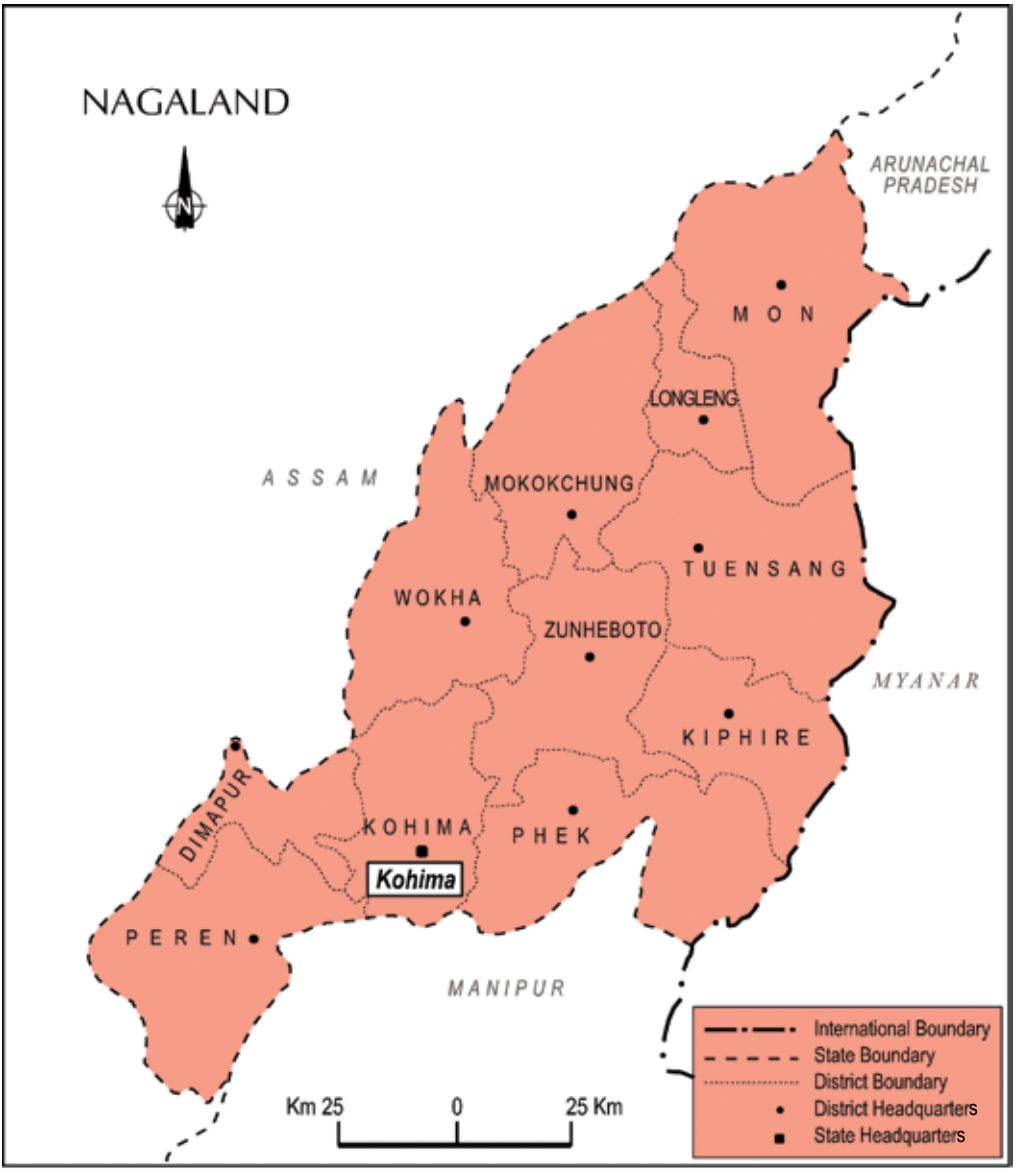

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Nagaland: Land of Festivals

Nagaland is known as the 'Land of Festivals', because the state abounds with festivities all through the year. It is predominantly a tribal state with a population of 19.78 lakh (Census 2011). It is bounded by Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh in the east, the state of Assam in the west and north, and Manipur in the south. It covers a geographical area of 16,579 sq. km with remarkable topographical variations.

Welcome to Nagaland: Land of Festivals

1. Land and People

Nagaland is inhabited by 16 major tribes along with a number of sub-tribes. Ao, Angami, Chang, Konyak, Lotha, Sumi, Chakhesang, Khiamniungam, Kachari, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Yimchungru, Kuki, Seliang and Pochury are the major tribes. Each tribe is distinct and unique in character in terms of customs, language and attire. The colourful and intricately designed costumes and ornaments that are traditionally worn can help distinguish each tribe and sub-tribe. Nagas' way of life is woven around their land, family, clan, *khel* (cluster of clans) and the village. The villages are located on the top of the hills for defence reasons. Nagas construct their huts with wood, bamboo and straw. Each tribe has its own design. A common thing about the tribes is that they decorate the entrances of their huts with the skull of animals. Nagas are efficient in iron works and skilful in making baskets and other bamboo products and have been making pottery articles without the use of the potter's wheel. The pattern of clothes and textiles worn by various tribes of Nagas differ according to their customs and tribal affinities. The textiles are woven by women on their simple loin looms,

but the designs are intricate and artistic. The weapons are generally made of *daos* (machetes) and spears.

Traditionally, weaving is the main activity for women in all Naga tribes. Knowing the art of weaving is considered to be one of the important skills of women. The designs of shawls and *mekhala* (wrap-around) are different for men and women. The shawls are colourful and their designs denote the social status of a person. Besides these status shawls, every tribe has its own common shawls for men and women and for married and unmarried people.

Ornaments are an indispensable part of the costume. Men wear ornaments made of metals, bones, ivory, cowries, shells, cane, leather, orchids and wood. Ornaments worn in the neck are mainly strings of beads, shells, cornelian stones, trunks and horns. An opaque red stone used as a necklace suspended by a thread or string made of cone is highly prized. A conch shell worn with a chain of beads implies social status. An ivory gauntlet or bracelet is a valuable ornament. Their leggings are of blue, red or yellow dye cane rings. Naga women wear ornaments like earrings, wristlets and bracelets made of brass, copper, lead and silver.

Young couples in traditional attire

Nagaland does not conform to the general perception of women's status in India. Though traditionally women do not participate in official functioning of traditional institutions or decision-making process of a clan or a village, all members of the community are considered equal in status to each other.

Naga women have played an important role, individually and collectively, in helping their communities survive and in enabling human development and peace across the state. The Naga Mothers Association (NMA) plays a pivotal role on gender justice, social harmony, political empowerment of women, and peace between various warring underground factions and the government.

Nagaland is an agrarian state with over half of its population dependent on agriculture and allied sectors. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy and the largest employer in the state. Rice is the main staple food of the Nagas. It is cultivated in two major farming systems practised in the state viz., *jhum* cultivation and terrace rice cultivation/wet rice cultivation. Other principal crops include maize, pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, potatoes, ginger, etc.

Naga king chilli and Naga tree tomato have been granted the Geographical Indication tag. The Nagaland government had in 1999 passed the Nagaland Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act to provide some safety net to farmers in the cultivation of indigenous products.

Horticulture is another main activity in the state. The fruits and spices grown here are—orange, other citrus fruits and vegetables, passion fruit, pineapple, banana, Naga chilli, cardamom, ginger, turmeric, black pepper, betel vine, cashew nut, guava, plum, apple, flowers, etc. Agriculture and other primary sectors like forestry and logging, fishing, mining and quarrying contribute a significant share in the state's economy.

Industrial development is comparatively slow. The main factors for the slow growth of industrialisation in the state can be attributed to remoteness of the state, lack of road connectivity and inadequate infrastructure facilities. Special land laws also restrict the transfer of land to non-locals. An Industrial Growth Centre (IGC) and a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) have been set up in Dimapur.

The Nagaland Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd facilitates and promotes the marketing of handloom and handicraft products. The main focus of the Corporation is to promote marketing outlets.

The state has resources of unutilised and unexploited limestone, marble, granite, petroleum and natural gas. Coal, limestone, nickel, cobalt, chromium, magnetite, copper, zinc, platinum, petroleum and natural gas are the major minerals available here. Coal is found in Nazira, Borjan and Teru valley of Mon district. Limestone is found at Wazeho and Satuza in Phek district and at Nimi belt in Tuensang district. Ores of nickeliferrous chromite-magnetite occur in the Ultra Basic Belt at Pokhpur in Tuensang district. The soil of the state is mainly of two types, ferruginous red soil and laterites.

1.1 Festivals and Dances

Most of the festivals revolve around agriculture, which is the mainstay of the Naga society. People, irrespective of gender and age, dressed in colourful traditional attire, participate in traditional games, music, folk songs and dance, etc., to celebrate the festival.

'Sekrenyi' is the main festival of the Angami tribe, which is celebrated in the month of February and falls on the 25th day of the *Angami* month of *Kezei*. It is a festival of purification with feasting and singing. The *thekrahie* is the most fascinating part of the festival where young people of the village sit together and sing traditional songs throughout the day.

'Moatsu' is the main festival of the Ao tribe, which is celebrated in the month of May for three days (1-3 May). This festival is held after the sowing is done and the earth begins to show signs of fertility. People pursue the customary practise of preparing the best rice beer and traditional non-vegetarian dishes during the festival.

'Sukrenye' is the main festival of the Chakhesang tribe, which is celebrated on 15 January. During the festival, boys and girls are sanctified through religious ceremonies and rituals.

'Naknyülüm' is the main festival of the Chang tribe, which is celebrated in July. This festival is marked by exchange of gifts and food items among friends and relatives. Meat, wine and freshly baked bread are used as gift items. The women play the *Kongkhim* (musical instrument). Men and women, young and old, all engage in feasting and merry-making the whole day but do not dance.

Naga Cultural Troupes

'Miu' is the main festival of the Khiamniungam tribe, which is held in the first week of May. The importance of this festival is to build cordial relations and forge close-knit relations between the maternal uncle and his sister's children (nephews and nieces). During the festival, the maternal uncle offers special prayers by invoking the supernatural deity, requesting to grant good health, prosperous life and power over the enemy to his nephews and nieces.

'Mimkut', the main festival of the Kuki tribe, is the harvest festival. Kukis of Nagaland celebrate this festival on 17th Kuki month of *Tolbol* (January) every year. The celebration lasts for one week. Besides Mimkut, Kukis celebrate 'Chapphou Kut', 'Chawang Kut' as well as other smaller festivals.

'Aoleang Monyuis', the main festival of the Konyak tribe, is observed in the first week of *Aoleang lee* (April). Aoleang is observed after the completion of sowing seeds in new fields. It is celebrated to mark the end of the old year and welcome the new year, beginning with spring.

'Bushu' or 'Bushu Jiba' is the main festival of the Dimasa Kachari tribe. It is a post-harvest festival and usually falls in

the month of January, after the hard-earned grains of paddy are harvested, thrashed and stored in granaries.

'Tokhu Emong' is the main festival of the Lotha tribe, which is celebrated on 7 November after the harvest.

'Monyu' is the main festival of the Phom tribe, which is celebrated in April, soon after the sowing season begins. A day or two prior to the festival, the green signal of the dawn of festival is made by beating log drums with a distinct tune synchronised purposely for the event, traditionally named *Lan Nyangshem*. On the occasion of Monyu, male members of the family show love and affection towards their married daughters or sisters by presenting them with the purest of rice beer and food prepared especially for them.

'Yimshe' is the main festival of the Pochury tribe, which is celebrated in the month of October. It is the festival welcoming the new harvest.

'Ngadah' is the main festival of the Rengma tribe, which is celebrated towards the end of November just after the harvest.

'Tuluni' is the main festival of the Sumi tribe, which is celebrated in the month of July. This festival is marked by feast as the occasion occurs in the bountiful season of the year. Drinking rice beer indispensably forms a part of the feast. This wine is called *Tuluni.* During this festival, the fiance is invited to a grand dinner at the fiancee's residence.

'Mongmong' is the main festival of the Sangtam tribe, which is celebrated in the first week of September. Mongmong is observed on the occasion of a good harvest for which the villagers have toiled throughout the year.

'Metumniu' is the main festival of the Yimchunger tribe, which is celebrated from 4-8 August every year after the harvest of millet. An elder known as *Kheanpuru*, after due prayers, inaugurates the festival. The festival is spread over five days and has separate names for the days viz., *Shito, Zhihto, Zumto, Khehresuk* and *Sheresuk*.

'Hega' is one of the most important and the biggest festival among the Zeliang tribe. It is observed in the month of February every year when God's blessings for prosperity, luck, protection, guidance and courage are invoked.

The Hornbill Festival

The annual 'Hornbill' festival envisioned to showcase the Naga culture, both traditional and contemporary, is held for 10 days, starting 1st December (Statehood Day). The festival is a tribute to the great hornbill revered by the Nagas for its qualities of alertness and grandeur. The feathers of the hornbill are used in the headgear. The permanent venue for this 'festival of festivals' has been established at Kisama near Kohima and christened 'Naga Heritage Village.'

Opening and closing ceremonies of Hornbill festival

'Morung' or communal dormitory for young men and women was the most important traditional institution of the Naga tribes within the village. Every khel (cluster of clans) had a Morung. It was the primary educational institution that nurtured and prepared the young of every clan for life and living. All clan/khel/village history, songs, folklores and legends, traditional practices, including the laws governing community living, were taught in the Morung. Morung also served as the fortress of the village, where young unmarried men used to sleep and guard the village.

Traditional dances, folk songs and folk tales are an indispensable part of the culture. Folk songs are composed on the basis of historical events, agricultural seasons, romantic events, etc., and are sung according to the occasion. Folk tales narrate stories of the ancestors and historical events. Traditional dances are usually performed on festivals and religious occasions. Such groups, comprising men and women, perform the dances in a synchronised fashion in tune with folk songs. The famous 'war dance' is performed

by a group of men accompanied by folk songs and war cries by the dance troupe. Indigenous musical instruments such as bamboo mouth organs, cup-violins, bamboo flutes, trumpets, drums made of cattle skin and log drums are used during the festivals.

1.2 Language and Literature

The languages spoken by the Nagas are broadly grouped under the Tibeto-Burman family. The state has a rich linguistic tradition with as many languages as there are tribes, each exclusive to itself. Even within the language of a particular tribe, there are dialects which are unintelligible. This makes inter-tribe and intra-tribe communication difficult. In these circumstances, English is used as the state language, while Nagamese, a kind of pidgin Assamese, has become the common lingua.

The oral literature of the Nagas has existed as part of their cultural life, which was transmitted by the older members in the *morung* to the younger generation. Writings on Nagas appeared in the 1800s and the early twentieth century via the works of anthropologists like A. Mackenzie, B.C. Allen, J.H. Hutton, J.P. Mills, Christoph von Führer-Haimendorf, Verrier Elwin, etc. The anthropological research documented the lives of Naga tribes before their conversion to Christianity in the late nineteenth century. These documentations provide a comprehensive view of the socio-cultural life of the Naga tribes from mid-1800s to pre-war 1900s.

Literature by Naga writers made its entry only in the 1980s and 1990s. Poetry, novels, short stories and children's books are being written. Easterine Kire is a poet, novelist, columnist and children's author. She won the Hindu Prize 2015 for her novel, *When the River Sleeps*. Her books have been translated to European and Indian languages.

Temsula Ao is also a poet, short story writer and ethnographer, who received the Sahitya Akademi award for her short story collection, *Laburnum for My Head*, in 2013. Besides poetry and novels, academic and research writing on Naga society are being undertaken by writers such as Charles Chasie, Kaka Iralu, Abraham Lotha and Dolly Kikon.

2. History

The origin and migration of Nagas to the present location and the word 'Naga' is sketchy. Many scholars have made an attempt to define the word 'Naga'. It is commonly accepted that it originated from the Burmese word 'Naka', meaning people with earrings. It is believed that as the British used this term for the people living therein on the basis of description of Naka people given by Burmese guides.

Most scholars argue that Nagas migration to the present geographical area took place in different phases in different groups from the east before the arrival of the Ahoms in 1228 A.D. This resulted in unique characteristic of each tribe displaying unity in diversity in their customs, traditions, attire and political system.

The Dimasa Kacharis ruled the territory before the Ahom invasion during the thirteenth century. After their contact with Ahoms in the thirteenth century, there was a long gap till Nagas came in contact with the British in the nineteenth century. The advent of the British in the Naga Hills was slow. The encounter of tribes with the British started when the latter made a series of explorations to find a regular route to Manipur through Naga Hills and also to counteract the aggression of the Nagas into the dominion of the East India Company. The first two British explorers to enter the Hills were Captain Jenkins and Captain Pemberton, who marched across the land in 1832. The early British relations with the Nagas were of perpetual conflict. Between 1839 and 1850, many military expeditions were led to the Hills to explore the region, punish Nagas for their raids and to establish British control. The policy of military expeditions and involvement in Naga affairs was changed after the Battle of Kikruma in 1852 and the British adopted a policy of non-interference with the hill people. However, this policy failed. From 1851 to 1865, Naga tribes continued to raid the British in Assam.

Kohima War Cemetery

Therefore, the British India government reviewed its policy and decided to establish the district of Naga Hills. In 1866, the British India administration established a post at Samaguting (Chumukedima) in Nagaland as the Deputy Commissioner's headquarter. In 1976, the headquarter of the Naga Hill district were shifted to Wokha. In 1878, the headquarter was further shifted to Kohima with the objective of effectively controlling and influencing the Naga Hills. The tribes violently and bitterly resisted the British authority until the fall of Khonoma village in 1880.

The people volunteered and fought in both the world wars alongside the British India government. In the World War I, 2,000 Naga labour corps were sent to France. On their return, some of these veterans together with headmen, *Dobashis*, and government servants formed the Naga Club in 1918 with an objective to assist the Colonial administration, but later played an important role in the search for a common Naga identity.

The World War II brought a transforming impact. Kohima was the main battlefield to halt the Japanese invasion of British India. In this battle, approximately 2,484 soldiers died and in their memory the Commonwealth War Graves Commission raised a war cemetery in Kohima.

After the Independence of India, a separate Tuensang administrative circle was constituted as an outpost of Mokokchung sub-division and its headquarter was set up at Tuensang. In 1951, a separate sub-division of Tuensang was constituted under the Naga Hills District. In 1957, Tuensang was re-transferred from NEFA to Naga Hills to form a new administrative unit known as the Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA) and become a Union Territory. In July 1960, following a discussion between the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and leaders of the Naga People's Convention (NPC), a 16-point

50 years of Nagaland

Agreement was arrived at, whereby the Government of India recognised the formation of Nagaland as a full-fledged state within the Union of India. On 1 December 1963, Nagaland become the 16th state of the Indian Union. Kohima became the state capital. The state has 11 districts.

Owing to its unique socio-cultural setup, the state enjoys special provision for its autonomy under Article 371(A) of the Constitution.

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

The state enjoys a typical monsoon climate with variation from tropical to temperate conditions. The average winter temperature drops to 3 degrees Celsius in the hills and 6 degrees Celsius on the plains, while the average temperature in summer is 25 degrees Celsius in the hills and 34 degrees Celsius on the plains. The state lies between 25°6´ and 27°4´ north latitude and 93°2´ and 95°15´ east longitude.

The mountain system of the state can be divided into four ranges. The Low Mountain Range runs along the Assam-Nagaland border. The range starts from Jalukie in Peren district and runs in a northerly direction through the length of Nagaland. It comprises some of the richest agricultural valleys in the state viz., Jalukie, Medziphe, Baghty, Changki-Tsurang and Tiru. Dimapur city and Champang oilfield are important places located in this range. The Middle Mountain Range, the most dominant mountain range, runs through the middle of the state from north to south. This system consists of many ranges and some small lateral offshoots running in east to west direction. Mao, Pfutsero, Chozuba, Satakha, Zunheboto, Suruhuto, Longkhim and Tuensang are the most prominent ranges as they divide the watersheds of the Brahmaputra in India from the watershed of the Chindwin in Myanmar. The Patkai Mountain Range is the longest mountain range in the state

Headgear with hornbill feathers

and forms the international boundary with Myanmar. Mount Saramati, which is approximately 12,000 ft. (3,840 metres), is the highest peak in Nagaland situated in this range. It is in this region where the Naga Hill merges with the Patkai range in Myanmar. The southern-most point of this range is the Molhe Pass through which the Japanese entered Nagaland during the World War II. At the foot of the Molhe Pass is the Shilloi/Lachem Lake. The Barail Mountain Range runs in the east to west direction and becomes progressively lower from east to west. This mountain range system extends from Nagaland to Manipur and from Manipur to Meghalaya. The Japfu range, which is 3,014 metres high, is the eastern-most point of this mountain range. The Dzukou valley, which is in the eastern-most part of the Barail Mountain System, is the only place in the world where elephants are found at an altitude of more than 2,400 metres.

The state is dissected by a number of seasonal and perennial rivers and rivulets. The major rivers of the state are: Doyang, Dikhu, Dhansiri, Tizu, Tsurong, Nanung, Tsurang/ Disai, Tsumok, Menung, Dzulu, Langlong, Zunki, Likimro, Lanye, Dzuza, Milak and Manglu. Dhansiri, Doyang and Dikhu flow westward into the Brahmaputra. The Tizu flows towards the east and joins the Chindwin river in Myanmar.

Forest covers about 78.20 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The geo-climatic conditions favour rich biodiversity in the state. The world's tallest 'Rhododendron' tree is found in Japfu mountain of Kohima district. The state is also rich in medicinal plants, bamboo species, canes and a variety of orchids. There are various species of mammalian avian fauna, a large number of fish and reptile species.

For the management and preservation of wildlife, the state government has created parks and sanctuaries namely, Intangki National Park, Zoological Park Kohima, Rangapahar Wildlife Sanctuary, Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary and Puliebadze Wildlife Sanctuary. Pangti is one of the first villages in Nagaland to conserve Amur falcons. It is estimated that about one million Amur falcons roost in the state during their annual migration to South Africa. The Pangti Village Council and the state forest department have erected Naga

traditional rock monolith, declaring the area the Falcon capital of the world.

Realising the importance of biodiversity, people in the state have started conservation of forests. In 1998, the Khonoma Village Council declared approximately 2,000 ha (20 square kilometre) as the Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary (KNCTS). In 2001, the Sendenyu Village Council declared approximately 20 sq. km as the Sendenyu Village Council Biodiversity and Wildlife Protected Area.

4. Some Eminent Personalities

P. Shilu Ao (1916-88) was the first Chief Minister and is an iconic figure in Nagaland's political history. Before joining politics, he had served as a teacher, school inspector, headmaster of a school and later joined the Assam service. He resigned in 1960 and joined the Naga People's Convention (NPC). He is one of the architects and signatories of the 16-point Agreement, which brought Nagaland statehood in December 1963.

Rano M Shaiza (1928-2015) was the first and only woman from Nagaland to get elected to the Lok Sabha in 1977.

Neichiilieii Nikki Haralu (1918-2016) was the first Naga woman in Indian Foreign Service. She had served in various capacities in the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and retired in 1980.

Talimeran Ao (1918-98) was an Indian footballer and physician. He was the captain of the India National Football Team and the flag-bearer of the Indian contingent in the 1948 Summer Olympic held at London. He played for Mohun Bagan 1943-52 and for the national team 1948-1951. Talimeran Ao earned his MBBS from the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, Calcutta. He joined the Kohima Civil Hospital as Assistant Civil Surgeon and retired as Director of Nagaland Health Service in 1978. In recognition of his immense contribution towards sports, the Mohun Bagan honoured him by creating the Mohun Bagan Ratna award

and accorded him with a lifetime membership. In Assam, an outdoor stadium at Kaliabor and an indoor stadium at Cotton College have been named after him. For encouraging the youths of the North East to excel in sports, DoNER has initiated the Talimeran Ao Football Trophy.

Chekrovolu Swuro is an archer, who began her career at the age of 16. She represented India in archery in the 2002 and 2006 Asian Games held in South Korea and Qatar, respectively. She has also won numerous medals for India in world archery competitions. She was also a member of a team during the World Archery Championship in 2011, where she won a Silver medal for India. Swuro is the second athlete from Nagaland, after Talimeran Ao to participate in the Olympic after a gap of 64 years. She was awarded with the Arjuna Award in 2013 for her outstanding contribution in the field of sports.

5. Places of Interest

Heritage village Kisama is well-known, the name of which is derived from two villages namely, Kigwema (KI) and Phesama (SA) and MA which means village. The Dzukou Valley, popularly known as the 'valley of flower', is located at the border of the Nagaland and Manipur. Situated at an altitude of 2,438 metres behind the Japfu mountain range, it is one of the most popular trekking spots in the North East. Khonoma Green Village, located 20 km west of Kohima, is considered to be the first green village in India. The village is known

Shilloi Lake

for its fierce resistance against British dominance during the Colonial period. Japfu Peak, a 3,048-metre-high peak, has the tallest (over 109 ft.) Rhododendron tree in the world (as recorded by the Guinness Book of Records). It is also the second highest peak of the state. The 'Dimasa Kachari' ruins are a series of mushroom domed pillars located in Dimapur. Shilloi Lake, shaped like a footprint, is located in Phek district, which is about 300 km from the state capital. Shilloi lake is one the famous tourist spots in the state. The lake covers an area of about 300 sq. m. Saramati Peak (3,841 meters) is the highest peak in the state. It is located on the Nagaland-Myanmar border and is snow-clad throughout the winter season. The Kohima War Cemetery was raised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in the memory of those soldiers killed in the Battle of Kohima in 1944. It is situated in the heart of Kohima town and is an important tourist attraction.

6. Conclusion

Nagaland is rich in biodiversity and is known to be a land of festivals and dances. The state is inhabited by various tribes and is also known as a 'land of festivals'. The tallest tree of the world, Rhodendendron, and the largest electric guitar ensemble of the state have been recorded by the *Guinness Book of World Records*. The Hornbill festival, organised by the government to promote cultural tourism is becoming popular.

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Sikkim: Himalayan Paradise

Sikkim is a small state surrounded by high mountains. The state forms a tiny territory in the north-eastern part of India. Sikkim is bounded to the north by China (Tibet), the kingdom of Bhutan to the east, Darjeeling district in West Bengal to the south, and Nepal to the west.

Sikkim was known originally as 'Nye-mae-el' or 'heaven'. People from the neighbouring Tibet called it 'Ren-Jong' or 'Den Zong' or the 'Valley of Rice'. In this remote land, the Lepchas of Denzong and the Limbus of Eastern Nepal intermixed freely with each other. Marriages between the two communities were common. When a Limbu girl married a Lepcha and arrived at her husband's house, she would call it 'Su-Him', i.e., her new house. This word then became 'Sukhim' and later 'Sikkim'.

Sikkim has four districts, namely East District, West District, South District and North District with their respective headquarters in Gangtok, Gyalshing, Namchi and Mangan. The total area of Sikkim is 7,096 sq. km.

1. Land and People

Sikkim lies between 27° and 28° North latitude and between 88° and 89° East longitude. The capital of Sikkim is Gangtok. The three principal ethnic communities of Sikkim—Lepchas (Rongs), Bhutias (Khampas) and Nepalese are nature-worshippers, while also practising Buddhism and Hinduism. The Kanchenjunga peak is regarded as a guardian deity by the Lepchas, and worship of the mountain is a major annual event in Sikkim followed by all communities. Regardless of caste, creed, religion and gender, the people enjoy equal status. There is no gender disparity and discrimination. The state government

Bhutia Couple

has ensured 33 per cent reservation for women, especially in Panchayats and jobs. This has led to the empowerment of women in economic roles and decision-making. Widow re-marriage has never been an issue, although there are single parents in the Sikkimese society. Sikkim has relatively high levels of literacy. Because of high literacy, women here are aware of their rights and duties.

Lepcha Couple

The principal occupation of rural people is agriculture. The major crops are—maize, paddy, wheat and millets. Cardamom and ginger are the main cash crops of the state. Animal husbandry is another activity that predominantly shapes the rural economy.

Sikkim has a small portion of land under agriculture and a little of it under rice. Rice is the staple food of the people. As there is not much scope for increasing the land under agriculture, the stress has been on horticultural products like tea, cardamom, orchids, ginger, oranges, strawberries, vegetables, etc. Sikkim has around 450 species of orchids, many with rare medicinal values. The government maintains a orchidarium to protect the species. Coffee, mangoes, hybrid mandarin oranges, guavas and olives are also grown here.

Cattle, buffaloes, yaks, sheep, goats, pigs, mules and ponies are the important domesticated animals of Sikkim. Poultry birds are also raised in different parts of the state. Cattle and buffalo are mainly limited to the humid tropical belt and temperate zone. In high altitude cold areas, yak is an important domesticated animal.

Sikkim prides itself in being the first state of the country that allows only organic farming. Organic farming is an alternate agricultural system, which relies on organic fertilizers such as compost and green manure, and places emphasis on practices like crop rotation, companion planting, biological pest control, mixed cropping and fostering of insect pesticides. The hill states in North East of India are regarded as ideal for organic farming, since

the use of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides are meagre in the region. Sikkim's Organic Mission has created success and awareness among people about advanced methods of organic farming. Organic farming has helped increase the productivity of cash crops. The government has extended full support in building the infrastructure needed for change over in form of bio-fertilizer units, seed-processing units, automated greenhouses and soil-testing labs.

Sikkim's economy is largely agrarian. Because of the hilly terrain and lack of reliable transportation and infrastructure, there are no large-scale industries. The Government Food Preservation Factory (GFPF) is an important factory that produces products like fruit juices, orange squash, passion fruit squash, tomato ketchup, tomato puree, orange marmalade, mixed fruit jam, synthetic vinegar, mango pickle, etc., under the brand name of 'Sikkim Supreme'. Breweries, distilleries, tanning and watch-making are the other main industries. These are located in the southern reaches of the state, primarily in the towns of Melli and Jorethang. Sikkim Jewels Limited and Sikkim Time Corporation are reputed for their jewellery and assembly of watches, respectively.

Sikkim Temi Tea located in Temi-Tarkhu in South Sikkim is famous for its quality. Spinning of wool and weaving of woollen fabrics, *tankha*, carpet and rug-making, and bamboo craft deserve a special mention among the handicrafts of Sikkim.

Tankha

The reopening of the Nathula Pass in April 2006, connecting Lhasa in Tibet to India, has given a boost to the local economy. This Pass, which was closed since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, was an ancient pilgrim centre and trade route, essential to the people for border trade in salt, wool, fur, spices, etc.

Traditional games like archery and stone-throwing are also popular. Sikkimese boys play *dhoko* (stone-throwing game) around the year. On a level piece of ground, they mark a line and stand behind it. They, then, throw the stone one after another. Whosoever throws the stone to the farthest distance is declared the winner. Kite-flying is also popular in Sikkim. Children form trekking groups, imitate their elders and trek to nearby hilltops. The sport of *datsha* (archery) is organised, particularly after the celebration of the Sikkimese New Year. To play this game, groups of five or more persons gather in an open space with their bows and arrows. They put up a pole about the height of a man, and fasten a piece of square-shaped wood to its top with a distinct mark made in the middle. All competitors announce their stake, which usually is one or two bottles of *chi beer* for each competitor. The winner wins all pooled bottles as the prize.

Modern games such as football, hockey, badminton, tennis, etc., are also popular. The Government of Sikkim has set up a stadium in the memory of former Crown Prince Paljor Namgyal, who was a good sportsman. A pavilion with concrete seating has been constructed there for the public to watch the games.

1.1 Festivals and Dances

Festivals in Sikkim are held during the time of planting, harvest and other such occasions. Among the most important festivals is the one held to worship Kanchenjunga, which is the third highest peak in the world and is regarded as a protecting deity by the people of Sikkim. The late Maharaja Sir Tashi Namgyal had permitted a British expedition to attempt the ascent of Kanchenjunga in 1955, on the condition that the climbers would not set their foot on the holy peak. Buddhist paintings depict the deity with a fiery red face,

Kanchenjunga Peak

usually riding a white snow lion upholding the banner of 'gyaltsen' (victory). The deity is dressed in a multicoloured attire and ornaments on the festival day. Dances by lamas are performed in his honour. The tradition of celebrating this festival, which is known as 'Pang Lhabsol' or the 'worship of the snowy ranges', was first started by Chador Namgyal (1686-1716 C.E.), the third ruler of the Namgyal dynasty, following a dream. Since then, it is celebrated with great pomp and show in August-September every year, symbolising the victory of good over evil. Another important festival in Sikkim is held to honour Padma Sambhava or Guru Rimpoche, the patron saint of Sikkim.

Lord Buddha's birthday is celebrated every year on the tenth day in the month of *Vaishakha* (April-May). On this day, village people observe the Bhutia festival 'Chhechu', when the lamas, lamis and lay Buddhists visit monasteries. The public generally visit the Tagmoche monastery to make offerings of ghee and butter for lamps that are lighted before the image of the Lord. This festival is known as 'Sagadawa' among the Lepchas.

At the end of January every year, a big festival is held at Lachen where lamas dance to the tunes of sacred music in their colourful robes. This wonderful spectacle of dance, lasting three days is known as 'Chham'. The local musical instruments used are drums, pipers, *nagah*, *rema* and *radu*.

The 'Bumchhu' festival is held at the Tashiding Monastery with great pomp and show on the full moon day of the first month of the year (around 14 March). Tashiding is a great pilgrimage centre for Sikkimese Buddhists.

Chham Dance

'Losoong', which is the New Year festival of the Bhutias, is celebrated with great jubilation on 29 and 30 December every year. Annual dances of lamas are held at Tsuk-Lha-Khang, adjoining the former *Chogyal's* chapel. Other Sikkimese Buddhists celebrate their New Year in November with great gaiety as 'Lhosar'. The celebrations last for two days. Dances are performed and plays enacted in the honour of deity 'Mahakala' and Guru Padmasambhava.

The Nepalese Hindus observe Dassehra in October, when Goddess Durga is worshipped with great pomp and show. This festival lasts for 15 days. Animal sacrifices are made and a lot of dancing, singing and merry-making take place.

The other important Hindu festival is 'Magh Sankranti', which is celebrated every year in the month of January. It is considered auspicious to take ritual baths at the confluences of rivers on this day.

The Lepchas are fond of music. Their favourite musical instrument is a long flute, which is available in various shapes and sizes. Its variants are known as *pun tong pa lit* or *pa lit keng*. There is also a double flute called *nyi bryo pa lit*. The women too have a flute called *tung dyu*, which they play after work in the fields is over. Other musical instruments include drums, metal gongs and harp.

Dances play an important part in the Sikkimese life. Dances are performed on various occasions like harvests and other social events. There are also numerous war dances, mythological dances, mystical dances, and so on. Both men and women take part in these dances. These dances are accompanied by chanting and instrumental music including sound of flutes, drums, etc.

1.2. Language

Nepali is the *lingua franca* of Sikkim. However, English and Hindi are also spoken and understood in most part of the state. Other languages spoken include Bhutia, Gurung, Lepcha, Limbu, Magar, Majhi, Newari, Rai, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Tamang, Tibetan and Yakha.

2. History

Not much is known about the early history of Sikkim. Information about the ancient history of this Himalayan region is based largely on the mythological and legendary accounts that have been preserved by Buddhist monasteries.

According to some anthropologists, Sikkim in pre-historical times was inhabited by three tribes—Naong, Chang and Mon. Later, the Lepchas entered the region and are believed to have completely absorbed these tribes into their fold. The origin of the Lepchas is shrouded in mystery. Some scholars believe that that their origin can be traced to the Naga clan, who lived in the southern flank of the Brahmaputra valley. They were worshippers of nature and were not organised into a society. They practised shifting cultivation to grow cereals and vegetables.

A number of legends exist regarding the migration of Tibetans to Sikkim. The name of Guru Rimpoche seems to be an integral part of the legend as he is believed to have introduced Buddhism to the region in the ninth century C.E. The Guru predicted that someday there would be a kingdom on the land, which would eventually unite all warring tribes. This prediction seems to have been fulfilled with the arrival of Guru Tashi of the Minyak dynasty from eastern Tibet. A legendary prince who was the twenty-fifth scion of the ruling dynasty, Guru Tashi came to Sikkim on a pilgrimage in the thirteenth century and was given the title of 'Khye-Bumsa' (one who possesses the strength of one lakh persons) in recognition of the legendary work he did at Khabe for the Sakya monastery. He married the daughter of the Sakya chief and settled down with his wife at Phari in the Chumbi valley. He is credited with having united the Lepcha and other tribes to lay a strong foundation for the growth of the kingdom of Sikkim.

An important event in the history of Sikkim was the rule of Phuntsog Namgyal, the descendants of Khya-Bumsa. Phuntsog Namgyal, born in Gangtok in 1604 C.E., was consecrated in 1642 C.E. and conferred with the title of *Chogyal* (religious head).

The 332-year period of Namgyal rule is significant because it saw many social and economic reforms. Phuntsog Namgyal

took steps to bring order in the kingdom and declared Mahayana Buddhism as the state religion while making efforts to keep the Lepchas, Bhutias and Limbus together. The capital of Sikkim was then located in Yoksam.

2.1 Relations with the British

With the arrival of the British in India, Sikkim allied itself with the British to fight their common adversary, i.e., the Gorkha Kingdom of Nepal. The Anglo-Gorkha War of 1814-16 between the British and Nepal ended with two successive treaties. While the Treaty of Sugauli between the British and Nepal annexed the territories captured by Nepal, the Treaty of Titalia between the British and Sikkim restored the territory of Sikkim seized by Nepal. According to H.H. Risley, author of the *Gazetteer of Sikkim* (1894), the Treaty of Titalia also gave the British paramountcy in Sikkim.

The British had their own vested interests in befriending Sikkim. They wanted to open a direct trade route through Sikkim to Tibet as an alternative to the route through Nepal, and also to counter increasing Russian intrusion into Tibet. The Anglo-Sikkimese ties began to deteriorate as Sikkim had to gift away Darjeeling to the British in 1835, in return for an annual subsidy. Relations between Sikkim and the British soured further with the imprisonment of two British officials, who had entered Sikkim without obtaining permission from the *Chogyal*. This resulted in the British annexation of Darjeeling and a major portion of the Sikkimese Morang (terai) territory. The *Chogyal's* control was confined to a diminished territory around Gangtok. Further, the need of protection from Tibetan attacks through Sikkim resulted in the Ten Clauses Agreement of 1895 between the British and Sikkim, according to which the *Chogyal* was only allowed judicial rights. Restoration of some of the political powers of *Chogyal* took place only after the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1905, who had a cordial relation with crown prince Sidkeong Tulku.

After Independence in 1947, Sikkim received a special protectorate status, under which India controlled matters relating to defence, diplomacy and communication, while

Sikkim continued having a monarchy. However, with the formation of the Sikkim National Congress party, which demanded elections and establishment of a popular democracy, voices against monarchy began to be heard. In the wake of anti-monarchical protests and a popular referendum on Sikkim's status as part of the Indian Union, Sikkim finally became a full-fledged state of the Indian Union on 16 May 1975. Kazi Lhendup Dorjee became the first Chief Minister, and the institution of *Chogyal* came to an end in 1982, with the passing of the last consecrated ruler.

3. Natural Vegetation and Biodiversity

Tsangu

Despite its small size, Sikkim is geographically diverse, owing to its location in the foothills of the Himalayas. Terrain conditions range from tropical in the south to tundra in the north. Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak, is located here and straddles its northern border with Nepal. The state has prominent mountain peaks, glaciers, high-altitude lakes, including Tsomgo, Gurudongmar and Khecheopalri, hot springs, and a large number of rivers and streams. Some of the mountain passes connect Sikkim with Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. Sikkim is a popular destination for tourists, owing to its scenic beauty and political stability.

The state spreads over hilly terrain ranging from low to high elevations, with numerous rivers, lakes, rivulets, mountain passes and valleys. Nathula and Jelepla passes are located at an elevation of over 14,000 ft. along the state's borders. Nathula is the main border point of China and India in Sikkim. Nathula is located only 50 km from Gangtok. Changu (Tsomgo) and Memenchu

Nathula Pass

are two famous lakes on the route, which attract thousands of tourists from home and abroad.

Lachung River

The thumb-shaped state of Sikkim is characterised by uneven mountainous terrain. Almost the entire state is hilly, with an elevation ranging from 280 metres (920 feet) to 8,585 metres (28,000 feet). The climate ranges from sub-tropical conditions in the south to tundra in the northern-most parts. Most inhabited regions in Sikkim, however, have a temperate climate with the temperature seldom exceeding 28 degree Celsius (82° F) in summer and dropping below zero degree Celsius (32° F) in winter. Sikkim has five seasons, namely winter, spring, summer, monsoon and autumn. The average annual temperature in most of Sikkim is around 18 degree Celsius (64° F). Sikkim is also among a few states in India to receive regular winter snowfall. The permanent snowline for the state is around 6,000 metres (19,600 ft.). During the monsoon months, the state is lashed by heavy rain that increase the frequency of landslides. Because of high altitude in the northern region, temperatures at times drop to –40 degree Celsius and even below during winters. Foggy conditions affect many parts of the state during the winter and monsoon, making transportation extremely perilous.

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Baichung Bhutia, one of Sikkim's most famous sons, is an international footballer. Born in the village of Tinikitam near Gangtok in December 1976, he grew up to be a soccer legend in the country. At 21, he was the youngest player ever to captain East Bengal, and later became the first Indian to play in the English football league. He has now returned to Sikkim where he organises football coaching camps for schoolboys.

Danny Denzongpa is one of the most famous and loved characters in Hindi cinema. He was born and brought up

at Yoksam in West Sikkim. The Sikkim-born actor made his debut in the film *Zaroorat* in 1971. This was followed by memorable performances in a number of hit movies over three decades. He is also a stakeholder in Sikkim's leading brewery, producing the popular 'Dansberg' brand of beer. Denzongpa led a people's protest against the project of constructing a dam over Rathong Chu in the interest of environmental protection and was successful in securing withdrawal of the decision.

Sikkim- A Film by Satyajit Ray (English)

In 1971, a documentary film, Sikkim, was produced and directed by Satyajit Ray. The film was commissioned by the Chogyal (king) of Sikkim at a time when he felt that the sovereignty of the state was under threat from both China and India. The film was banned by the Government of India, when Sikkim became a state of India in 1975. In 2000, the copyright of the film was transferred to the Art and Culture Trust of Sikkim. The ban on the film was lifted by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in September 2010. When Kolkata-based Satyajit Ray Society traced the print that was with the Chogyal's family, it was found to be in a condition damaged beyond repair. Finally, a print was traced in London and restored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2003.

5. Places of Interest

Located 21 km from Gangtok is a historical site called Kabi or Khabelongstock. This is the place where a historic agreement of blood-brotherhood was reached at between Khye Balsa, early ancestor of the Namgyals, and Thekong Tek, then Lepcha chief. A memorial stone still adorns the spot bearing testimony to this historic agreement. Prayer flags and chortens surround the hillock where people from across the state gather with flowers to pay their homage. At a distance of 24 km from Gangtok, Rumtek is the site where two important Tibetan monasteries of the Kargyupa sect of Mahayana Buddhism are situated. Sounds of chanting lamas, cymbals,

drums and reed-trumpets seem to greet visitors even before the monasteries are sighted. The design of the monastery follows the lamasery pattern of Tibet. The Karmapa Lama, head of the Kargyu sect in Tibet, lived there for the rest of his life after exile from Tibet. Enchey monastery, the oldest Buddhist monastery in Gangtok, is located on the Gangtok-Nathu La road.

Rumtek

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology located below Gangtok has beautiful traditional Sikkimese architecture. The primary purpose of the Institute is to promote Tibetan studies. The royal chapel, popularly known as 'Tusklakhang', was both a worship hall and a venue for religious congregations until recently. The chapel is one of the finest examples of traditional Sikkim architecture. The Orchid Sanctuary, located below the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, is known for its large variety of orchids. Sikkim is also known for traditional gateways erected at the entrance to many of its urban settlements, and to the capital Gangtok, in particular. The gateway entrance to the Civil Secretariat, or Tashiling, has a beauty of its own.

The Deer Park near Tashiling is a fascinating attraction to visitors. It has an image of Lord Buddha seated in a preaching posture. The park offers a sanctuary for deer brought from different parts of Sikkim and the world. The Cottage Industries Institute is an academy of art and crafts, which produces beautiful hand-woven woollen carpets with unique traditional

Traditional Sikkimese Designs

Sikkimese motifs and designs, and fascinating patterns and colour combinations. Hand-made Sikkimese folding tables are also manufactured here, in different shapes, sizes, patterns and designs. Hand-made Sikkimese paper is another souvenir produced by the Institute.

Sikkimese folding table

6. Conclusion

Sikkim is a beautiful hilly state in the northern Himalayas. Its proximity with the Himalayas, distinctive Buddhist culture marked by beautiful monasteries, and easy accessibility from the mainland has made it a popular tourist attraction within the country and abroad. Its efforts towards becoming the first fully organic state of India have also given it a remarkable presence in the country.

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Tripura: Land of Diversity

The North East region is known for its geographical and ecological diversity, combined with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. The state of Tripura is a true representation of this bewildering diversity. Tripura is home to different ethnic groups and faiths, who celebrate life through their music, dance, fine arts, folklore, architecture and handicrafts. The state, located in the extreme south-west corner of the North East region, shares a common boundary with Assam and Mizoram on the north-east and is bounded by Bangladesh in the north, west and south.

The origin of the name Tripura has often been debated by scholars, though the word means three cities in Sanskrit. Some scholars trace its origin to king Tripur, believed to be a powerful ruler of this region, who is also mentioned in the chronicle *Rajmala*. Many say that etymologically the word 'Tripura' is a compound of two words used in the local language, 'tui' meaning 'water' and 'pra' meaning 'near'. The geographical location of the state with proximity to vast water resources coupled with generic identity of its inhabitants as 'Tipra' or 'Twipra' could also explain the origin of the state's name.

Tripureswari Temple

1. Land and People

With a total area of 10,486 square km, the state's population is 36.74 lakh (Census 2011). Besides its indigenous tribal communities, it has welcomed non-tribal communities at various points of time. According to the Census 2011, indigenous tribes consisting of 19 tribal communities constitute 31.05 per cent of the state's population, while 69.95 per cent are non-tribals. Among the tribals, the Tripuris or Debbarman communities form a vast majority, while the

non-tribal population comprises largely Bengalis and a small number of Meiteis and Vishnupriya Manipuris.

Tribals who are considered to be the original inhabitants consist largely of Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Lushai, Uchai, Chaimal, Halam, Kuki, Garo, Mog and Chakma, who have migrated to the region at different points of time in the ancient past. The Tripuris constitute the largest tribal community in the state. They are followers of both Shakti and Vaishnavism, besides revering their own local deities accompanied by indigenous customs and rituals. They mainly speak 'Kokborok' like some of the other tribal groups. They have followed their own subsistence patterns and their traditional occupation consisted of food-gathering, domestication, cottage industry, etc. Gradually, food-gathering was supplemented by *jhum* cultivation. The Tripuri and the Reangs were the two major tribes that practised *jhum* cultivation.

Chakma couple

Other tribes Bhil, Munda, Santhal, Lepcha, Meiteis and Khasia consist of immigrants who came from Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Bhutan, Meghalaya, Sikkim, etc. The Chakmas and Mogs are Arakan tribes who entered Tripura through Chittagong hill tracts. Linguistically, the tribes are divided into (i) Bodo-Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia and Uchai (ii) Kuki-Chin–Kuki, Lushai and Halam and (iii) Arakan-Mog and Chakmas.

Manikya rulers encouraged the settlement of Bengalis in Tripura. They gradually assimilated Bengali language and literature into their culture. Soon, Bengali was adopted as the state language. The lack of skilled professionals led the Manikyas to encourage the migration of skilled professionals like teachers, doctors and lawyers from Bengal. Further expansion of wet rice cultivation also facilitated migration of landless cultivators from Bengal.

Other than socio-economic factors, political factors also led a large number of Bengalis to take refuge in the state. In

1941 and 1946, many Bengalis fled Bengal to take refuge in Tripura fearing communal riots. Bir Bikram Manikya helped the refugees by forming an official Relief Committee with the support of the royal administration. The state also witnessed large-scale migration of Bengalis from East Bengal after partition. Proximity of the state to the districts of Chittagong, Noakhali and Sylhet in East Pakistan led to waves of migration after partition and after 1971, the liberation of East Pakistan and formation of Bangladesh. Presently, they are the largest ethnic group in the state constituting over 60 per cent of the population.

The traditional Tripura cuisine is known as 'Mui Borok'. *Berma*, a dried and fermented fish, is a key ingredient. The *banqui* rice, bamboo shoots, fermented fish, local herbs, etc., are important elements of the cuisine. Some of the typical food items are 'chuak' (rice beer), 'apong' (local drink), 'muya awandru' (bamboo shoot, rice flour and Berma), *gudok* (prepared by bamboo pipes), 'mosdeng sema' (chutney), etc. A popular fish is the 'hilsa', made with mustard paste and green chillies.

Agriculture constitutes the primary sector of the economy. More than half of the population is dependent on agriculture and allied activities for sustenance. Rice is the major crop and accounts for more than 90 per cent of the land under cultivation. Potato, sugarcane, pulses and jute are other major crops that are cultivated here. Jackfruit and pineapple are the important horticulture crops, apart from orange, banana, litchi, etc. The state has a number of food-processing centres that produce many fruit products.

Pisciculture has also shown some progress. The state produces a surplus of 104.3 million fish seeds. Rubber and tea are important cash crops. The state is known for its handicrafts—hand-woven fabric, wood carvings, bamboo items, etc. Sal, garjan, teak and gamari are varieties of wood that are found in the forests.

The location, lack of efficient transportation and communication network as well as lack of power supply has made the industrial sector underdeveloped. Sericulture used to be another core sector but there has been a decline in its growth.

Rubber Plantation in Tripura

The government of Tripura has started a rubber timber processing unit in Agartala. Tripura ranks second in India in rubber plantation, next only to Kerala. The plantations were started to utilise the degraded land of Tripura for conservation of soil. Low elevation regions and tropical climate have helped Tripura emerge as a major rubber growing zone in the country.

1.1 Festivals and Dances

Different tribal groups follow their own festivals, rituals and traditions. Inhabiting different parts of the hilly region, they contribute significantly towards the cultural and economic vibrancy of the state.

Religious diversity is reflected in the existence of different religious faiths. Hinduism is the major religion in the state. Some of the other religions that are practised here are Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Most of the tribes are followers of Hinduism and worship their own tribal deities. Some of the significant deities worshipped here are 'Buraha', 'Bonirao', 'Uma', 'Goraiya', 'Jampira', 'Mangisiri', 'Lampra', 'Khulma', etc. 'Tripura Sundari' is one of the most popular deities who is revered by many and is popularly known as 'Sharoshi' or 'Rajarajeshwari'. The Chakmas, Uchai and Mogs are followers of Buddhism.

The Tripura Sundari Temple, which is located in Matabari in south Tripura district, is regarded as one of the holiest Shakti Peeths among Hindus. Built by King Dhaniya Manikya, the temple contains the idol of Kali in her incarnation as Sharoshi (16-year-old girl).

Tripura Sundari Temple

The celebration of a variety of fairs and festivals accompanied by traditional dances is a reflection of the

rich and diverse cultural heritage of the people. Throughout the year, a number of festivals are celebrated with pomp and show, commemorating important events that are related to their religious beliefs as well as to traditional economic activities. Some of the popular festivals that are celebrated are 'Kharchi', 'Unakoti Mela', 'Banabihar Mela', Makar Sankranti, Durga Puja, Diwali, 'Khumpui', 'Garia', 'Hangrai', 'Dhamail', 'Biju', 'Hozagiri', etc. Another interesting festival is 'Thakurmura' or 'Pir Dargah Mela' observed in the memory of a Muslim Pir in village Thakurmura, Sonamura sub-division. People across religious boundaries attend the mela (fair) with great fervour.

Hozagari Dance

People also celebrate festivals associated with their economic pursuits. Harvest festivals are particularly popular among the Tripuri, Reang and Jamatia. The Tripuri celebrate 'Bhangni Mutairenai' in *Pausa-Magh* (January-February), the Reang celebrate 'Bisucani' in *Chaitra* (April), the Jamatia and Noatia celebrate 'Mamita' during *Ashwina-Kartika* (October-November). The first grains are worshipped and *maisoi* (kheer) is offered.

Music and dance form an inseparable component of fairs and festivals of Tripura. Most of the tribal communities have their own distinct dance forms, which are performed by both men and women and accompanied by musical instruments like bamboo *cymbal, uukhrap, kham, chongpreng, sumui, dhukuk, khamb,* etc. Some of the vibrant folk dances that are a part of the rich tribal culture are 'Hozagiri', 'Wangala', 'Bizu', 'Lebang Bomani', 'Jhum', 'Sangrai-Mog', 'Hai-Hak', etc.

1.2 Language and Literature

The major languages spoken by the people of Tripura are Bengali, Kokborok and its variants, and Manipuri. The origin of Kokborok is said to be from Tibeto-Burman family and is written using the Bengali script. Bengali literature received

an impetus owing to patronage of the Manikyas which was further enriched by the influence of Rabindranath Tagore. Bengali writers wrote on themes related to Bengal as well as their experiences of life in Tripura.

Development of organised writings in Kokborok is comparatively new. The lack of written literature was amply compensated in its oral traditions. In recent times, the volume and quality of Kokborok writings have received attention. Some of the prominent literary figures who have made a mark in the development of Bengali and Kokborok literature and poetry are Sankha Subhra Devbarman, Khagesh Dev Burman, Snehamoy Roy Chowdhuri, Nanda Kumar Debbarma, Bodhrai Debbarma, Rabindrakishore Debbarma, Sefali Debbarma, etc.

2. History

Much information on the early history is not available because of the lack of evidence. But there are references in ancient texts such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. It also finds a mention in the pillar inscriptions of Emperor Asoka. The information on early history is largely based on oral traditions contained in the *Rajmala*, a court chronicle belonging to the fifteenth century and is the earliest documentary evidence written in Bengali, during the rule of the Manikya kings. The writings of the *Rajmala* was commissioned by king Dharma Manikya to compose the history of the Manikya ruling family.

The *Rajmala* reveals two distinct periods in history, first is that of the supposed early kings of Tripura who ruled the region as representatives of Gods, and thus, identified with that of popular legends and other folklore. Scholars, however, attribute all pre-fifteenth century kings to the realm of mythology. In the seventh century, the kings adopted the title of 'fa' or 'pha' (meaning father or ruler in Kokborok, the local

Unakuti

language) and ruled the region from the then capital city of Kailashahar in north Tripura.

2.1 The Rule of the Manikyas

The second period marks an important phase in the history when it came to be ruled by the Manikyas in the fourteenth century. The Tripuri kings who were of Indo-Mongolian origin adopted the title of Manikya and ruled Tripura for an uninterrupted period of 350 years. Udaipur in south Tripura district was the earlier capital of the Manikyas and founded by Udai Manikya (1585-96) on the site of the old capital of Rangamati on the banks of the river Gomati. In 1700, it was shifted by Krishna Chandra Manikya to old Agartala. In 1849, due to frequent invasion of the Kukis, he shifted the capital to New Agartala and adorned it with beautiful tanks, buildings and temples.

It was under the rule of the Manikya dynasty that the kingdom of Tripura reached the zenith of its power and most glorious period in its evolution during the sixteenth century. The Manikya rulers achieved a number of military victories, including suzerainty over Burma (Myanmar), Bengal and Assam. The Manikyas came in conflict with the Mughals in the seventeenth century when the latter extended their suzerainty over the region, including much of Tripura. The Nawab of Bengal granted the zamindari right of Chakla Roshanabad (presently, in Comilla district of Bangladesh) to Tripura during the reign of Dharma Manikya (1714-29).

The Bhubaneshwari Temple is situated on the banks of the Gomati river in Udaipur, Tripura. It was built by Maharaja Govinda Manikya.

Bhubaneshwari Temple

In the eighteenth century, the British started to extend their control over most parts of eastern and northern India. Consequently, the British established control over Tripura in 1761 but it continued as a princely state under the Maharaja even during the British rule in India. In 1809, Tripura became a British protectorate and, in 1838, the kings of Tripura were recognised by the British as sovereigns. In 1905, Tripura became part of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam and was designated as Hill Tippera.

Ujjayanta Palace

2.2 Tripura's Merger with Union of India

The creation of East Pakistan after the partition cut off the north, south and western borders of Tripura from the rest of India. Moreover, a chain of hills and hillocks also obstructed road links with Assam. Merger with the Indian Union seemed to be the only way out to continue its links with India, thus, marking an end to princely rule in Tripura. Following the death of the last ruling king Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, Tripura acceded to the Indian Union in 1949 through a Merger Agreement signed by Queen Kanchan Prava Devi.

Bir Chandra Manikya (1862-96) contributed greatly towards the cultural and spiritual development of Tripura. He is regarded as the architect of modern Agartala city and also modelled his administration on the pattern of British India. He enacted various reforms, including the foundation of the Agartala Municipal Corporation. He also established the Umakanta Academy, the first western school in Tripura. He was the first king to organise an annual photography exhibition in his palace. His close friendship with Rabindranath Tagore helped establish Bengali as the language of the court.

Initially administered as a Union Territory, Tripura gained full statehood on 21 January 1972 as per the North-East Reorganisation Act, 1971. For socio-economic development, preservation of language and culture of Tripura Tribal Areas, an Autonomous District Council (ADC), was constituted in 1982 and later in 1985, it was brought under the 6th Schedule. Tripura had four districts before 2012, namely Dhalai, North Tripura, South Tripura and West Tripura. In 2012, four new districts were carved out of the existing four—Khowai, Unakoti, Sipahijala and Gomati.

Rabindranath Tagore's relations with king Bir Chandra Manikya (1862-96) followed a long association between the Tagore family and the Manikyas since the time of Dwaraka Nath Tagore, grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore. The poet based his celebrated novel 'Rajarshi' and dramas 'Visarjan' and 'Mukut' on Tripura's history. It is believed that king Bir Chandra found solace in Rabindranath's celebrated love poem 'Bhagna Hriday' when his queen Bhanumathi Debi died in 1881. His son and successor Radha Kishore Manikya (1897-1909) also maintained a close relation with Rabindranath and it was during his reign that the poet visited Tripura for the first time in the year 1900.

Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya (1923-47) was an ardent fan of the poet and his work. At his behest, a day's official mourning was observed in Tripura on the death of Rabindranath Tagore. The poet had penned some of the famous songs during his visits to Tripura. The Manikya rulers from Bir Chandra to Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya extended generous financial assistance to Rabindranath and his dream project Viswa Bharati at Bolpur in West Bengal. Renowned artist Dhirendra Krishna Debbarman and Manipuri dance expert Buddhimanta Singh were deputed to Viswa Bharati and it was Tripura's contribution that enabled the Viswa Bharati to introduce Manipuri dance form in its curriculum.

3. Natural Vegitation and Biodiversity

Tripura, predominantly a hilly region, is surrounded on all sides by deltaic basin of Bangladesh, except for a small part in the north-east, which adjoins Cachar district of Assam and Mizoram. The state displays three distinct physiographic regions—hill ranges, undulating plateau land and low-lying alluvial land. There are five major hill ranges—Jampui, Unakoti-Sakhantlang, Longthorai, Atharamura-Kalajhari and Baramura-Deotamura. The highest peak lies at Bethliangchhip (Thaidawar, Shib-rangkhung), 975.36 metres above the sea level. Topographically, the state is characterised by hill slopes, *tillas* (hillocks), *lungas* (land areas between the tillas), flat lands, rivers and lakes.

Jampui Hill is the highest hill range located at an altitude of about 3,000 ft. above the sea level. The hill is famous for its favourable climate, green forests, orange trees and breathtaking views of sunrise and sunset. Inhabited by Lushai and Reang tribes, the population of the hill is around 8,000. The main occupation of the people is orange cultivation.

The climate is warm and humid. The temperature varies between 10 degrees Celsius in the winter to a maximum average of 35 degrees Celsius in summer. Humidity is generally high throughout the year. Monsoon usually arrives in the later part of May or the first week of June and lasts till September. The north-eastern part of the state around Dharmanagar gets the maximum rain. The state has 10 major rivers—Burima, Gomati, Khowai, Haorah, Longai, Dhalai, Muhuri, Feni, Juri and Manu. The Gomati is the largest river and like the Ganga, it is considered as the most sacred of all rivers. Tripura has a diverse ecosystem ranging from forests and grasslands to freshwater wetlands.

Orange Festival

In the early 1960s, Jampui witnessed the beginning of orange cultivation mainly for self-consumption. Realising the potential of the fruit and its commercial value, people started orange plantation in the valleys. This changed the economy and lifestyle of the people of Jampui hills. Trees laden with oranges are a treat to the eyes during October to November. The popular Orange Festival is a tourism festival held in November in Jampui.

The soil of Tripura is loamy and sandy, which is red and yellow in colour. Large tracts of alluvium soil consisting of sand, silt and clay can also be found along riverbeds. Over 90 per cent of the land was once covered with dense forests. Today, about 53 per cent of the land is under actual forest cover. Owing to increasing pressure on land, practise of *jhum* cultivation, unregulated felling of trees and forest fires, much of these forest cover has been replaced by crops.

Forests are mainly tropical, evergreen, semi-evergreen and moist deciduous. There are many species of rare, endemic and endangered plants and animals found in the region. The state boasts of a large variety of species of trees, shrubs, herbs, climbers and medicinal plants, many of which are restricted to the state and neighbouring states. It houses endangered orchids like red and blue vanda and around 266 species of medicinal plants. Some of the trees that are commonly available in the forests are *amalaki*, *balda*, *chalita chamal*, *dongar*, *mandar*, *udal*, bamboo,

Jampui Hills

etc. Bamboo plays a vital role in the economy as it serves both the artisan and non-artisan users of the state. Nineteen species of bamboo found in the state include Barak, Bari, Kai, Lanthi Bans, Tetua, Dolu, Paora, etc.

There are around 90 mammal species found in the state. Seven primate species have been documented in Tripura, of which slow iris and stumped-tailed macaque have become rare. Phayre's langoor, which has become endangered in India, is also found here. Hoolock gibbon, the only ape in India, and clouded leopard are also found here. As regards birds, nearly 340 species have been reported, of which 58 are migratory. Some of the important birds that are found here are—dora lark, red bulbul, green bulbul, mynah, babul, tuntuni, bhating, pancowri, doyel, etc.

State Animal: Pharye's Langoor

4. Some Eminent Personalities

Sachin Dev Burman, the celebrated music director, belonged to the royal Manikya family of Tripura. He was born in Comilla, Bengal Presidency (in present-day Bangladesh) on 1 October 1906. He was trained in formal music education under various maestros such as K.C. Dey, and Ustad Allauddin Khan. He started composing music for Bengali plays like *Sati Tirtha* and *Janani*. Eventually, he composed for Bengali films like *Rajgee*, *Nirbashan*, *Protishodh*, *Abhoyer Biye* and *Chaddobeshi*. He moved to Mumbai in 1946. He composed music for a large number Bengali and Hindi films. His original compositions and lilting melodies led to the success of many Hindi films such as *Pyaasa* (1957), *Devdas* (1955), *Funtoosh* (1956), *Sujata* (1959), etc. Each of his composition

Sachin Dev Burman

is considered a masterpiece. To keep the memory of this musical genius alive, a postage stamp on Sachin Dev Burman was released on 1 October 2007 coinciding with his 101st birth anniversary.

Sachin Dev Burman

Dipa Karmakar, the 'Golden Girl of Tripura', who is the first-ever accomplished female gymnast of the country, represented India at the 2016 Summer Olympics, making it to the fourth position in the Women's Vault gymnastics with an overall score of 15.066. Her first remarkable victory was at the 2014 Commonwealth Games when she won a bronze, becoming the first Indian woman gymnast to achieve the feat. She is also one of the only five women, who has successfully performed the 'Produnova', the most difficult vault performed in women's gymnastics.

Dipa Karmakar

Sourabhee Debbarma became the first woman to win the *Indian Idol* trophy in 2009. She was born in 1985 to parents who did not belong to the field of music. Despite not having a background in music, she did not stop pursuing her dreams. Sourabhee is a singer and performer who loves to perform in live concerts. She has to her credit a number of live concerts in India as well as abroad such as Hongkong, London, Nigeria, New York and Durban. She is also the record holder of Guiness World Records for singing non-stop, suspended upside down for 4:30 minutes. She has also worked with Shantanu Moitra for the music video *Our North-East, Our Star*.

5. Places of Interest

Mahamuni Pagoda (Buddhist Shrine)

Tripura is an attractive destination for tourists. It has magnificent palaces, rock-cut carvings and stone images, temples and monasteries, lakes, wildlife sanctuaries and eco parks. Some of the prominent places of interest are—Ujjayanta Palace and Kunjaban Palace; rock-cut carvings and stone images at Unakoti, Debtamura and Pilak; Tripura Sundari and Kamalasagar Kali temple; Mahamuni Pagoda, Gedu Mia's Mosque, Dumboor, Rudrasagar and Kalyan Sagar lakes; Jampui Hills, wildlife sanctuaries at Sepahijala, Gumti, Rowa and Trishna.

Khumulwng Eco Park

Rudrasagar and Neer Mahal

6. Conclusion

Tripura is a small state, distinguished by its cultural similarity with neighbouring Bengal, trade routes with Bangladesh across the border and large potential of agricultural and industrial development. It is home to several tribal and migrant communities and is regarded as a model for balanced social and economic development.

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STATE CAPITALS, AREA, ANIMALS, BIRDS, TREES AND FLOWERS

Sl. No.	State	Area (Sq. Km.)	Capital	State Animal	State Bird	State Tree	State Flower
1	Arunachal Pradesh	83,743	Itanagar	Mithun	Great Hornbill	Hollong	Lady Slipper Orchid
2	Assam	78,438	Guwahati	One-Horned Rhinoceros	White-Winged wood Duck	Hollong	Foxtail Orchids
3	Manipur	22,327	Imphal	Sangai	Mrs. Hume's Pheasant	Toon	Shirui lily
4	Meghalaya	22,429	Shillong	Clouded Leopard	Hill Myna	White teak	Lady Slipper Orchid
5	Mizoram	21,087	Aizawl	Serow	Mrs. Hume's Pheasant	Iron wood	Red Vanda
6	Nagaland	16,579	Kohima	Mithun	Blyth's Tragopan	Alder	Rhododendron
7	Tripura	10,486	Agartala	Phayre's Langur	Green Imperial Pigeon	Agar	Nageshwar
8	Sikkim	7,096	Gangtok	Red Panda	Blood Pheasant	Rhododendron	Noble Orchid

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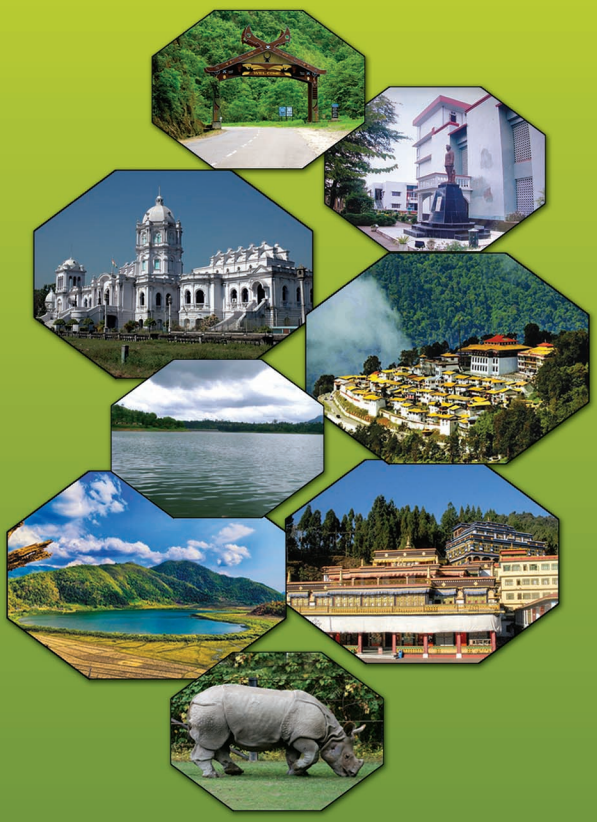

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विद्यया ऽमृतमश्नुते

एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

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