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Culture as the Link Between Tribe and Nation

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My participation in the Seminar organized by the Cultural Research Institute, Government of West Bengal with its focus on 'Tribal Culture' during March 27-28,2018 has given me the opportunity to take a relook at the role of culture in forging a link between tribe and nation, particularly in the context of contemporary India. To deal with the question whether tribes ever formed a part of the Indian nation, it is necessary to develop a concept of nation which may have some effect on the tribal psyche. When Nirmal Kumar Bose (1967) looked at nation from the perspective of a community, he probably had tribe's position in mind. As Bose explains, "In general usage, a nation is a community which inhabits a common territory, lives under one State, i.e., shares one administration and is also marked by certain commonness in culture. The latter often results from frequent intercommunication and living under one political or administrative system." In contemporary situation, political and administrative control matter a great deal, but it cannot be said that tribes are always willing partners to this system of control unless they themselves are actively involved in the control mechanism. Historically speaking, the tribes were never an active component of the core structure of Indian nation and they mostly remained in the periphery, which is aptly termed by Surajit Sinha (1980) as 'fringe enclave' or 'fringe zone' and which used to provide nourishment to the Indian civilization. Tribes represented a distinct category and the distinction was particularly reflected in the field of culture. Going back to Bose's formulation, there is at least one point which supports the position taken by him. Intercommunication at the community level is definitely on the increase and in a situation marked by 'post-coloniality' and pluralism inter-community relation has touched upon culture in the complex everyday world through which the bearers of culture encounter and interact with each other and through which they all move beyond one another's fixed domain. Actually it is inter-cultural communication which augments inter-community relation.

Bose's use of community might have been prompted by his attempt to bring India's diverse groups including tribes into a common platform to project and promote national integration. But so far as India's tribes are concerned, their own way of forming and affiliating with a community structure cannot just be overlooked. There may of course be questions about how one conceptualises a community. The main question perhaps is how does a nation grow? There could be many explanations, but to my mind one given by Ernest

Gellner may help us critically examine our own context. Gellner writes, "Nationalism engenders nations, not *vice versa*. Successful nationalist movements select and transform a pre-existing culture, working to ensure that this culture is fused with a single polity. People who find they are excluded and deprived may seize on whatever linguistic, genetic or cultural symbols they can as a way of making themselves out as a people whose demands must be met. Sometimes localized low culture may be used and sometimes a high culture." By 'low' and 'high' Gellner probably points at the span and intensity of cultural attributes. He further adds, "Nationalism is to be understood in terms of the radical structural and cultural transformations associated with the development of industrial societies. The sense of belonging increasingly derives not from membership of a particular village, lineage or corporate group, but from being part of a shared literate culture broadly co-extensive with the boundaries of the nation-state."

The Indian tribal situation may not quite fit in Gellner's scheme based on European experiences. 'Radical cultural transformations' with the emergence of industrialized societies Gellner talks about may not be applicable here, where the impact of industrialization never rose to the level of bringing full-scale transformation of the society at large. This particularly applies to the tribal society. A section of the tribals in India may claim to be in a position of sharing the tradition of a 'literate culture', but this does not mean that they are invariably the proponents of changing the 'pre-existing' culture. If the tribals had advocated for the creation of a 'nation-state', the consideration of their own tribal affiliation was uppermost in their mind. Of course, in some cases the aim was to install a regional solidarity structure, but the purpose was mainly to counter the dominance exercised by the majority group or, if I may say so, the mainstream community. The guarded, cautious outlook of the tribals, which is the outcome of a long process of seclusion and separation, stands in the way of complete fusion of their culture with a single polity. If nation is the product of nationalism, as contended by Gellner, it is also true that nationalism postulates the existence of an 'abstract community'. At another level, nation itself manifests a somewhat arbitrary existence depending more on the political vision and larger interest of those who are in it. To avoid abstraction, attempts have been made to explore the communitarian base of the Indian nation, as was done by Nirmal Kumar Bose. Gellner, however, had no faith in community and he himself believed that he did not belong to any particular community. In the Indian situation it is rather difficult to undermine, let alone ignore, the existence of community. Here tribes function as communities with distinct cultural attributes. In order to identify themselves with such an abstract entity as nation, it becomes necessary to develop inter-community relation on a firmer footing and follow the course of 'cultural standardization'. Cultural standardization as a modern concept refers to the 'cultural landscape' of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality.

It also underlines the need for individuals to follow a common standard for which they are required to function as 'integrated subjects' for the sake of national interest. In this case, cultural relativism, though acknowledged, is hardly given credence to. But tribes in India are yet to reach the stage of integrated subjects, for whom the immediate location as social individuals rather than greater national representation appears to be more important. These formations based on community affiliation display a type of 'traditionalism' expressed through what is recognized as 'sub-nationalism' or 'infra-nationalism' from the larger national perspective. From the standpoint of the people concerned, it reflects expressing nationalistic feelings rooted to traditional values and way of life. Traditionalism here is not so much concerned with 'traditional' or 'ancient' as such; it takes the garb of an ideology glorifying a specific cultural tradition. Though such traditions are consciously developed and constructed, these have relevance for the people in question. The emergence of 'ethnic communities' may be related with it even if it is against the interest of the state, particularly when such communities take to the path of ethnic movement.

Today, one's everyday world is not limited within the confines of a society or community. Diverse cultures now come together to face a common situation, confront each other and, expectedly, self-awareness of the cultural beings remains grounded in this confrontation. This is the modern trend, which has become problematic day by day. The problem actually lies with the process of cultural transmission. Culture's encounter with a plurality of other cultures has been more intense after Independence as it leads directly to the realm of power. Pierre Bourdieu's (1989) contention that the problem of cultural transmission in a politically charged situation does not entirely depend on the stability of key values and beliefs of its culture, but rather on the stability of political structures and the structures of domination and exploitation within the society makes sense. For a smooth cultural transmission, an atmosphere of domination and exploitation is just what is not wanted. Again, increasing differentiation within the society underlines the need for stable political structure and this probably applies more to tribal culture in its present uncertain state of existence. This is the reason why the tribes have been making concerted efforts to attain a degree of political legitimacy to preserve their cultural identity. It is also Bourdieu (1977) who asserts that culture is not devoid of political content, but rather an expression of that. Only through 'cultural socialization' individuals and groups are placed within competitive status hierarchies. Obviously, tribals are required to make compromises between retaining old cultural values and accommodating unavoidable competitions for new status hierarchies.

During the post-Independence period, the political and ideological content of culture has been assuming greater significance. In some cases, it leads to protests and movements. A class-based explanation is sometimes given

to account for such a course of action initiated by a group who have been identified as 'dominant class' within and across tribes. Though the class-based explanation has been contested at some quarters, the class effects on political and ideological life of the tribals cannot altogether be ruled out. Popular traditions are now set against a contemporary political conjuncture. New meanings are given to them and these meanings, when articulated with class ideological discourses or with anti-power bloc, can develop into a progressive powerful tool in political terms. Not all tribes are in a position to reach that level, but most of them have now gone for interpellations or interruptions at the moral or aesthetic, religious and political levels. In all these exercises their source of inspiration is supposed to be their culture. But post-Independent situation has struck at their cultural bastion exposing it to the global forces in operation. The definition of culture provided by James Clifford and George Marcus (1986) has touched upon some of these contemporary realities. Their definition that culture "is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist historically between subjects of power" has some contemporary relevance. Now, it has become necessary to make a distinction between individuals as individuals and individuals as subjects of power, the latter, though known primarily by their community affiliation, exemplify the power relations which produce them. Due to the working of power relations they have been changed from individuals who could function on their own terms to subjects of power. The implication is development benefits are made available to them not as free individuals but as subjects of power. Apparently, there is nothing wrong in it and probably this is the way the modern political system operates. Furthermore, the power relations have now been crystallized institutionally at the community level. 'Institutional crystallization', however, depends a great deal on the nature of power relations. As a sequel to that, the state has taken steps to give legal recognition to their culture. It has dawned on us that culture is the strong point of tribal society, which needs to be recognized formally, legally. At this stage, some points may be raised for our serious consideration. Is it only the state recognition or ascertaining the legitimacy of culture what the tribals need to authenticate their culture? Is cultural legitimacy the first step towards achieving tribal rights? To add to the confusion, it is often said that culture with its old values and customary practices is 'anti-modern' and hence not quite compatible with the interests of the progressive nation. Sociologists and anthropologists like Partha Chatterjee, Homi K. Bhaba, Ashis Nandy, Veena Das (Ref.: Amartya Sen, 1996, *The New Republic*, April, No.27), through their writings, have defined 'anti-modernism' not from the Western perspective but from an Indian perspective. Partha Chatterjee (1993) in *The Nation and Its Fragments* has preferred to follow the path of what he calls 'our modernity'. But what exactly is our form of modernity which also applies to tribals? To most of us including tribals Western standard is still the determinant of modernity in its expressive form. Actually, there are forces of change of differential

character operating at different levels of Indian population, of which tribe represents one. In the contemporary situation, tribal culture and cultural identity need to be treated separately depending on their contextual significance. Probably, the government has also realized this. But is it prepared to give them complete cultural autonomy which has political implications as well?

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Living in the Times of Crises: An Anthropological Inquiry into the Cosmological Adventures of History

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Abstract: Space is not a homogeneous entity. Spatiality, just like temporality abounds in multiplicity. Following Henri Bergson, we are now aware of the heterogeneity of the concept of time¹. Similar is the case with space. The peculiarity of the space comes from the types of ingredients that go into its composition. The aim of this paper is to show how different types of cultural spaces are carved out using different types of ingredients (humans and non-humans), with varying nature and status. For doing so, we have used the distinctions between 'ground' and 'key points' made by Gilbert Simondon (1958) for describing the cultural geographical space. We will look into these cosmologies on the parameters of how much a space is populated with 'key points', to show that the present age of crisis has its genealogy in worldviews which have very little or no investment in this world.

Key words : Landscapes, Ground, Key points, Immanence, Transcendental, Ecological crisis

A note on the word 'crisis'

Sometimes looking at the usage of a particular word over a period of time can give an unexpected handhold for starting an inquiry. This act of historicizing a word does not necessarily mean discovering the essence or true meaning of that word. Historicization reveals the unfolding of multiple trajectories through which a word or a thing finds existence in different spheres of life. It can tell us about the life of a word in all its dimensions. According to all the standard dictionaries, the word crisis has a Greek origin from the word 'krinein' meaning to decide, which dates back to late 14th century and early 15th century. And over the years, it has acquired a sense in legal and medical terms meaning, to judge in the former and a turning point in the latter. The general sense of this word denotes a critical situation where it becomes an imperative to take a decision or to make a judgment (Serres, 2013). It denotes a decisive point where the quality of judgment would ensure whether the existence is furthered in time or it ends up in chaos and death (Serres, 2013). A crisis symbolizes a crossroad where we have to choose one path over another and the entire existence depends on that choice of path. Everything depends on the response to the situation presented and the word crisis more or less denotes this sense in wherever way is in use.

But something has changed over the years, especially after the 18th century, in the way this word has been deployed, from being used specifically in different fields to one of generality, from denoting a particular situation to describing the general condition. The life of a word, apart from its meaning could be

measured in terms of frequency, amplitude and intensity from which we can infer something about the world, thanks to some new techniques developed recently as a result of digitization process. If we search for the word 'crisis' on *Google books Ngram viewer* which relies on a huge database of digitized books, we get some interesting results in the form of a graph, plotted with 1500 as base year up to 2008 (See graph 1).

Apart from some abrupt towers for a brief period, the graph is generally flat and non-continuous until the middle of the 18th century. After that period, the curve picks up the continuity in terms of frequency and regularity in upward direction. The curve shows an overall increase in its parameters; its usage and mentions are progressively increasing with each passing decade. What does this graph tell us and how to make sense out of its curve? What accounts for its gradual increase after the 18th century? And if we add to it the trends of the last five years of our present time, the graph will definitely shoot up like a rocket. Also, if we make the inventory of phrases which have the word crisis associated with it, the list would be very large and expanding with novel entries, which includes spiritual, ecological, identity, relationship, moral, and midlife, to name a few; apart from the economic crisis which is slightly older than the rest.

One general observation could be made that from having a particular nature and form it has become something of a general order. Michel Serres (2013) has described this general order, the order after the post-war period, when as 'The Times of Crisis' Europe in particular has presented unprecedented novelties of such big dimensions that demand something else other than a simple judgment. In order to appreciate the validity of the tag 'times of crisis', we just have to test some phrases mentioned above in *Ngram viewer* as we did for the simple unattached word 'crisis'. And we would find that almost all types of crisis are only a century old, but more specifically after 1950s, lots of novel crisis add up and rise geometrically leaving every other one behind as if symbolizing some kind of catastrophe. Ecological crisis has shown such tendencies both on the graph and in the world. There are few more entries which behave on similar lines and which have almost no presence or mention before the 1950s on this simple graph like identity crisis and relationship crisis. As mentioned earlier, the life of word, apart from its literal meaning, also includes other dimensions like frequency and intensity. But we haven't talked about the intensity of a word from this raw data. This attribute can only be inferred from this simple graph which won't tell anything about it directly. Before doing this, we should know what it means by an intensity of a word? In linguistic terms, it can be understood as the stress or the load or the urgency which a word evokes or holds (Sahlins, 1978). What kind of response a word evokes when it is uttered refers to one of the domestic ways to measure the intensity of the word, which may or may not have a direct correspondence with the regularity of its utterance.

Intensity

When we hear someone saying that the economy is in a bad condition and a crisis can set in any time or the boom bubble will burst in the near future, it generates a reaction in the form of a mild tremor about the anticipated event and the consequences. People recall the hardships they faced, the savings they lost, and the austerity measures they had to follow in order to overcome that period. However, almost after 100 years of economic socialization in crisis and bubbles bursting, people and economists have become habituated with it. In fact, prosperity and depression have become part and parcel of rational economic thinking. It never forced the economic paradigm to reconsider its ways and orientation and the debate restricted itself to ideological lines like who would own the means of production, who would exploit the resources and who would share the profit. So over the years, its shock value has gone down along with its intensity, not in terms of damages done, but in the manner of receiving it. Even spiritual crisis has the same span and has almost the same tendency as the economic one but it has not been considered worth thinking about, lest it would invoke some public reaction and so the individuals are left on their own to deal with it. Implicitly, on some occasions such crises were considered as the bye products of progress and therefore were of not much significance.

Another event of the late 50s was the nuclear crisis where superpowers were standing face to face with their nuclear arms ready. For the first time, realization came that the entire earth along with their inhabitants could be destroyed in seconds with a bomb. Now that was something unheard of in the entire human history that a bomb could erase everything including the earth about whose existence nobody questioned before. That an entity which is the base of all action could perish just like that was something really scary. This shock forced the sense to prevail and the event was averted. It still looms large over humanity but since it depends on the act of stupidity and false sense of vanity, proper mechanisms and arrangements are put in place to avoid that. The intensity it had is still there but everybody feels the need to devise ways to prevent that act of stupidity. The importance of nuclear crisis was that it brought to light the fragility and perishability of the earth and the life on it. Till then, the earth was thought to be perishable only in the cosmological time scale but now even the earth has been made part of human time scale. The verdict is: don't indulge in any stupid act so that the humanity could survive. In terms of intensity, it has a higher place above all preceding crises. After all it is more rational to think of immediate survival than immediate annihilation.

However, what would happen if our rationality falls short of breath? What if it shows signs of an imminent death, along with all the humanity that is placed under its guardianship? What if the same bomb like situation arises, not out of stupidity but by the conscious rational thinking and action? Then we are sure that it's not like any other crisis that has hit before and which

cannot be resolved in the same way as before. Apart from that, there's no question of getting habituated or inured to it. It does not follow the same protocol of response where it is diverted into the imbrolios of class, brushed aside as beliefs and superstitious, or thrust inside the psyches of the individuals to be taken care of by the specialists. What we have here is something we can describe as the first purely objective situation encountered in the modern human history ever since objectivity was discovered few centuries back by the enlightened people. With all these attributes, we can say that in terms of intensity, not only it occupies the top position in the hierarchy but totally reorients the discussion. Because for the first time, rationality has been suspect of stupidity; rationality here is understood as the response given, as an approach to the previous crises. I think we all have recognized the seriousness of what is known as ecological crisis. Never before economics talked about sustainability but now it is doing so. Ecological crisis has revealed to us clearly that it is the culmination of all the crises situations. It is the final articulation of what all such crisis wanted to convey.

What ecological crisis revealed?

As pointed out above, with ecological crisis, we encountered the first purely objective condition. There was no big scientific discovery involved in this, no ideological interpretation of reality, no doomsday theories relishing about the end of the world, no alien attacks of sci-fi bent on destruction. Just simple questions about air, water, land, earth and habitat were its mainstay. Realization can be an appropriate word, a bitter one too. Realization comes in the middle of a struggle, that you can't wage it any longer because your logistics are running out or your stock of life supports get exhausted. When you look at your combatant, you find him in the same position as you are, that you both are drawing from the same source which has dried up. What will happen next? Either ceasefire will be called in keeping with the larger wisdom or one would win the war but eventually both have to die. And this is crux of the ecological crisis. If there's any difficulty in visualizing this argument, we may go through Michel Serres's *'The natural contract'* to know what it's all about. All the struggles were fought, west versus east, left versus right, male versus female on some constants, on bases assumed to be permanent and suddenly the base has given away and the constant has become a variable. It turns out to be made of quicksand (Serres, 1995:1,2). And this fragile nature of earth has finally forced all the combatants to take this into account, to make it as one of the concerned parties of the debate.

For the first time there has been a reversal of relation between humans and the earth. The entire modern discourse was based on the finitude of the humans and the infinitude of a mechanized, impersonal earth. Its limit has been reached and as Michel Serres says that the infinite human potential has finally encountered the finitude of the earth (Serres, 2013). The mute impersonal earth operating under strict physical laws has turned out to be

fragile, sensitive and articulative at last. Sometimes we have to face an existential crisis, not in the philosophical sense but in the ordinary way of availability of air, water, food and proper habitat to understand that things should not be taken for granted. It's neither possible to reproduce the vast corpus of debates on ecological crisis. Here, the point of consideration is to use the insights in a limited way so as to relate it with the present project of interrogating different worldviews about their composition, the status of things in the scheme and the quantity of key points inscribed in them. It would help us to understand the division between subjects and objects, and finally about where nature ends and culture takes up the baton.

Like everything else, nature also has a history and can be historicized (Latour, 2004). How can something have a history which is itself outside history, which is eternal and *sui generis*? Thanks to the ethnographic research and anthropology, we have come to know that history unfolds differently in different parts of the world and there are multiple ways in which humans deal with their past and transmit it to the subsequent generations. In a way, there has been a democratization of history for all the humans of the world, there's no privileged method of living in history and certainly not of practicing history. There are court histories and to counter that, there's people's history or subaltern history with their own sub-fields. From archives to folktales, all form part of the inquiry.

This had to happen, going by the events and the logic which made history and historiography one of the pillars of modern knowledge. As it was the prerogative of the humans, it was only a matter of time before it is extended to everyone. Extension and inclusion are the modes through which everything aspires to be universal. But this method of envisaging history, history of the humans, history for the humans, and history by the humans was itself the result of a process of rupture acutely manifested in the post- Enlightenment Europe which was also the period of beginning of modernity. We all know the story of enlightenment, told so many times from so many different sources. Coming back to nature and the history of nature, it was during post-Enlightenment Europe that nature was introduced as a repository of everything which could not fit in the human history, entities which were considered to be outside history as ahistorical and eternal as compared to humans and their societies. Humans were considered historical subjects endowed with power of action and will. And as if this idea of historical nature was not enough, science studies have shown that history actually exists in the plural. There was nature of natural sciences, a cold impersonal entity operating under strict laws to be deciphered using observation and experimentation (Latour, 2004).

Then there was nature of economics and political sciences, beastly nature having blood on its claws, a nature of fierce competition, survival and a war of all against all. There was also a pristine and sublime nature, a nature of innocence pitted against the fallen culture, degradation and ugliness of daily

life, a nature of romantics, humanities and nowadays of travelers and go green groups (Latour, 2004). In this last aspect, anthropology tops the list for its claims of studying pure and innocent natives living close to nature, tinged with feelings of mourning for their decay.

This appeal to nature, or different natures was always on account of settling the debate raging among the humans, was a way of justification or more rightly what Bruno Latour described as a way of short circuiting politics (Latour, 2004). Nature and its counterpart, culture can only exist in a world which is composed of dichotomies or permanent dualities like the ones we are already aware of, subject- object, mind-matter, and most importantly of idealism-materialism. All this classification can be broadly understood as a differentiation between humans and non-humans into two different groups. It is to this classification that the sudden eruption of ecological crisis gave a bewildered and questioning look. And it's strange that if we look at the ethnographic works amassed by the anthropology, we find ourselves facing a very peculiar difficulty. We see that although the anthropologists have used the standard categories of nature-culture or subject-object, yet the entities are constantly jumping from one block to another, are performing activities which are generally associated with the definitions of the other block. The borders imposed on them, somewhat unwillingly, are not respected by them, that the non-humans encountered by the anthropologist are distinct from the non-humans inhabiting the world from which anthropologist comes. The former are still articulative, noisy and possess expressive power while the silence of the latter has been completely achieved and as such are reduced to nothing but mere projections and representations. In this respect, all anthropological documents are pre-modern in nature, a document which cannot keep up with the bifurcation, without the knowledge of the anthropologists who have written it. So in theory, all anthropologists operated on that dictum of bifurcation for looking at the world, but in practice were carrying out something totally different. They were listening to the non-humans' speech, were tracking their movements in and out of categories or containers, where sometimes two different humans were placed in two different containers of subject and object while placing idols and ghosts along with an animal in the container labeled as subjects (Levi Strauss, 1962).

This way of classification can indeed give headache to any person trained in modern form of rationality which reserves the privilege of articulation to humans only, and has not accorded the proper place to different beings other than human beings in the scheme of things. The question then arises is that how come something so clearly visible in the ethnographies, this way of classification could not change the theories used to explain the practice itself? A cursory glance at the history of anthropological thought would suffice for an answer. It always had a safety valve attached to prevent the spilling over of practice in to theory; first and foremost among them was the idea of evolution.

The effects of results were neutralized before the fieldwork actually began. Societies were already placed on the successive steps of ladder of civilization. Secondly, and it has to do with the method of rationality usually accepted in order to reach the truth, is the principle of reason behind any phenomenon. One of the assumptions of rational inquiry, based on rationalism which was developed in Europe, is that truth can only be reached by removing the dense undergrowth hiding the reality. Appearance cannot be trusted for their deceptive nature; they have to be peeled layer after layer to discover the true essence, the undiluted core which then becomes the defining feature, the principle of reason or unconscious structures, of the phenomena (Levi Strauss, 1963). The difference has to be subordinated to the principle of identity to understand its true nature (Deleuze, 1994). The passage of reason through this form of rationality has been played out again and again in various disguises.

This logic of justification for the data amassed, this way of theorizing about the practice recorded prevented the different worlds from entering with full force into the discourse. Anthropologists managed to maintain this lack of alignment with a sleight of hand, by temporarily opening the privilege of speech to multiple beings encountered in the field, willingly following the informants through their cosmological topography but closing it the moment they thought they have found the principle of reason, the defining criteria, the essence of the social world and which in most cases were already chalked out beforehand. From economic reason to sexuality, from unconscious structures to power, anthropologists had to deal in most cases rather uncomfortably with the cumbersome task of locating the essence, the undiluted core of all human action. The task of filling the pores of society with something essential, something fundamental is not the problem of anthropology alone.

In fact, anthropology had to grapple with this perplexing requirement with more difficulty as compared to other disciplines which did not have to deal directly with the supposed other and therefore could enthusiastically participate in the task of rationality, looking for reasons and essences. It only extended the range of the substances which were being used in the rational inquiry in the modern West, to fill the pores of the society, substances which could explain everything and could serve as a pole in the end to end sequential series. If this appears to be an exaggeration of the importance associated with essences, then we just have look around to see ourselves the role nowadays being played by the idea of 'power' in explaining everything. Power is the new substance employed as filler for filling the pores of society. Allegedly, all actions begin with it and end in it.

Ethnography along with other forms of historiography contributed substantially in making a plea for the inclusion of other societies in history on humanitarian basis. Speaking in philosophical terms, it added to epistemology but could not make a serious dent in ontology. Maybe because

its subject matter, exotic people were already demarcated as having nothing to do with truth or more specifically with ontology. It needed a strong lawyer to put up its case before the tribunal. The events which provided this opportunity were all related to health of the earth itself and questions of fragile ecosystem. The interventions of a new field of science studies following these eruptions finally brought to light the other aspect, the most important one contained in the ethnographic documents produced out of a fieldwork tradition. It articulated this point more rigorously because it concerned itself with one of the most powerful paradigms of modern world, science and scientific knowledge. And what is the best way to study science other than to focus at the points where this scientific knowledge itself is being produced. It all started when the habitat of science, laboratories, for the first time became the field of study along with its inhabitants, the practitioners of science (Latour 1972, 1979).

It's no surprise that the results which came out of it were having similar contours as that of the ethnographic texts of primitive societies. It also has the same difficulty of groupings and classifications encountered earlier. But this time it was different. It was different because we were dealing with something having an ontological status, not just any colorful epistemological tale of the world. Therefore it produced the ripples which anthropology couldn't produce.

The question of the world

One of the main features of almost all schools of thought, theological, philosophical and scientific is the search for unity. In fact, they all posit some kind of driving force in an ideal, an ideal which can provide a unifying force inherently (Whitehead, 1964). The question of truth was related to that ideal posited at the beginning and the world was a stage or background for the enactment of that project. History of the sciences and philosophy has shown the affinity of all western thought to the platonic ideal in varying degrees and forms. Taking a cue from what Alfred Whitehead had said about all Western philosophy that could be described as a footnote to Plato (Whitehead, 1978:39), we can possibly agree that Platonic ideal has been the driving force of many disciplines, which otherwise had to deal with the world in a different way. Just like nature, Platonic philosophy has been brought repetitively into the world for different purposes and in different forms. Popper (1966) while analyzing the dangers posed by ideologies to an open society tried to locate the philosophical precursors of Hegelianism and Marxism in Platonism. He missed the point that long before Hegelianism came on the scene; it was Christianity which applied Platonism to the world and closed it forever. I must acknowledge my incompetence beforehand in dealing with such a vast and deep philosophical tradition. It is not my intention to pin point at something in retrospective and shift the entire blame on it. What I am trying to do is to portray a rough picture of the world especially the western world in which modern science has become prominent and has occupied an important place.

In order to focus on science and examine the question of truth and unity contained in it, a brief exercise of arriving at scientifically derived conclusions has to be done.

Contrary to the notion of disjuncture between science and religion, historiography of sciences has revealed that modern science is the logical continuation of the Christian theology, at least in terms of questions it tries to answer. The struggles which were waged for the supremacy over the world resulted in the victory of the former over the latter. But something was preserved in the transfer of power from religion to science, something which was common to both in terms of the way the world was perceived. There was discontinuity at one plane only to be compensated at the other plane by continuity. We know that the same entities, elements, ideas gain different meanings when employed in different fields. The world entered the cosmos of Christian theology in a different way than the way it was encountered in the scientific cosmos. Both the worlds differed and resembled each other in lot of ways giving the impression of discontinuity as well as continuity. It is the continuous aspect on which we will focus for the time being, to situate it on a particular trajectory of history.

It's common knowledge to find the reference of some Greek mythology on the opening pages of books in social sciences before moving on to the subject of the book. These mythical stories about Greek gods and heroes are somehow made to serve as a starting point for issues involved, for providing a gesture in the intended direction. These stories provide the template for the discussion. Whatever be the author's intention, one thing is sure that these mythic tales open up an avenue through which another world could be seen, where stories proliferate in proportion with the number and set of actors participating in it, a world where everything happens for real outside the parenthesis of epistemology. The Greek cosmology, now long dead, has made its reappearance in the form of mythology while its gods and heroes decorate the museums and city squares. But what was it all about that it still forces the people to come back to it. The place it occupies in scholarly culture is on par with what Harry Potter and Disneyland occupy in popular culture. In a way nobody is free from the charms of these fantastic worlds, charms which present cosmologies, scientific or theological are lacking in comparison with the antiquarian world. Eliade (1975) has beautifully documented the presence of archaic and mythical worlds in these cosmologies.

We are focusing primarily on Greek cosmology in order to restrict ourselves to the alterations and transformations registered over time in that part of the world. From Greek cosmology to Christian theology and then to scientific knowledge, the sequence has to be kept in mind and every mention of theology or cosmology should be referred back to that particular element in the sequence. We know that the world of ancient Greeks was a world of living gods and goddess. They had peculiar features, identifiable habitat, wide range

of behavioral possibilities and were involved in constant transactions with the people. The world above, the world below and the underworld were joined together with multiple connecting threads facilitating the traffic between them. The earthly landscapes were saturated with key points on the canvas of ground, to use a phrase of Simondon (1958), through which the vast spaces formed a kind of grid. It is these key points that made action and movement possible by acting as a landmark, as a marker to illustrate the specificity of a particular space and the type of action suitable for each space. It is not difficult to visualize the image drawn here, of how the world must have looked like. This type of world, carved out in Simondonian categories, is still flourishing in different parts of the world and forms the bedrock of many civilizations. It has shown the resilience against the attempts of changing it from active cosmology to fantastic mythology.

Platonic philosophy about forms, ideals, truth flourished in a world already populated with concrete forms, idols and relations, each occupying a prominent place in the scheme of things. The questions about their truth or falsity never arose because each carried its own truth with it. All entities present were neither representation nor projection of something but had come to existence out of something. The distinction between epistemology and ontology could only be a niche method of inquiry inside the branches of philosophy whose boundaries are outlined in the beginning only. Philosophy looks at the world with its own sets of felicity and infelicity conditions (felicity and infelicity conditions are conditions required for judging the truth or falsity of a statement, elaborated by J.L Austin in linguistics and which has been brilliantly extended by Bruno Latour (2013) to various modes of existence). In the type of arrangement discussed above, truth of a supreme ideal can only aspire for universalism without being universal in any way, limited from the beginning by the presence of multiple concrete forms enjoying their own ontological status. Platonic philosophy must have been an interesting take on the world, or at most a rebellious one without being the only true idea about the world. The trial of Socrates in the platonic dialogues before the tribunal of reason testifies to this state of affairs.

It is also interesting to note that Platonic philosophy coincided more or less with the decline of Greek and Roman cultures. Was it a response to the decline or a rejection of the culture whose decline could be sensed beforehand or did it in any way contribute to the decline, we cannot be sure of. But all these trends along with certain new events must have acted in new ways to give rise to new formations. It was around this time that Christianity came into existence and whose desire for universalism succeeded when large parts of the world adopted Christianity. Indeed the Christian conception of other-worldly single god has less compatibility issues with Platonic idea of ideal forms. According to Eric Voegelin, who wrote both as a practicing Christian and a proponent of platonic ideals in social sciences, with the coming of

Christianity, there happened a de-divinization of the world (Voegelin, 1952). De-divinization means the world no longer is inhabited by gods and goddesses and therefore has become other worldly, belonging to the realm of the transcendental forms and entities.

This was a transition from polytheism to monotheism and the pantheon was merged into supreme ideal of god. With this merger, the magnitude of key points, privileged spaces and time, idols and concrete forms got reduced significantly. There was a gradual flattening of the earthly landscape which was erstwhile populated with so many characters and markers. There were still connections between the heavenly and the terrestrial but they were fewer in number, maintained through religious institutions and sustained through faith only. As far as earthly existence was concerned, there were prescriptions and codes for ethics and conduct, of piety and brotherhood but one thing was for certain, that this world was shrouded in darkness and the message has to be propagated to bring the light of the day. Plato's allegory of the cave has similar assumptions about truth and knowledge. Whether it was the cave inhabited by chaotic unruly mass or the world surrounded in darkness, the power of truth was singularly acknowledged and the legitimacy to preside over the world was granted. It is in these slight differentiations or deviations that the story of ontology and epistemology could be located. It's better to clarify that this is not a comparative analysis of different religions or its purpose is only to judge the quality of religious experience in a particular religion. It's only an inventory of markings present on the ground, surveying the landscape for key points, to know about the ways in which this earth along with its existents are taken into account and the ways they are codified.

Viewing it successively, it is true that the Christian world is more flat and less mediated in terms of landscapes and therefore action along with movement could be increased considerably from the previous standpoint. Action could slightly liberate itself as the numbers of obstacles encountered are reduced and it is less tied to the world on which it is acting. It is not strictly against idolatry, except idols of god, but it has nothing substantial to say about the idols, about their truth and falsity. After some point in time, the pragmatics of worldly living initiates a new kind of vegetation to take root and fill the landscapes. New connections are made, different set of key points are located, and mediations are installed which result in the stabilization of action and movement on the same lines. They may be fewer in number and more demanding in terms of implementation as compared with the previous worldview. But they do testify to the fact that worldly existence cannot do without taking the world into account in the form of privileged markings, although this time it is more on the side of morality and less about the existents of the world.

The fallout of this exercise is the excess of codification on the virtues of action that makes action itself impossible. And this is exactly what has

happened with Catholicism in history. Any mode of existence which takes upon itself to be the arbiter of everything without recognizing the legitimacy of other modes runs the risk of losing its own legitimacy. The aspiration of any mode for universalism, universalism understood as the covering of the universe with a single feature, leads to the breaking of that mode from the inside. It spreads but at the same time loses hold and cracks up at different points.

The period when Christianity or Catholicism reigned supreme in terms of power and jurisdiction was also the period when it cracked up from the inside. The process which gave birth to Christianity, the act of flattening the landscape sets into motion inside Catholicism also, giving rise to new sects which were more flat than the preceding one. This process defined by Voegelin (1952) as 'immanentization' resulted in the internal differentiations within Christianity, producing new sects like Protestantism which went further to reject the role of religious institutions like church, rituals and saint traditions as an unnecessary mediation between man and god. All the external mediations, whether of church or rituals, were merged into the authority of the sacred book. Biblical exegesis was recognized as the only substantial mediation between the god and the man. What was achieved by this process was a state of higher level of transcendence and immanence. There was a transition through which God became somewhat more transcendental for the world and more immanent for the man as he doesn't have to seek him outside of him. The presence of institutions out in the open, outside of individuals, occupying a fixed space, was transformed from mediators into impediments. As far as landscape was concerned, more free space was created out of this act, space which had smooth terrain, very few obstacles and less mediation to be negotiated. An ideal landscape where action could liberate itself some more from the world and movement could be accelerated tremendously.

There must have been reasons for this rupture, reasons that have initiated this immanentization of Christianity, particularly Catholicism in the reverse direction, to the source of the truth, to the unmediated ideal, to the message contained in the book. The reasons are well documented in the medieval history of Europe till the coming of modernity or capitalism or scientific revolution. We can't step in the same river twice, a simple wisdom of geography implies and we can't go in the reverse direction to reach the same state again. This is the rule of entropy. The return to the source, of true meaning, of truth and ideal when there is a gap of more than a millennium between the source and the present can be remarkable in many ways. The sedimentation that must have resulted in the formation of new terranean features again has to be flattened. The same pair of ontology-epistemology appears whenever there is a question of truth and non-truth and a repositioning of the world along with its existents into the scheme of things. It's a choice between an eternal truth with an increasingly immanent positioning in the world and a world full of beings but devoid of truth. The world has changed beyond recognition in

these long years, new forces have emerged, new events have taken place and whose aspirations for universalism have found their compatibilities and their partners along the way. Following these new waves of immanentization, we enter a period commonly known as modernity in history.

One of the main founders of sociology, Max Weber has found resonances between the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism while doing a comparative study of all the religions of the world (Weber, 1904). He has located the spirit of capitalism, the driving force of capitalistic enterprise, if there is any, inside the tenets of Protestantism with its codes of conduct and views about the world. While we accept Weberian analysis that there must be something conducive inside these ethics for capitalistic enterprise (innovation, invention, discovery, production, capital), but what he has called as spirit of capitalism is nothing but action somewhat more liberated and movement accelerated further. We have already discussed about the process of immanentization sweeping the world at that time, whether they were 'Gnostic revolutions' (a phrase used by Voegelin (1952) to describe the offshoots of Catholicism) or scientific revolutions with their own claims about the world in the context of the emerging state. It was not a two party struggle about truth and ideal but a struggle waged from many sides with shifting alliances. The overall result of the contest was weakening and disillusionment of the religious proponents of god and truth, whose custody was then taken over by the new forces of secular science (Nandy, 2005).

The works of Isabelle Stengers (1984), a philosopher and historian of science, have highlighted this passing on of the baton from one athlete to the other athlete. Questions of truth, unity and god remained pertinent questions thereafter also, contrary to what has been believed to be a radical rupture with the advent of science from the previous model. There was indeed a discontinuity between the two sequences of history but that discontinuity has to do with the temporary halt in the transfer of baton, of authority and power, a 'shifting out', to use a Latourian term from one curve to the other curve, and a change in the tools and methods of inquiry. No doubt, it is through these kinds of discontinuities, that continuity is ensured in history, a carrying forward is achieved from the past to the present (Latour, 2013). Focusing on the discontinuities alone makes us less concerned about the difficult tasks of maintaining inheritance, of preserving the lineage, of carrying forward in time which makes continuity possible. History is neither unbroken, seamless with continuous paths nor discontinuous with isolated blocks forming an island. Science carries forward these eternal questions contained in platonic philosophy, Christian theology and its offshoots along with the same process of immanentization of the world, i.e., to place that ideal, that truth, that God in an increasingly particular and specific location, everywhere yet not located anywhere. Just as their predecessors spread the light and the message in the dark world of ignorance, science could do this in a different way. It has made

the message even more immanent, truth has to shed its extra weight to encapsulate it into a general equation (Stengers, 1984).

It has dealt with nature and made its responsible for filling the pores of nature with that supreme truth and ideal, nature which could embrace that truth contained in a particular equation. Its ultimate objective is to work out a general equation of the world that could shelter the grand design, the truth, the ideal and ultimately even the God. Isabelle Stengers (1984) has shown this aspiration of Science for universalism, illuminating the classical Science starting with Newtonian science. To devise an equation that would explain everything in the universe, the universal equation that would cover the entire landscape, both earthly and heavenly; which is omnipresent, wherever you go, it is there; which is omniscient, it knows everything beforehand; which is omnipotent; nothing happens outside of it, was and still is the dream of Science with a capital S. And it should be noted that most of the practitioners of classical science were firm believers in God. From Newton to Pascal, Laplace to Leibniz, doing science never posed any threat to their idea of ideal (Stengers, 1984). In fact, it was in perfect correspondence with the idea of a single universal truth that was immanent at the same time. However, in terms of landscapes, perhaps this was the flattest that was achieved till now. Removal of remaining key points from the world that earlier cosmologies had preserved, would mean giving no scope to the tentative presence and intervention of God with certain attributes into the world but searching for an abstraction of truth into few ideal equations freed the action from any superficial resemblance to connections whatsoever. Action and movement, which are our prime concerns, have the capacity of increasing geometrically in such type of a terrain. The lighter the weight you carry on a road with obstacles, the faster you can travel and freer your actions can be (Bauman, 2000; Boltanski, 2005).

Apart from new arrangements brought in, what happened in capitalism or modernity was the tremendous increase in the volume and the speed with which novelties were produced (inventions and productions). The magnitude of innovation didn't give the people enough time to accommodate and adjust to the changes taking place. And it is this change of speed that has made all the difference with modernity. Using the terminologies of a curve plotted on the graph, we can say that the numerical values of its parameters increased enormously. If we approach the question of capitalism or modernity in this way, we would find that it is the phenomenon of accelerated speed on a desertified landscape which has made all the difference. It is this desertification which has subsumed all the distinctiveness of different spaces into the homogeneity of a single space, occupied by mere objects. Zizek (1997) alludes to this homogeneity of space when he describes the multicultural world as a space comprising only of tourist places; and the only way an individual can enter this space is by being a traveller.

In retrospect, some kind of correspondence could be established between the present reality and its potential source. But that would be a convenient method of bringing past into the present for the purpose of justification, of developing some kind of idea as the driving force of history. Protestant ethic might have compatibilities with the capitalistic enterprise, but it would have no power of its own without the scientific inventions taking place at that time. Steven Shapin has made us aware that Hobbes's leviathan would have remained a fairy tale and Boyle's air pump (Shapin and Schaffer, 1985) a mere artifact on its own without their coming together to provide an impetus for a new arrangement of the state. Or, Adam Smith's economics wouldn't have created the wealth of nations without boarding James Watt's steam engine. The main argument in all these cases should not be missed out, which is not directed only to the base and superstructure or of spirit and body but which is about the engagement with the landscapes of the world.

We saw the progressive immanentization of the world with each successive series in the long history and the subsequent covering of the landscapes with their key points. If we could localize these ideals evolved through centuries, we would find that the space covered in the external world has been constantly shrinking and the mediators necessary for reaching that ideal are almost reduced to zero. Externality of relations has been replaced time and again with a completely different set of internal architecture inside humans, whether it is heart or spirit or mind. The repository of activity is 'Heart', when the truth is approached by theology, it involves 'mind' and at another level it has to deal with 'science'. Action and movement on the ground increase in proportion with the flatness of the terrain. Articulation of the truth, clearing of the space, extending the reach of the truth, ensuring the ease of mobility, acting at a distance from a fixed point and finally, to be universal without moving an inch, are the different ways through which people have been engaged with the world and with the task of universalism. Flatness of terrain can be understood with the help of an idol and the place inhabiting it demands certain codes of behavior and movement in and around its vicinity from an idolater. Idolater, idol, the place and specific codes, together form a landscape which has an uneven surface or key points. But if that idol is represented by an inanimate object like stone, the same type of behaviour as is normally expected in the case of an human cannot be executed around it. At most, it can only be discretionary depending strictly on political alignment between humans. This type of terrain is somewhat smoother compared to the other terrain. Going along this way, even landscapes can be measured in terms of the quantity of world taken into account.

Two kinds of trends could be visible in these rough outlines of the world shaped by history. On the one hand, the world has been progressively filled with new entities, new lands, with objects of invention, exploration and production, while on the other hand, ideas about the world, about truth, reality,

god, objects and actions have been increasingly confined within the shrinking spaces so as to totally remove them from the external world and also from the sources of truth. They are present in the world but absent from the idea the world is all about. In terms of vectorial representation, these two trends have exactly opposite directions, one moving from being less populated to more populated, while the other from being more populated to less populated. Even the diversity of demography (which includes both humans and non-humans) has the same directionality (see Figure 1).

CONCLUSION

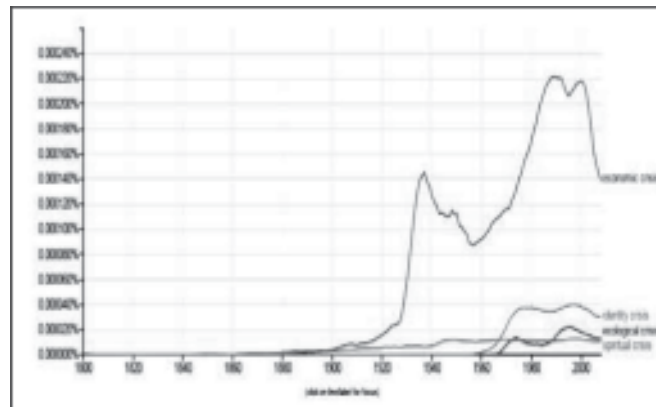
We can see from the Figure 1 the totally opposite directions of these streams. Mere increase in the presence of things in the world didn't ensure a position for them in the ideal of the world. They were denied the ontological status, the truth value of their existence and therefore lacked the proper codification essential for situating them within relations and mediations. At best they could be jumbled together inside epistemology, which did not deal with truths but only their representation and projections in the world. There has been a bifurcation of the world in the form of ontology and epistemology but more precisely in the form of one and many.

The relation between one and many that existed in history has been that of one against the many or one against the rest. One was not the outcome of unity achieved by many (Tarde 2012) but a denial by one of the others, of the validity and truth value of the rest beforehand. The unity of world as manifested in universalism was achieved through constant immanentization of the world, whereby reality was stripped of its truth value and only a specific ideal of the world, which was both highly transcendental and purely immanent, was projected as the only truth to be known. Everything else was just an illusion, or an outgrowth denying access to it. What had to be achieved as an epilogue, i.e. the unity of the world, was done in the prologue itself, before going out into the world.

What we are witnessing today whose one of the manifestations has been the advent of ecological crisis, can be summarized from all the discussions we had so far. It speaks of our inability to take control of the things produced by human action. Things which were deemed incapable of posing any kind of perplexity before, are reflected in actions whose masters we were supposed to be, in spite of realizing that these actions are plunging us ahead for destruction. This realization becomes even more poignant considering the fact that none other than humans themselves, in their enthusiasm for newly discovered truths, have repeatedly taken recourse to destroying everything that so long restricted their actions and movements and now, as a result of which, they are having difficulties in both locating themselves and in distinguishing good actions from bad actions. What these successive historical cosmologies achieved were the progressive desertification of the world, where everything

was subsumed in the ground without any distinguishing key points. In the absence of the key points and geo- spatial markers, humans are left on their own with fallible devices to negotiate the world. And it is no surprise that they are finding it difficult to do that. Along with re-enchantment (Stengers, 1984), what we need are cosmologies ready to invest in the world and its future. What we need is having worldviews whose spaces are not empty landscapes but filled with key points and markings, giving the space its peculiarity and its individuality. The paper has tried to present a brief history of the world and its worldviews from the position of things; how they were successively devalued into objects with no truth value. In the end we can say that one of ways to test any worldview (cosmologies and ideologies) of its sustainability is to check whether it is populated by things having agency or mere objects.

Graph 1



(Source: Google books NGRAM viewer)

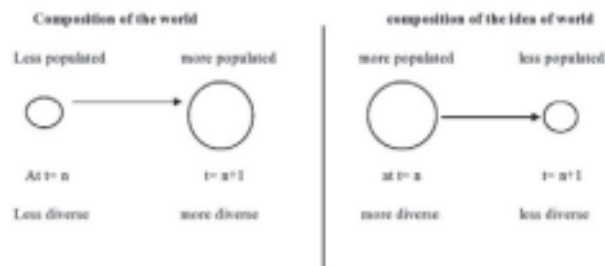


Figure 1. Successive composition of the world and the associated idea of the world.

NOTES

- 1 The author is referring to the famous debate which happened between Henri Bergson and Albert Einstein on the question of time in 1922.

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Soul Loss and Retrieval: Understanding the *Mi Amua* Ritual of the Garos

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Abstract: The concept of soul and soul loss is seen in many societies across the world. Among Garos of Northeast India, it is intricately connected with concepts of life and death, of nature and religion, and their worldview. The soul emanates in different forms in different worlds – in the living world, it is the inherent life-giving force in humans and non-humans; and in the world of the dead, it is the unseen malevolent or benevolent ghost. In that which transcends life and death, are a number of spirits variously known as *mite*, *nawang*, *skal*, etc. As long as the soul remains, a person is alive. When it becomes weak or is spirited away, the human body becomes weak and burdened by all bodily ills. When this happens, one falls sick and needs to be cured. Just as a human soul can become weak and can be spirited away, so too other non-human entities – chief of which is the paddy soul. This paper deals with the concept of soul, its loss, and retrieval in paddy, the most important crop of the Garos. The data for this paper were collected through fieldwork conducted from March 2013 to April 2014 in village Gondenggre in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. Much of the data were gathered through observation and interview of the Songsarek and Christian Garos of the said village, but for transcription and analysis of specific rituals, audio-visual aids were extensively used.

Key words : Garo, soul loss, paddy soul, paddy goddess, soul retrieval, rituals

INTRODUCTION

In an article published in 1920 in *Folklore*, W. H. R. Rivers stated that the soul-substance resided in the living body and left it at death, when another spiritual entity, the ghost, came into existence. Hence, he considered the double existence of the soul, since it lived on after death as a ghost. In Chinese folk religion too, the number of souls is a topic of constant debate and controversy – whether there is one soul, three souls, or a dozen souls (Harrell 1979).

This soul or soul-substance, however, in its personal manifestations, can separate itself temporarily from the body during life as well (Rivers 1920). It can be extracted from the body by supernatural beings, evil spirits or ghost of the dead (*ibid.*), thus leading to soul loss. Achterberg (1985) characterizes soul loss as an injury to the core or essence of one's being; reflecting concerns with the essence of crucial aspects of the self (Ingerman 1991), involving the loss of, or injury to, fundamental aspects of personal identity. This injury to one's essence is manifested in despair, disharmony, and loss of meaning in life and feelings of belonging and connection with others (Winkelman 2004). Within the shamanic worldview, this 'disease' has two origins, both related to the separable soul (Reece 2010). First, when the soul or a part of the soul is separated from the body, creating soul loss; and second, when some foreign element from the spirit world is introduced into the body. Sometimes the two

combine in a form of possession in which an entity from the spirit world occupies the body to the extent that the separable soul of the patient is forced out.

In Latin America, this state is referred to as *susto* (trans. soul loss: literally 'fright of the soul'). *Susto* is considered a folk illness attributed to having a frightening experience which includes soul loss (Wikan 1989). A study conducted by Glazer et al. (2004) showed that soul loss is more often equated with death – and what was thought to have left the body may not be the soul but rather a vital force. Interestingly, the diagnosis of spirit loss and fright in Quecha Indians of Peru reveals a crisis of identity: sufferers represent non-humans and they succumb to fright or soul loss because of an emic concept of vulnerability that transcends the characteristics of gender and age usually associated with soul loss cross-culturally (Greenway 1998). These culture bound syndromes are psychosocial in origin and a product of the cultures in which they occur (Crandon 1983). Thus, the process of soul retrieval is culture specific, and rituals for its retrieval would differ from one culture to another (Rubel 1964, Lindquist 2004). Soul recoveries usually involve the shaman's dramatic enactment of battles with terrifying and threatening spirit images that symbolize disowned and repressed aspects of the self (Walsh 1990).

Among Garos², a tribal community residing mostly in the Garo Hills region of Meghalaya, the concept of the soul is intrinsic in their worldview, just like other communities across the world. However, unlike others, they also believe in a soul in paddy, referred to as *mijanggi* (trans. *mi*=paddy/ rice, *janggi*=soul). This paper discusses the concept of soul and soul loss existent in the germination, growth and harvest of paddy among Garos – irrespective of religious affiliations³, eventhough it is clear that much of the animistic beliefs and practices are followed by the Songsarek Garos. In discussing soul loss (in paddy), the paper also attempts to look into issues of soul retrieval, and the rituals and practices thereof, so that paddy grows lushly and provides succour and life to the people.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical aspects of this paper are an outcome of several years of the author's fieldwork in different Garo villages in West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, and in Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam. For the primary data on the *Mi Amua* ritual, data presented herein is collected from the Songsarek³ Garos of village Gondenggre, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. Understandably with the coming of Christianity, much of the traditional rituals have disappeared, or become diluted; and found in practice only among the Songsarek.

Gondenggre is located in Rongram Tehsil of West Garo Hills district in Meghalaya, India. It is situated about 18km away from sub-district headquarter Rongram and 36km away from district headquarter Tura. Gondenggre has a total population of 588 individuals (Fieldwork 2013), and 123 households, with a sex ratio of 102.027. The literacy rate is 70.56%, even though the number

of people who attended secondary schooling and beyond is minuscule. At present, there is one government LP school, one SSA school, and one private LP school run by Roman Catholics; and one ICDS centre in the village. The nearest PHC is at Rongram, and hence majority of the villagers continue to depend on traditional healers. Of the total working population, 86.62% are engaged in agricultural activities – majorly engaged in shifting cultivation and a minuscule (>10 households) in cash crop plantations.

Approximately 10% of the population in the village belong to the Songsarek faith, while a larger number existed a decade ago. This change in the religious affiliations has been aided by the setting up of the Gondenggre Baptist Church and the Roman Catholic Church in the village. The ten localities in the village, namely, Songma, Balsrigittim, Dokagittim, Keragittim, Teskeng bisik, Mebitchigre, Ronggopgre, Walgrogittim, Arokonagittim, and Agal adding, are based on its location and landmarks, and are not in any way connected to socio-cultural factors. The village falls in the Matabeng Matjangchi sub-tribe/linguistic group⁴, and the area falls under the *A·king nokmaship*⁵ of the Chambugong clan. Under the *A·king nokma*, the Tesking bisik locality *nokma* is with Dawa clan, and the Dokagittim locality is with Tegite clan. Except the *A·king nokma* who is a Songsarek, the other two *nokmas* are Christians.

Fieldwork in Gondenggre¹ was facilitated by an 18-month project funded by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi and conducted during March 2013 to April 2014. A survey schedule was initially used to cover the whole village for basic data collection regarding demographic data, and indispensable socio-cultural aspects. Elderly members (both Christian and Songsarek) were interviewed in order to collect information on beliefs and practices connected to the concepts of soul, soul loss and its retrieval. The ritual master, *torua*, and the other shamans⁶ were interviewed to understand Garo cosmology and the different ways of communication with the supernatural beings. Participant observation was majorly used in order to collect information on rituals connected to paddy germination, growth and harvest. An audio-visual recording was also employed for data collection, which were later transferred to the laboratory for transcription and analysis.

RESULTS

Soul and its Variants

Garos, irrespective of their spatial and cultural differences^{3,4}, believe that every living object has its unseen counterpart – the soul, known as *janggi*. Folktales abound about the *janggi*, and how it has a mind of its own. One such tale collected from village Gohalkona (Kamrup district, Assam) narrates how a miserly man loses his soul due to his stinginess⁷.

Beliefs connected to the soul include the following:

1. A human consists of a physical body (*bimang*) and an invisible counterpart, the soul (*janggi*). When asked what the *janggi* looked like, an

elderly woman said: “It is like the wind – gentle – and can be felt”. Her sister added, “You can feel it in the breath that you take – so long as you breathe, you have *janggi*”. Hence, the word, ‘*baljanggi*’ (*balwa*=air/ wind, *janggi*=soul) is synonymously used with the word ‘*janggi*’. The word ‘*balwa*’ is used both for the breath in all living beings as well as air/ wind.

2. Non-human living beings also have a soul. This holds true for large animals like cows, tigers and elephants. Hence, when a cow dies, it is not uncommon for the owner to say, “*Matchu janggi galaha*”, i.e., “The cow’s soul has left”. Some plants too have a soul. Garos are not sure which plants have a soul, but it is accepted by all that the most important crop, paddy, has a soul as well. This soul in paddy is commonly referred to as ‘*mijanggi*’ (trans. *mi*=paddy/ rice, *janggi*= soul). “It is that which gives life to paddy”, informed Jobash, a Christian jhum cultivator, indicating that without it paddy would be non-existent.

3. The soul may leave a body temporarily or permanently. If temporarily, the ritual master (*torua*) can bring the soul back and if permanently no amount of rituals will bring the soul back. It is believed that temporary departure is aggravated due to the person not taking care of the soul⁷, an attack by malevolent spirits or demons, and due to non-adherence of traditional societal norms as laid down by the deities.

4. Everyone and everything that has life can die. Upon death, the soul ceases its bond with the body, and it will stop breathing – thus giving a physical sign of the soul leaving the body. As a consequence of death the soul transforms into a ghost (*mimang*), and remains so till his/ her rebirth⁸. Some malevolent souls might turn into a *skal*, which can be loosely translated as a demon, and either manifests as or is associated with insects like beetles or fireflies. Powerful *skals*, however, are usually not of human origin, but supernatural spirits, and feed on people – drink their blood and eat their liver, and devour their soul. Being bitten by a *skal* causes severe illness, and frequently results in death.

5. Souls like to roam. They are not subject to any limitations regarding space and time. Souls can move from one place to another – across rivers and mountains. In dreams people are believed to see through means of their roaming souls. When one dreams of distant places it is explained thus – the soul moved out while the body was still in sleep, and roamed around in freedom. This is how Garos explain the meeting of distant relatives and deceased people (whose souls are still wandering) in their dreams.

6. Souls of some people can split and take the form of animals simultaneously. This is called *pila* (transformation). Transformation into an animal form can best be explained as a shape-shifter, i.e., were wolf, were tiger etc., however differing in the fact that as the soul manifests and dominates in the animal form, its human form exists parallelly but becomes passive, and vice versa. This transformation involves mostly tigers, but some people are

transformed into animals such as elephants, snakes, and deer. Such an animal has a soul of its own in addition to which it is associated with a human soul. Since the soul is believed to manifest itself in a shadow these animals are said to cast two shadows. People are normally transformed into an animal of the opposite sex – men transform into female animals, and women into male animals. Transformed tigers are particularly attracted to funerals. Transformed people⁹, who are unable to attend a funeral because they live far away or due to ill-health, are believed to come as a tiger to the cremation ground or graveyard in the ensuing night.

Paddy Soul and Connected Rituals

Paddy, locally called *mi*, along with its different species, has its invisible counterpart pervading the visible grain. This invisible part is referred to as *mijanggi* (i.e., paddy soul), whose mother is Minima Kiri Rokkime. Minima Kiri Rokkime is variously referred to as *minima* [‘mother of paddy’ (*mi*=paddy/ rice, *ma*=mother)], *mijanggi* [‘paddy soul’ (*mi*=paddy/ rice, *janggi*=soul)], or the ‘*mite* (spirit/ deity) overlooking paddy’. Garos believe in a number of *mite* – an all pervading spirit/ deity¹⁰, a variant of the soul – that exist in nature. Thus, they are life giving forces and responsible for all life and death. For instance, Misi Saljong, who appeared in human form and transacted with mortals in the past (Rongmuthu 1960), is the giver of all materials to human beings – such as agricultural practice, bountiful harvest, a long and happy life etc. Goera causes thunder and lightning, and his brother Kalkame holds in his hands, the lives of people and guarantees safety from wild animals, aquatic fauna, and all kinds of diseases. Similarly, Minima Kiri Rokkime (henceforth referred to as Rokkime) is the paddy spirit/ deity/ soul. So long as this soul exists in paddy, the latter manifests in lush growth free from all diseases, and bearing abundant fruit; but once the soul departs, just as in human life, paddy too withers and dies.

Like the human soul, the paddy soul is also unseen and invisible, visible only in its physical form – the paddy plant – from the stage of sapling through maturity. The presence of the soul can be gauged in the following words of the informants: “It is healthy and green”, “It is growing as expected”, “It is growing beautifully”, and “It is stronger and bigger than the weeds”. If the above is not seen, then it is strongly believed that the paddy soul is no longer residing in the plant, and thus there occurs a soul loss. This lost soul can be retrieved only through a series of rituals referred to as *Mi Amua*, even though there are other rituals connected to paddy.

In order to keep the mother/ soul of paddy happy and satisfied, which will manifest in a good year’s crop, Songsarek Garos conduct a series of sacrificial rites (*krita*), which take place in a cyclical manner (Table 1) – starting from the first ritual to the last in one agricultural season. It has to be underlined that these rituals are connected to cultivation of hill paddies, i.e. *jhum*, and not the newly introduced wet paddy with the plough.

Table 1 *Rituals connected to the Paddy Soul*

Sl. No	Ritual	Order of ritual	When conducted	Purpose of ritual	Where conducted	Manner of ritual	Who conducts
1	<i>Rokkime Ringama</i>	First	March	Calling upon the paddy soul/ deity to come and reside in the fields	In the jhum field	An altar is constructed in the field; a hen or rooster is sacrificed; prayers are recited.	Any <i>kamal</i> can conduct; but animal sacrifice is done only by the <i>torua</i> ⁶ .
2	<i>Mi Amua</i>	Second	June-July	Enticing and appeasing the soul/ deity to return to the fields	In the jhum field, and followed by a ritual at home	The main altar is constructed in the field; a hen/ rooster and a pig is sacrificed; prayers are recited; 'pouring/ offering of rice beer' ritual is conducted at the main post of the residential house.	Any <i>kamal</i> can conduct; preferably the <i>torua</i> .
2	<i>Ambi Rimona</i>	Third	August-September	Bidding goodbye to the soul/ deity	In the field, and followed by a ritual at home	At the same altar constructed in as Sl. 2 a hen/ rooster is sacrificed; prayers are recited; 'pouring/ offering of rice beer' ritual is conducted at the main post of the residential house.	Any <i>kamal</i> can conduct; but preferably the <i>torua</i> .

Source: Fieldwork (2013-14)

The first ritual connected to paddy soul/ spirit is *Rokkime Ringama* which takes place sometimes in March, once the hill plots have been set on fire. Immediately the next day (after the fire), the first ritual of the agricultural cycle called *Agalmaka* takes place in order to cleanse the land of pollution which is believed to have set in due to the fire (which killed plants, insects and small animals). Once the land is cleansed, then *Rokkime Ringama* is conducted calling upon the soul/ deity to come and reside in the fields. Only after the ritual is completed, the paddy seeds will be sown. The second ritual is *Mi Amua* which take place sometime in June-July after the rains when paddy saplings start to grow. This is conducted to call upon *Rokkime* to continue

residing in the fields, or if already deserted, to call her back. Garos strongly believe that unless the paddy soul/ deity continue to reside in the paddy plants, they will not grow as expected and lead to drought and famine. The third ritual is *Ambi Rimona*, popularly known as *Ahaia* in other places, conducted in August-September as the paddy harvest nears to an end. This is a ritual that takes place on the last day of paddy harvest, bidding goodbye to Rokkime from the fields, escorting her to the granaries, and only to call her back the next agricultural cycle through the *Rokkime Ringama*. This completes the ritualistic cycle connected to the growth and maturation of paddy.

Mi Amua (*mi*=paddy/ rice, *amua*=incantation/ prayer), the focus of this paper, is usually performed in the last week of the month of June or the first week of July, when the saplings are tender and are just beginning to sprout in the fields. As the saplings are growing, the cultivator finds many faults with it – it is not growing as lushly as it should, there are caterpillars and termites, and there are too many weeds. *Sambasia*, the pre-preparation, is completed a day before – it is arranged so that the ritual can be conducted in a timely manner. On the morning of the ritual, people assemble at the *nokma*'s (chief) courtyard and move together to the jhum field with the required materials, including pig(s), a hen/ rooster or both, and a pot of rice beer. Meanwhile, in *Sambasia*, three altars were erected in different shapes and sizes – (a) Chabolma (for Rokkime) (*Fig. 1*), (b) Rakasi (a malevolent spirit/ deity who spreads sickness in crops), and (c) Miasi (a minor spirit/ deity).

Rokkime is the main deity who is responsible for the health of paddy, and hence the main altar Chabolma (*Fig. 1*) is dedicated to her. This is the largest altar and one that requires a number of items and sufficient time for construction during *Sambasia*. Rakasi is said to be the main culprit who causes destruction to paddy, and whose attacks force Rokkime to leave the field, and hence a separate altar is made for him in order to appease him. Miasi is a lesser spirit/ deity whose main duty is to look after the paddy crops, but due to the malevolence of Rakasi, she is unable to do so.

Mi Amua comprises of the following in chronological order :

1. *Churugala* (pouring of rice beer) is first conducted at the main altar as an offering of the first draw of beer to the deity/ soul of paddy.
2. Incantation to Rokkime begins calling upon her to reside in the fields.
3. Pig(s) and fowl(s) are sacrificed and the blood smeared on the altars for Rokkime, Rakasi and Miasi.
4. The entrails are taken out, and portends are read.
5. Continuation of incantation to Rokkime at the altar, calling upon her to return to the fields.
6. Two smaller altars are erected - (a) at the boundary of the jhum field, so that the paddy soul does not wander off to another field; and (b) at the tri-junction of the road leading to the field, as an announcement to all (humans and spirits) that *Mi Amua* has been conducted.

Figure 1
Chabolma altar for Minima Kiri Rokkime



Source: Fieldwork (2013-14)

7. The party returns to the *nokma*'s house where *Churugala* is performed followed by beating of the sacred drums and gongs, and playing of flutes etc.

Figure 2
Reading the entrails for omens



Source: Fieldwork (2013-14)

Note: Left: The intestines of the sacrificed chicken are being read. Since the dung is uneven, it was not a good portend. Right: The protrusion of the liver of the sacrificed pig is read, and it signified good portends.

Retrieval of Paddy Soul

The main principle behind the *Mi Amua* ritual is to call back the paddy soul/deity enticing her to return to the fields (*Fig. 3*). For just as human souls can wander or die, the paddy soul too can wander off. Just as a human soul can be spirited away by *nawang* and other demons like *skal*, the paddy soul can be chased away or forced to retreat due to the misdeeds of demons like Rakasi and others. These are mischievous malevolent spirits/ demons who cause bad harvest. Scared of their mischief, Rokkime, reportedly leaves the jhum fields and goes far away across the waters and goes into hiding in caves and rock shelters.

Figure 3
The *torua* calling out to Minima Kiri Rokkime



Source: Fieldwork, 2013-14.

As a part of the *Mi Amua* ritual, the *torua* pours rice beer at Rokkime's altar, blows the *wapipi* (bamboo pipe) and invokes upon her to return by saying the following:

“O Rokkime! Do you hear me?
O Rokkime! Do you hear me?
Come back from the land of Ajong Moipa,
Come back from the pond of Banggal Dingipa.
Set out and come straight, O mother of paddy!
I am calling you O mother of paddy into my jhum field,
I am calling you into my jhum field.
Come out from the ocean, O mother of paddy,
Come out from your bathing place,
Climb up from bottom of the ocean,
From the wave of the Songdu,
Come on mother of paddy, come my beautiful *ambi*...

Mother of paddy, I am
 Keeping a stool for you to sit,
 Keeping a *miringkong* to stand up,
 To sleep there is *miampok* for you.
 I am not calling mother of paddy, unnecessarily.
 Beautiful mother you will not to be empty handed.
 Come, mother of paddy, climb up,
 Come, beautiful grandmother set out...

Keeping precious ornaments for you,
 I have a bangle for your forearm.
 Come, Rokkime, mother of paddy,
 Climb up, come on beautiful grand mother...

Climb up, mother of paddy,
 With happiness, set forth!
 All creatures of the earth are mourning for you,
 The mother of water is mourning for you,
 For who will breastfeed them?
 Under whose tender care, will they be safe?

Come on mother, climb up,
 Come on grandmother, set forth,
 Set forth, mother from the place where you are,
 O mother of paddy, stand up, set forth,
 I am, to my own jhum field, mother,
 I am calling my mother."

In studies of the spirit and spirit possessions, it is seen that ethnomusicology plays an important role as a medium between the living and the spirits (Jankowsky 2007). In the incantation of the above, the comforting tunes of the *wapipi*, along with the priest's soothing words possibly act as enticement to the paddy soul being called back. As the *torua* calls upon the paddy soul, the rest of the congregation (men who are related to the house who 'own' the plot of land⁵) sit around in solemnity.

The invocation of the priest continues whence he calls upon her as the 'most beautiful mother', the 'best of all', and offering her the 'best of the rice beer', and sacrificing animals for her. As part of enticement, she is offered a *miringkong* (bamboo structure) to stand on, and *miampok* (bamboo stool) to sit on. She is repeatedly informed that everyone is mourning for her – creatures of the earth and water. She is repeatedly referred to as 'mother', 'grandmother', and 'nurturer'. She is also constantly reminded that she will not go empty handed – animals, rice beer, and even ornaments would all be hers. It is

believed that due to such enticements the paddy soul returns and resides in the jhum fields.

The conduct of this ritual is an integral part of the Garo agricultural cycle. The time of its conduct is purely upon the *kamal* or *torua* for it is he/ she who decide when the paddy soul is being spirited away, or has already been spirited away. It is again the same ritual master who decides when to call her back, and in what manner – whether the sacrifice of one rooster or pig will suffice, or sacrifice of more animals is required.

In order that the paddy soul continues to reside in the fields, the following practice is seen in many villages where jhum cultivation is still going on, irrespective of religious affiliations:

1. Loud whistling, noisy laughter, and making a nuisance of oneself is avoided in the jhum fields, which is considered sacred, especially during the season when paddy saplings are growing. It is widely believed that loud and irritable noises would discomfort Rokkime, and she would leave the land.
2. Great care is taken to keep the environs of the jhum land free from garbage and litters. A rubbish bin made of bamboo spikes is a very common feature seen in Garo jhum fields. Dirt, just like loud noise, could be a trigger for Rokkime to leave the fields.
3. Traditionally paddy was reaped with bare hands (which is still witnessed in interior villages) without the medium of a gadget like iron sickle or iron knife. The underlying belief is that the contact of iron would either kill or chase Rokkime away from the fields. Thus, Garos would reap paddy by tearing or plucking it with their bare hands.
4. Just before harvest, *mijjangi* can be treacherously spirited away by demons, the chief of whom is Rakasi. To prevent the spiriting away of the paddy soul from the standing stalks, cultivators every day during harvest carefully tie a knot or two at the top of the grain bearing paddy stalks.
5. *Ahaia*, the harvest ritual, is a solemn affair conducted in the fields. Here, on the last day of harvest, a sheaf of paddy is symbolically cut off with an iron sickle to signify the end/death of Rokkime in the fields. However, as Rokkime is carried home from the fields (the symbolic sheaf after the ritual), the congregation maintains silence, and refuses to talk/answer anyone they might meet on the way – for they strongly believe that if they talk to a passerby, Rokkime might go away with him/ her.
6. Only after the *Ahaia* ritual is concluded at the *nokma*'s home, the taboo on playing drums, singing, whistling, laughing etc. is lifted, and people are free to make merry.

CONCLUSION

In many societies the concept of the soul is not necessary to explain or deal with culture and is generally mentioned only in psychiatric context. Normal human behaviour does not require any explanation except in its absence. However, among Garos the concept of soul is an integral part of their culture (both at the personal and communal level) which manifests itself in their day to day life and thus controls their behaviour to a large extent. Thus, a person would think twice before killing an animal or even how they speak/ act towards another human – for this human behaviour affects their soul while living and more so once dead. This concept of the soul among Garos is transferred to non-human beings, chief of which is paddy, especially jhum paddy.

The relation between the soul and the body is intricate. The soul separates either voluntarily or involuntarily when it is forcefully ejected out. The former takes place when the soul roams on its own, or when the body does not treat the soul well. The latter takes place when demons such as *nawang* or a malevolent ghost (*mimang* or *skal*) may take the soul away. The disappearance of Minima Kiri Rokkime, the paddy soul, too is a result of other malevolent spirits who succeed in chasing her away. However, it is accepted by all that when the soul departs, the human body falls sick and dies. In paddy, it manifests in a bad crop and poor stunted growth with attacks by termites, ants, and caterpillars.

What a soul may do before birth, what happens when someone loses it, how it sometimes travels to other realms, how it can possess a body not its own, and what it changes into after death, is an interesting subject altogether. A human soul is always found attached to a human body. However it can roam all around. On death, it becomes a ghost, and sojourns to the land of the dead, or remains in other places depending on the manner of death. After a spell of stay in the land of the dead, the soul attaches itself to a new born baby and thus is re-born in body again. Thus, it is a cyclical movement for the soul – both human and non-human. For the paddy soul too, the paddy spirit/ soul is called upon to dwell in the fields just before the seeds are sown. As they are growing, when the paddy spirit/ soul disappears, she is recalled with enticements. Then at the end of the harvest, she is sent back, to be recalled the next year.

Despite scientific approaches negating the presence of a soul in the physical being, empirical narratives reveal its existence. That a soul exists finds manifestation in the ethos of the Garos – their cultural behaviour and belief system. Sacrifices, incantations and appeasements of the traditional believers are at present replaced by prayers to the Christian God, and use of amulets to ward off the evil effects of malevolent *mite*, *skal*, *nawang* and *mimang*; nevertheless, the concept of the soul, its loss, and retrieval continue to form the crux of Garo worldview, whether they are Christians or Songsareks.

NOTES

- 1 I acknowledge Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, which funded the ethnographic fieldwork (2013-2014) through which data on *Mi Amua* ritual has been collected. I also acknowledge the help rendered by my research assistant, Venybirth Ch. Marak, and all the informants from village Gondenggre, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya.
- 2 Garos are well-known in anthropological circles as one of the few living matrilineal people, whose matrilineality exists on five pillars – lineage, residential pattern, inheritance, succession, and avuncular status. Once born, a child, irrespective of sex, is inducted into the mother's lineage and clan (*machong*), into which he/ she remains even after death. Matrilocality is the norm – post-marital residence for a man is in his wife's mother's house, in which he remains permanently if his wife is the inheritress (*nokna*), or temporarily (till he builds his own house) if his wife is the non-inheriting daughter (*agate*). In case of more than one daughter, the lion's share of the property as well as the responsibility of looking after elderly parents and relatives passes on to the inheritress. Succession of chieftainship (*nokma*) passes from one man to another man, but through women – thus, a man married to the chief's inheritress daughter, will eventually become the *nokma* on the death of his father-in-law. The maternal uncle holds the supreme position in the lineage and clan, since he is the socially accepted leader of the kinship group(s).
- 3 Traditionally Garos were animists, referred to as Songsarek; Today, approx. 90% are Christians. Eventhough 'Songsarek' refers to Garos who follow the traditional animistic religion as opposed to Christianity, Hinduism or Islam, the believers themselves refer to each other as '*mite manigiparang*' (trans. 'one who worships spirits/ deities'), and it is only recently that they have started calling themselves as 'Songsarek'. This, therefore, appears to be a term imposed on them by the others such as the missionaries, Christian Garos, etc.
- 4 Garos comprise of a number of sub-tribes having linguistic variations. Playfair (1975[1909]) talks about 12 'tribal divisions', Majumdar (1980) mentions 9 'sub-tribes' and Sangma (1984) 12 'dialectical and cultural groups'. The Matabengs, discussed in this paper, are a sub-tribe of the Garos living in the areas near the Arbella range.
- 5 The traditional political system of the Garos is the system of *nokmaship*, which is a hereditary position that passes on from the incumbent *nokma* to his son-in-law (by virtue of marriage with the inheriting daughter). This position is held by the apical house of a particular clan who owns a geographical area which might consist of one or more villages. Such a land-owning *nokma* is referred to as *a-king nokma* (*a-king* refers to the land owned by a particular clan). Thus, an *a-king nokma* will sometimes have several *nokmas* under his jurisdiction. It is the *a-king nokma* who owns the land of his village/ group of villages – however, with due consultation, he allots land for residence and cultivation to the residents of his village.
- 6 Songsarek rituals can be conducted by anyone who can recite the incantations. Thus, the owner of a piece of land might himself conduct a 'permission ritual' or a 'cleansing ritual'. Such people who can conduct rituals are referred to as *kamal*. However, for rituals connected to welfare of not a household, but the whole village is usually conducted by one who can be referred to as a ritual master by virtue of his/ her ability to communicate with the deities, and his/ her knowledge of the deities. This ritual master is referred to as *torua*, and there can be only one *torua* in one village or cluster of villages. For Garos of Goalpara District (Assam) the *kamal* is the midwife.

- 7 “Once upon a time, there was a miser, who hoarded his money. One day, he went to the weekly market and bought a few pieces of *jagua nakam* (dry fish), wrapped it in a plantain leaf and stored it inside a clay pot. This pot, he hung from the ceiling in the centre of his room so that no one would be able to reach it. Not even a cat. Every day, when he ate his food (comprising of plain rice and salt), he would take a sniff of the *jagua nakam* and feel contented. After the meal was over, he would again store it away. This continued for many days. One afternoon after a hard day’s work, he fell asleep under a tree. While he was in that state, his soul came out of his body and sat on a branch of the tree. The man wanted to wake up but he could not since his soul had left him. He asked his soul why it left him and the soul replied, ‘You have been tempting me with the *jagua nakam* but you never ate it, thereby leaving my hunger unquenched. You are a miserly man; I will not live within you!’ The man pleaded his soul to come back again and again, but all in vain. The soul refused to return to its earlier self and the man was never able to wake up from his sleep.” – Folktale from Kamrup District, Assam.
- 8 Garos believe in rebirth – and the manner of rebirth depends on how one lived during his/ her lifetime. It is believed that the greatest reward for a pious person is to be reborn into one’s own clan. This belief, which continues to be widespread among Songsarek Garos, are also surprisingly found in the everyday belief and behaviour of Christian Garos. Thus, irrespective of religion, there are post-funerary rituals such as *mimang dila* (‘leading the ghost’) and *magual* (gifting the mother’s house of the deceased man) which are followed by both groups – these rituals essentially are believed to lead a dead soul to his/ her mother’s house (i.e., lineage or clan) to be reborn into.
- 9 This is said to be a common phenomenon in Garo villages of Assam where reportedly tiger footprints are witnessed either outside the house of the gravely ill person, or in the burial grounds. These shape-shifting tigers are attracted to bones from a cremation or from the decomposing corpse that has been buried. People who undergo *pila* are aware that their soul is associated with an animal because they see through its eyes in their dreams. For a person who is transformed, the animal acts as a kind of alter-ego. These persons are said to be always sleepy during day time, with a stinky odour, and having a dirty look in terms of clothes, body and even nails. *Pila* persons are cautious to acknowledge that they can transform and prefer to take the secret to their death, for anyone who boasts of being in control of an animal alter-ego exposes him/ herself to the ridicule of others, and accompanying danger.
- 10 Garos believe in a number of spirits (*mite* or *mitde*) residing in the forests, agricultural lands, water, streams, caves, rocks, mountains, thunder and lightning etc. However, some of the spirits became deified as they were propitiated and called upon for permission, for blessings, or even to stay away. Thus, some spirits can be referred to as deities, but not all. Spirits (and deities) were either benevolent or malevolent – bringing blessings or sufferings – while a few assumed both state depending on adherence to norms (believed to be laid down by the spirits/ deities) and their timely propitiation.

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Significance of Myth in the Life of the Abujh Maria of Bastar

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Abstract: Myth is the product of man's spiritual quest for finding an answer to the mysteries of creation in relation to his environment. In the tribal world of Bastar there are a number of legends and myths regarding the creation of the universe and origin of human beings which again are directly linked with their socio-economic and religious life and action. The paper highlights a few of those myths showing how from an abstract level of existence they were put into practice in the life and action of a community, which later got entangled in their daily life almost mechanically as was followed in the supernatural world. This paper deals with some myths in the belief system of Abujh Maria- a particularly vulnerable tribal group who are distributed in Abujhmarh hills of undivided Bastar district, and also seeks to understand the role of myth in their daily life even in this era of open market economy under the impact of modernization and globalization.

Key words : Myth, Belief, Pen, Katta, Dadabhai, Akomama

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The role of myth in human society has always been the subject of critical analysis. A common understanding which has gained ground is with the rise in importance of science and technology myth takes a back seat. But even today in specific context 'mythical thought' (Levi-Strauss, 1978) has not altogether lost its relevance. The present study tries to justify that on the basis of its findings on a specific community.

Myth in its simplest form can be regarded as a highly symbolic account or story of a supernatural or extraordinary event within a culture or subculture (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969). It is the product of man's emotion and imagination, acted upon by his surroundings. With this simple understanding, an attempt has been made here to explore the mythical world of the Abujh Maria tribe of Bastar.

Field work and methods adopted

Field work was carried out among the Abujh Maria from 1991 to 1998, every year in two spells for a period of 10-12 days in the months of May-June and November-December. In the months of May-June, *Kaksar* was performed and Pune-nuka ritual was observed during November-December by the Abujh Marias. During these two periods, all the Abujh Marias of *marh* area get assembled at Orcha. For studying Abujh Maria tribe intensive field work was also carried out for a period of 40 days in the villages of Ader, Orcha, Kodoli, Asnar, Gudari and Juwara of Chote Dongar Pargana and Jatlur and Becha villages. From the administration point of view, the whole of *marh* area had 13 Parganas (Grigson, 1991-Reprinted). The villages under study were more or

less uniethnic and Abujh Maria huts of these villages were dispersed along the forested hilly terrain. In order to cross-check the qualitative data collected from the aforesaid villages, the researcher also undertook a survey to substantiate the data already collected from the villages of Ader panchyat, like Dhondrobeda (uniethnic village with Demor *katta*), Kurmel village (uniethnic village with Usendi *katta*) and Arbel village (uniethnic village with Jatal and Gota *katta*).

This cross-sectional study followed a participatory approach, which provided greater insight and enabled the researcher to understand the process of social integration of the Abujh Marias in relation to the area-wise distribution of the *Pens* and the *kattas* under each *Pen*, which were exogamous in nature. The methods of data collection used in this research are personal interview, focused group interview, revisiting the original sites of data collection and literature review. Initially, the researcher concentrated only on collecting genealogies to know the family history as well as to understand the network of kinship at a glance. Interviews with local government departments and traditional authorities like religious headman (*bhum-gaita* or *kaisyeq-gata*), *manjhi*, the chief of the *pargana* and old knowledgeable persons were also conducted. During such interactive sessions, participants were able to throw light on the role of the myth, revealing the sources that shape their opinion. Group interviews held at Ghotul of Orcha village added further insight. All the proceedings, which were mainly in the local Gondi language, was translated by the interpreter. The interpreter was the local government official at Block Development Office, Orcha, posted there for more than 15 years and was well conversant in Gondi, English, Bengali, Hindi and Halbi-the spoken language of the whole of Bastar. Apart from this, the local school teacher and *Sarpanch* of Orcha helped the researcher in generating empirical data.

Here the data collected some twenty years back have been re-examined in the light of new developments that have taken place in all these years. The researcher, however, feels that because of territorial integrity and close settlement pattern their social life has remained more or less unaffected to the extent that it is not devoid of mythical content. Furthermore, restudy of the community in this line may not be totally out of place; and in any such restudy period (1991 to 1998) of the present researcher could be taken as the baseline information. Such an exercise will help to identify the degree and pattern of changes among the Abujh Maria society and its culture. Of course, it would have been appropriate if the researcher herself could take up the restudy in the same area and locate the old informants to rejuvenate the relationship (Raychaudhuri, 2007) and study their change of views, if any. It would have been a test of the researcher's own perception as well.

Some studies on the role of myth in social life

Hazra (1983) through his study among the Kolam of Maharashtra has shown that they have four exogamous phratries namely, four god phratry (*naling-dial*),

five god phratry (*aid-dial*), six god phratry (*saha-dial*) and seven god phratry (*sat-dial*). The mythical belief system had a compulsive effect on them to follow and practice such marriage rules.

Among the Kolam of Andhra Pradesh (undivided), it is again observed that mythical belief system has divided the community into four phratries (*kher* or *dayyam*), viz, *Yedudayal kher* (seven-spirit brothers' group), *Idudayal kher* (five-spirit brothers' group), *Nalidayal kher* (four-spirit brothers' group) and *Arudayal kher* (six-spirits brothers' group). The *kher* are exogamous in nature, so are clans (*devar*) (Saheb, 2012).

The article by Philip et al. (2014) entitled 'Behind the Myth: Indigenous Knowledge and Belief System in Natural Resource Conservation in North-east Ghana' shows how the traditional belief system and practices associated with it put emphasis on belief in nature, holding nature as a partner in its struggle for existence. The traditional knowledge system regards man and nature as inseparables and is closely knit together. As such, African traditional cultural practices and belief systems are a precept of nature-earth-man relationship. Though the indigenous beliefs, knowledge and taboos contributed immensely and effectively to a general reduction in unsustainable agricultural practices like bush burning, deforestation, farming along water bodies, overgrazing and many more, their mythic connection remains a matter of community-specific explanation.

The setting

Bastar is rich in various types of myth. Myths were functioned even during the Kakatiya kingdom, with their tutelary deity Danteswari Mata. Bastar myths depict bravery, heroism, religiosity, unity, solidarity and all human virtues. These are particularly displayed during Dushera; the great festival symbolizing worship of the tutelary deity of the kings which still is the most important event in the life and culture of the people of Bastar. This is an event where both tribal and non-tribal populations used to participate. Mythically, as per the order of Danteswari Mata, the responsibilities beginning with *kachangadi* or taking permission for the celebration of Dushera festival from the deity up to the symbolic fight to set free the festive *rath* (cart) from the enemies who had stolen it during the festival fell on the *prajas* or subjects (Sarkar and Dasgupta, 2010). There were several steps to be followed in the performance of the Dushera festival. The workload was distributed among all of the tribal, non-tribal people as per the directive of Danteswari Mata. Among those, one of the vividly common myth was eating of new rice, which is observed till date. It is close to the heart of Bastar tribes. Following the instructions of Danteswari Mata, the first eating of new rice was performed by all the villagers during Dushera festival along with their King (now his successor or the nearest kin) at a place named Kumrakot (just outside the town). Kumrakot is a place where it is believed that the king's ancestors first camped on their arrival. Even now they believe in the deity's order and perform the ritual offering of season's

harvested crop to the deity and their ancestors, and from then on all of them together perform ceremonial eating of new rice. The first eating of the new rice by the king along with his tribal subjects clearly signifies the importance of the celebration as a demonstration of the in-group solidarity within the State and the divine Kingship which it represents. However, most tribals still remember it as the time when their Kings used to eat the new rice with those who went to see him and paid their respect to Danteshwari Mata. It appears that the then King of the Bastar State had easy communication with his subjects from distant forested areas of the State, aided by the system of land revenue collection or *pargana manjhi* system. In fact, *pargana manjhi* had a vital role in the functioning of the State and acted as a liaison between state administration and common villagers (Sarkar and Dasgupta, 2010).

The whole Abujhmarh area came under the rule of the Maharaja of Bastar since the time of Raja Purusotham Deo (1468-1534) (Elliot, C. 1856-Dy. Commissioner's notes, Unpublished manuscript, Record Room, Jagdalpur, Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh (now C.G.). Incidentally, the present Raja of Bastar, Kamal Ch. Bhanjdeo was coronated on 19.09.1996, when the researcher was also invited. Thus, the former state organization made use of an indigenous form of political structure, but in doing so renamed it to its advantage (Jay, 1968).

In the tribal world of Bastar there are a number of legends and myths regarding the creation of universe and their deities which again are directly linked with their socio-economic and religious life and activities in this world. As indicated earlier, the paper highlights a few of such myths among Abujh Maria tribe of undivided Bastar district of Chhattishgarh.

Myths among these tribes often act as a moral prohibition surrounding the life and culture of this pre-literate tribal group. The empirical study was conducted in Chote Dongar pargana of AbujhMarh. During the regime of Kings, the Bastar was divided into 88 parganas, each headed by a Pargana *Manjhi*. A number of villages were included under a pargana. For example, in Chote Dongar pargana there were about 24 villages, distributed throughout the mountainous terrain that only allowed transportation of goods by men aided by bamboo shouldered yokes.

AbujhMaria - a socio-cultural profile

Since the present study was conducted among the Abujh Maria tribe of Abujhmarh hills of Bastar, a brief socio-cultural profile of the tribe needs to be given.

Abujhmarh is situated on the North West part of undivided Bastar which presently comes under Narayanpur district and is located on the southern part of Narayanpur Tehsil. On its east lies Narayanpur and Chhote Dongar pargana of Narayanpur Tehsil. Chhote Dongar village check- post is the gate of Abujhmarh region.



The AbujMarh area of the district is an extensive hilly terrain of 3900 km. The Abujh Maria population is distributed in 236 villages. The area is covered extensively with hills and hillocks, interspersed by streams and dense forest. It is ill communicated and was declared as a restricted area by the State Government.

Abujh Maria or Abuj Maria are one of the particularly vulnerable tribes of Abujmarh hills of undivided Bastar. Etymologically, the word Abuj or Abujh means 'the unknown' and marh means 'hill'. The name Abujh Maria is given

to them by the outsiders. They prefer to introduce themselves as 'Meta Koitor' (*meta* means hills and *koitur* is man). 'Koitor' is used by all the Gond people as their generic name. The Koitors are of two types, the Meta Koitor and the Dor Koitor. Those who live in hills or *metabhum* are Meta Koitor and the inhabitants of plains are Dor Koitor.

Traditionally, they are *Penda* (slash-and-burn or shifting hill) cultivators in hilly terrain, covered with jungles, where they live. Till date, they have been practicing *Penda* as their primary source of earning. Along with *Penda*, presently they are engaged in settled plough cultivation, but *Penda* is the most preferred type. Rice is the chief crop produced from plough cultivation, while *kosra* (a kind of millet) is the chief crop of *Penda* cultivation.

It is known that each and every Maria has a *Pen* and a *katta*. *Katta* (like a clan) regulates marriage within the social group. Each *katta* has its own deity called *Pen*. Generally, several *kattas* are clubbed together under a *Pen*. The Abujh Maria people believe that they were originated from their respective *Pens* in a particular *katta*. There are several *Pens* among the Abujh Maria people which are exogamous in nature. These *Pens* have bigger families and relatives in the spiritual world. They are related with each other through blood or marital ties and the Abujh Maria people strictly follow the rules of marriage as their *Pens* do. Though each *Pen* has two sets of relatives, even then all the *Pens* together form more than two divisions. A number of *Pens* always come together and form a group, and there are several such groups, all of which are tied by blood relation or non-marital *bhaiband* ties. They have several other relatives belonging to other *Pen* groups who are either of their *saga* or affinal relatives or *bhaiband* or *dadabhai*, the blood relatives.

From the kinship analysis it is observed that they call their father-in-law and mother's brother, father's sister's husband as *mama* and they call their mother-in-law and mother's brother's wife and father's sister as *ato* instead of addressing the father-in-law and the mother-in-law as *bawa* (father) and *awa* (mother) respectively, despite the relationship is actually that of father and mother. This automatically points to the likely practice of cross-cousin marriage. The present study also reveals that among all the marriage types, cross cousin marriage is the most preferred one.

Other than cousin-marriage, marriage by exchange, levirate (junior) sororate (junior) are also prevalent. In case of marriage they believe to have followed the verdict of their *Pen* deities. They have their own reasons and supporting arguments behind all those marriages. Co-wives are treated by them as sisters and the term of address and term of reference in case of co-wives is the same, which is *Akka / Didi* for the elder and *Hellor* for the younger. Again, the children call their step mother and mother's sister, both elder and younger, by the same term *Pheri/Peri* and *Kuchi* respectively. Clearly, the Abujh Maria represents a close kin structure, which is not free from ambiguities. This is also reflected in their presentation of myths.

Construction of myth as a celestial belief system

Abujhmarh area is a hilly terrain and a forested area. Right from the inception of the society they have nurtured several legends or stories which are transmitted from generation to generation as a part of their oral tradition. These ultimately take the form of community-based myths.

According to one myth, *Bhagwan* who lives in *upor* or *swarg*, that is, heaven or supernatural world, take with him other deities, who also live in *swarg*. They are related to each other either through blood or through marriage. It is believed that in the supernatural world, rules of marriage are strictly followed for maintaining inter-relationship among the deities. When rules framed here are applied to the supernatural world, it has some implications. It may be that the social relations developed here are sanctified with the involvement of supernatural entities.

Regarding the creation of earth and also about the origin of The Abujh Maria people also have myth regarding creation of earth and their origin. According to this myth, initially the earth was very soft and slippery and full of water. There was no human being in the world. *Bhagwan* sent a boar from the forest of the heaven called *Dantemeta* to make the world suitable for human habitation. The boar began to dig the soft mud until it became hard. The rocks of this earth developed from the excreta of the boar. Gradually, our earth became suitable for construction of villages. In course of digging of earth, some places got depressed which later turned into big *nulhas* (cannel). The places where the boar urinated, pits were formed and the urine turned into ponds and rivers. Later, the Heavenly Father sent a frog. The purpose of sending this frog is to level the land by leaping continuously. After that, He formed the Sun called *pord* and the Moon or *lenj*. *Pord* was a male as it was very strong, which could produce extreme heat and rays. Moon or *lenj* produced mild, somber effect creating a very smooth and pleasant atmosphere and was regarded as his wife. They said that both Sun and Moon were symbolized by the wood of *marang* tree. Only one such tree was sent from the heaven to create them. It was done by *Sonkuar*- a god who later became one of the *Pen* gods of the Abujh Maria community. *Sonkuar* placed the Sun on the east side. The Heavenly Father, ordered Sun to give light to the world every day for twelve hours. From then on, the Sun rises every day on the east or *pogiaya* and sets on the west. After the Sun sets, the Moon appears and performs its duty till the next day when the Sun rises again. The stars or *ukkam* are their children. Perhaps the underlying meaning of this myth is to develop a concept of the world where supernatural beings are intricately connected with human beings with all known components.

After the earth became suitable for human habitation, the almighty *Bhagwan* created human beings. He sent two pairs of brothers and sisters- *Neleria* and *Nelire* and *Bumeria* and *Bumire*. He placed both the pairs of brothers and sisters to live in the hills and forests. Later, *Nelariya* was married

to Bumire and Bumariya was married to Nelire- a type of marriage by exchange. The offspring of these two couples gave rise to two social groups of the Abujh Maria people. Each of these two groups was exogamous in nature. The members of a group were tied by *dadabhai* or *bhaiband* or consanguineal relationship. It may be mentioned here that the Abujh Marias have to marry from the other group, members of which are referred by them as *akomama* or *saga* or relatives through marital ties or affinal relatives. Following the marital alliance of Nelariya- Bumire and Bumariya-Nelire, the Abujh Maria consider marriage by exchange as an important type of marriage. This type of marriage has an economic advantage because daughters are exchanged from one family to the other and so less expenditure is incurred. They have several other myths regarding their origin which are similar with this type of myth.

The Abujh Maria people also connect deity to their crops and cereals. The concerned deity is the deity of the earth, known as *Tallurmutte*, who is one of their mother deities. *Tallurmutte* is referred to as *Bhurel Devi*. She lives in Gudari village of Abujhmarh and is regarded as the Rani (queen) of the village. Her husband's name is Kanga. There are several stories on their conjugal life and about their children. It is told that initially Kanga was not willing to sleep together with his wife *Tallurmutte*, but because of his wife's repeated requests he agreed. After sometime she gave birth to seven daughters. They are named as Kolakosh (Kosra), Bismasch (smaller variety of red coloured leafy vegetable), Banajmago (paddy), Pipulpusey (*urad dal*), Armabire (Kang), Ikalire (a type of millet, produced with kosra in the same field) Gondoporki (a variety of millet which looks like Kosra of a bigger size). She gave birth to those to feed her Maria and Muria children. They show respect to *Tallurmutte* for her greatness for giving birth to these seven daughters and thereby ensuring food for the Maria children.

In the village Gudari, there is a sacred grove on the western corner. It is the place of *Tallurmutte*. She is worshipped once in a year and elaborately after every five years. She is offered egg, chicken and other eatable during the ritual. Moreover, they never forget to offer new crop, cereal and new fruits to her. Since they believe that *Tallurmutte* has taken the responsibility of feeding Abujh Maria children, it is the duty of her children to offer new crops of the season first to her and invoke her blessings; and ignoring such a ritual would result in facing her wrath. For example, there is a myth which narrates how a man became greedy after seeing year's new mango fruits and how he could not resist himself and consumed them all. The very next day a tiger entered their village and killed him. The myth, which became a belief, was ultimately accepted as a social norm. According to the customary law of the Abujh Maria, if anybody breaches the norm, he or she will be punished.

Thus, myths are always very important and precious to in the lives of the Abujh Marias. These are the symbolic accounts or stories relating to supernatural or extraordinary events, which became a part of their culture or

subculture. The myths are continually retold and transmitted from one generation to other generation and act as a socializing agent..

Myth in practice:

Among the Abujh Maria, there are myths relating to their social life and social organization. For example, *Bhagwan*, whom they also call Irushpal, lives in *poghobhum* or *upor* or *swarg* that is heaven or supernatural world. He is the sole authority of the universe. Irushpal lives in *paghobhum* along with other deities. These deities are related to each other either through blood relation or through marital alliance. The rules of marriage among the deities is said to be complicated. The relationship of the presiding deities of all the exogamous divisions within an endogamous group is strictly followed by the Abujh Maria people. These marriage rules are very clearly specified in several of their myths.

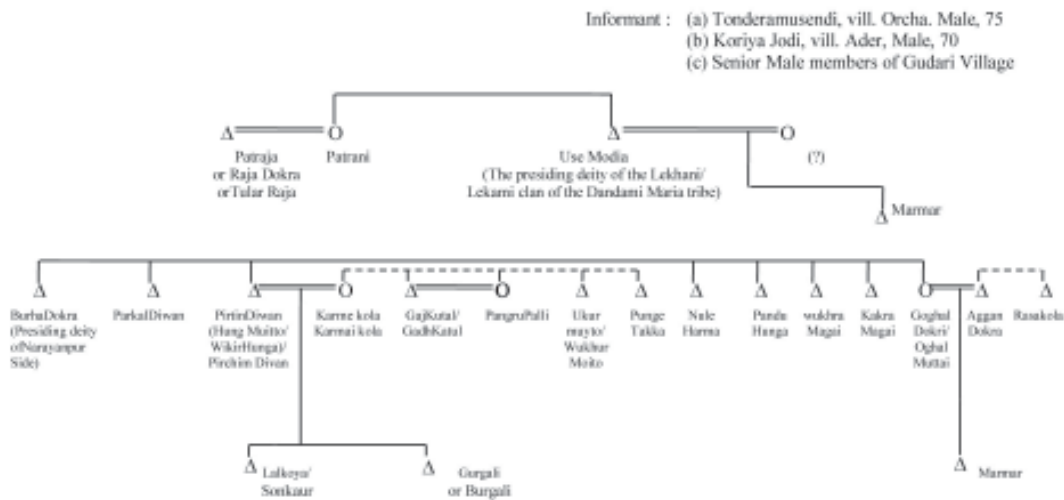
The strong belief of Abujh Maria Gonds in the Supreme God and the deities of the supernatural world play an important role in giving shape to their social formations. According to their myth of origin, in the supernatural world there are a number of deities. The Abujh Maria people believe that each family has its own *Pen* deity, from whom the ancestry or origin is traced. Again, each *Pen* deity has some *kattas* or smaller divisions. Abujh Maria families of each *Pen* are placed under a particular *katta*.

In the mythology of the Abujh Marias, it is narrated that *Bhagwan* created Pat Raja, the oldest deity of Abujh Marias. He was married to Pat Rani. As a rule of the patriarchal society, Pat Raja brought Pat Rani to his own village Mohonar of Mangnar Pargana. Pat Rani actually belonged to Dandami Maria group. Pat Rani's brother's name was U-se Modia. He is the presiding deity of the Lekhami *katta* of the Ghotpal village. Following this mythological belief, in present day, *akomama* or marital relation exist between Dandami Maria and Abujh Maria tribal groups, despite being the members of two different tribal groups.

Here, Pat Raja is again a key social figure who plays an important role in social control. The genealogy of Pat Raja, presented below would throw some light about the total range of his control over Abujh Maria villages through his kin members:

Pat Raja had seven sons. They were Burha Dokra, Parkal or Paikal Deo, Pirtin Dewan or Wikir Hunga or Hunga Muitto, Nule Harma, Pandu Hunga, Wukhra Maghai and Kakra Magahi. Similar to marital practices with Dandami Maria people, they are customarily allowed to arrange marriage with Murias. According to their myth, Pat Raja's eldest son Burha Deo in the supernatural world married a Muria girl named Fulkatti and began to live with her and became the presiding deity of some villages of Narayanpur. The village Narayanpur is dominated by the Muria community. Following the norm of the patriarchal society, the offspring of the Abujh Maria and Muria couple become the member of Abujh Maria group. In this connection, it is important

Figure 1 : Genealogy of Patraja – The Supreme Authority in Celestial World



to mention that Risul Kumar is the brother of Fulkatti. Risul Kumar's son Anga Deo is a very important and powerful log god (life is infused into the log with the performance of some rituals) of the Murias. He exercises similar power with Pat Deo.

Pirtin Dewan, another *Pen* deity, is also known as Parkal or Paikal Deo. In fact, Pirtin Dewan was a single *Pen*, who used to look after his children of Orcha, Juwara, and two other villages. The village Orcha was the permanent abode of Pirtin Dewan. He used to meet his children staying in Juwara and other villages that were under his control. There are many *Pen* deities who have more than one village under their control. The *Pen* deities live permanently in one of the villages and at times the *Pen* deities roam from one village to another. Although Pirtin Dewan lives in Orcha village yet during some rituals or festivals or at times of crisis or sickness he visits other villages that are within his control and stays for a specific period of time. The children of Pirtin Dewan living in Orcha village wanted him to stay permanently in Orcha. However, his children living in other villages did not accept him to stay permanently in Orcha village. As a compromise, Pirtin Dewan divided himself into two halves- one was the usual Pirtin Dewan for Orcha village and the other for Juwara village named Paikal or Parkal Deo. As both are the same, their *kattas* are also the same and are *dadabhai* to each other.

It is told that establishment of a new *Pen* deity or repairing and or construction of a *Pen* deity or log god is a very lengthy and tedious job marked by the performance of several rituals. If mistake occurs at any stage of the ritualistic process, starting from repairing and installation or establishment of a log god, misfortune will definitely befall on the village. In this ritual,



Log God

sacrifice of chicken and pigeon are compulsory. In the tribal world of Bastar, pigeon's blood is an important item for performing any ritual and is considered equivalent to human blood. Previously, in the establishment of a new log god, especially of Pat Deo, one human life used to be sacrificed. The hierarchical position of *Pen* is next to *Bhagwan* – the Supreme Being. All the Abujh Maria people are their children and each of the Abujh Maria family is placed under a particular *Pen*. Each *Pen* has several *kattas*- the smaller divisions are similar to clan. The Abujh Maria children are put in those *kattas*. For example, Pirtin Dewan is the *Pen* deity of the Abujh Maria people of Orcha village. Pirtin Dewan has several *kattas* such as Usendi (Abujh Maria of Orcha belong to this Katta), Wadder /Vedda, Eme, Korami, Deda ,Dodi, Dol, Demor, Gecha (Abujh Maria *kattas* of Pirtin Dewan, live in ChoteTendebeda village area), Ahkal (Abujh Maria of Parkal Dewan live in Juwara village).The *Pens* are always exogamous and so all the *kattas* under a *Pen* are exogamous. *Kattas* of a particular *Pen* are tied by consanguineous or *dadabhai* or *bhaiband* relationship with each other. There is a big list of *kattas* under each *Pen*. All the *kattas* have their respective totems. It is believed that Pirtin Dewan was married with *Pen* Karmaikola mutte- the presiding deity of Ader village. She has several *kattas* under her

control. They have a son named Lalkey or Sonkuar. He is the *gharjavai* of village Thulthuli and became the presiding deity of the village. He also has several *kattas* under his control.

There is a totemic association of *kattas*. Each of these *kattas* has its own totem. For example, Usendi stands for *Bandar* or monkey and the people of Usendi *katta* abstain from killing and eating monkey. Among other tabooed animals, mention may be made of Pattabi (a kind of fish named Ratu fish), Akka (a kind of snake), Koram (a goat), Kohami (a tortoise), Katabi (another kind of goat), Narkaku (also a kind of goat), Netam (a pig), so also is Gottaku.

A list of *kattas* under the control of respective *Pens* among Abujh Marias (Table 1) and their relationship with agnatic groups (Table 2) are given below:

Table 1 : *Kattas* under the control of Pens.

Name of the pen	Kattas under control
1. Pat Raja	(a) Jaterom/Jate (of Chote Dongar and Mangar Parganas); (b) Hukur (only Mongnar Pargana); (c) Alami, (do); (d) Nonde (do)
2. Pirtin/DewanDokra wikir Hunga and Parkal Dewan (Pat Raja's son)	(a) Usendi; (b) Waddar; (c) Erme; (d) Korami; (e) Deda; (f) Dodi; (g) Dol; (h) Gecha, (Chote Tondabera village area); (i) Ahkal (Gudari Village); (j) Demor
3. Nule Harma (Pat Raja's son)	(a) Deda; (b) Parsa; (c) Ete (Kurmer Village); (d) Boke (Kurmer Village, (e) Kodo
4. Pandu Hunga (Pat Raja's son)	Katlami
5. WukhraMagai (Pat Raja's son, Pen deity of village Takveda)	Vetti/Wetti.
6. Kakra Magai (Pat Raja's son)	Netam
7. Sonkuar (Pirtin and Karmaikola's son. Chalcher village)	(a) Parsak / Parsal; (b) Kodlo
8. KarmaikolaMuttai	(a) Jugho/Karme; (b) Jodi/Juri; (c) Mador; (d) Kohanaka; (e) Ichami/Hichmi; (f) Badebako/Barbako; (g) Nighaku; (h) Dondaku; (i) Korami
9. Reka Mudia (Jatlur village)	(a) Jatah/Potam/Poyami; (b) Gota
10. Maramar	(a) Marvi (Taktoli village of Mangnar Pargana)
11. Gogal Dokri/Oghal Muttai	(a) Dhurwa; (b) Dheorai; Dhodi; (d) Vadde.

Kapatdar, Waram Mari and Ukhra Magai are *dadabhai* and Dewan Dokra, Sonkuar, Karnwal, Rekamudia and Karmaikola are all *akomama*. But Waram-Mari and Ukhra Magai do not belong to the same group and they are *akomama* with each other.

Table 2 : Pen - agnatic group relationship

i. Pen- Dewan Dokra	Social significance
Bhaiband/Dadabhai/non-Marital relationship	Akomama/Marital relationship
Pat Raja and all his sons, Sonkuar, WukhraMaghai	Kapatdar, WaramMari, Karmaikola
ii. Pen- Karmaikola Mutte	
Bhaiband/Dadabhai/non- Marital relationship	Akomama/Marital relationship
Karmaikola, Maramar	RekaMudia, Karnwal, Kapatdar,
OghalMuitte/GogalDokri, PongaTakka	Waram Mari, DewanDokra.
iii. Pen-Kapatdar	
Bhaiband/Dadabhai/non- Marital relationship	Akomama/Marital relationship
Again these Waram Mari,	Sonkuar,
are akomama Ukhra Magai	Reka Mudia,
to each other	Karnawal,
	Dewan Dokra*
	Karmaikola**
	Note : *These two are <i>akomama</i> to each other.
	**While, Karmaikola and Karnwal are <i>akomama</i> to each other, but Karnwal and Dewan Dokra are <i>dadabhai</i> to each other..
iv. Pen-Waram Mari	
Bhaiband/Dadabhai/non- Marital relationship	Akomama/Marital relationship
Kapatdar	Wukhra Magai
v. Pen-Wukhra Magai	
Bhaiband/Dadabhai/non- Marital relationship	Akomama/Marital relationship
Kapatdar	Waram Mari

This is an indication that the social organization of the Abujh Maria might not have moiety organization as is generally believed. The society has several smaller social divisions which are either related through *dadabhai* and *akomama* ties.

Again, it was mentioned in their myth that *Bhagwan* divided the area or land of Abujhmarh among the *Pen* deities as per his wishes. Each *Pen* was the owner of his or her portion.

Social relationships are maintained in the Abuh Maria society following the mythological understanding of *Pen* deities in heaven. They follow the same marriage rules set in the heaven and believe that a departure from the rule may affect the peace of marital life. For example, Usendi *katta* of the *Pen* Pirtin Dewan or Wikir Hunga was the owner of the village Orcha. Pirtin Dewan had other villages under his control and automatically they came under his

other *kattas*. Pirtin Dewan was married to Karmaikola Mutte of Ader village. Ader village was under Jodi or Jugo *katta* of Karmaikola Mutte. Karmaikola had some other *kattas* who live in other villages which were under the control of Karmaikola Mutte. Following the myth, the members of Pirtin Dewan and Usendi *katta* were married to Jodi *katta* of Ader village.

The Abujh Marias of Usendi *katta* had ownership of land within the boundary of their *katta*. They cultivate land which are under the control of their *katta*. Similarly, the Abujh Maria of Jodi *katta* is restricted to cultivate lands that are under the control of their own *katta*. They believe that the entire system of ownership and control of land has a mythological background.

CONCLUSION

Modernization and globalization are yet to make much headway in this tribal area. Consequently, Abujh Marias have not fully come out of their secluded existence. In the past, outsiders were not allowed to enter in the Abujhmarh area except on Wednesday– the day earmarked for weekly market at Orch. The businessmen from Narayanpur and Kondagaon used to visit the market with their goods which were mainly exchanged with the Abujh Maria products. The mode of transaction was mainly through barter. *Mahua* was exchanged with rice grains or salt and with some money; the money which they got out of such exchanges were spend in buying vegetables and drinking of *mahua* liquor and gambling. The Minor Forest Produces (MFP), like *phooljharu*, *chiranji*, mushroom that they collected from the forest were bartered with either cereals/ grains or edible oil or ornaments for personal decoration of women. The role of cash was minimal. The weekly market was the place of exchange of ideas regarding organization of various clan rituals, *kaksar* festival and selection of bridegroom as per the dictum of beliefs on the celestial world. Their social life was intricately connected with role of myths covering the celestial world.

In the social context, marriage rules, identification of kin members on the basis of *dadabhai* and *akomama* relations and social functions of *Pens*, as demonstrated by their control over *kattas* and on sustenance activities have a celestial component. No doubt, the Abujh Maria knowledge system was inseparably connected with their belief system. But presently, because of market economy, the mode of relationship has changed. This has widened the gap between the supernatural and the natural or material, and in the process has reduced myth to a position of lesser importance in practical life. However, there has been a renewed emphasis on myth as a mark of self identification by specific communities and Abujh Marias is not an exception to this trend.

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Allelic Variation and Haplotype Diversity of the Dopamine Receptor Gene DRD2 Among the Four Sub-populations of Zeliangrong Naga of Manipur

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Abstract: Zeliangrong is a collective nomenclature of four sub-structured tribes formed by the first syllables of the names of three tribal groups- Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei. However, the nomenclature Zeliangrong is believed to encompass four tribal groups- Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui, believed to be cognate groups. Linguistically they belong to Naga-Bodo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family. There are many written documents where the Zeliangrong are claimed to come from the same ancestor and their origin and migration are well narrated through myths, legends and traditions. However, none have carried out studies based on genetic markers. *Aims:* Allelic variation and haplotype diversity of the dopamine receptor gene DRD2 among the four sub-population of Zeliangrong Naga of Manipur. *Methods:* 292 unrelated individuals belonging to 4 tribal groups of Manipur, India were screened using the three TaqI sites (TaqIA, TaqIB, and TaqID). *Results and Discussion:* All the three sites are found to be polymorphic with greater interpopulation variation seen at the TaqIA site. The overall allele frequencies among the four presently studied groups show close resemblances with each other and indicate a common ancestry for Zeliangrong which is reaffirmed by haplotypes analysis (share seven of the eight haplotypes). Average heterozygosity, analysis of molecular variance (AMOVA) and neighbor-joining tree analysis (constructed from the genetic distance matrix) reveals strong genetic affinities of Zeliangrong populations of Manipur with Chinese populations rather than with other Indian populations.

Key words : Haplotype, allele frequency, genetic, Affinities, Northeast, and Tibeto-Burman.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, unlinked biological markers have been used to study the genetic structure of a population but now linked biological markers forming small haplotype blocks are also being utilized as powerful tools for gaining insights into the population dynamics. One such linked molecular marker is human dopamine receptor gene D2 (DRD2) that is expressed in the central nervous system. The polymorphism at three sites in the DRD2 gene has become an outstanding marker in both evolutionary (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2002, Vishwanathan *et al.*, 2003, Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008, Prabhakaran *et al.*, 2008, Kshatriya *et al.*, 2010, Saraswathy *et al.* 2009, Saraswathy *et al.*, 2010, Sinha *et al.*, 2015) and clinical studies, where the gene is reported to be associated

with neuropsychiatric, behavioral disorders, smoking, alcoholism and other substance use disorders (Gorwood *et al.*, 2000; Noble, 2003; Lerman *et al.*, 2006; Dalley *et al.*, 2007; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). The global survey of haplotype frequencies (Kidd *et al.*, 1998) and various studies from India at DRD2 locus clearly indicate the significance of this gene in studying genetic structure of human populations using haplotype analysis. Thus, in the present study, DRD2 locus has been used to understand the biological consequences in terms of the population structure among the four sub-population of Zeliangrong Naga tribe of Manipur.

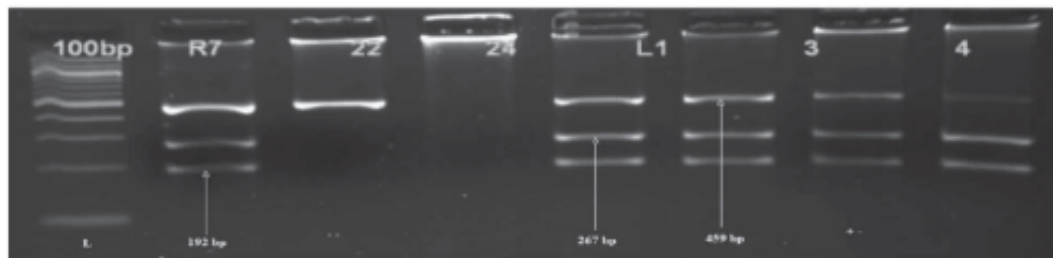
Manipur is a tiny State in North Eastern India. The state is bounded on the east by Burma (Myanmar), on the north by Nagaland, on the west by Assam and on the south by Mizoram. Earlier studies on the population groups of Manipur indicated differential ancestral affinities of various groups. These ethnic groups consist of Meitei, Naga, Kuki, Meitei-Pangal and immigrant populations. The study population 'Zeliangrong' is subdivided into four groups namely, Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui. Zeliangrong has a unique history and has not been studied so far regarding their genetic and parental affinities. According to Tohring (2010), the total population of Zeme and Rongmei is 34,100 and 90,372 respectively. The total population of Liangmai is 50,000 (Newmei, 2012) and Inpui is 3,000 (Frawley, 2003). They are settled in North-Eastern region of India in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Linguistically they belong to Naga-Bodo subgroup (Thurgood and Lapolla, 2003) of the Tibeto-Burman family (Grierson, 1903). They are known as the four cognate tribes having similarities in their traditions, customs, folklore, myth, legend, origin, etc. Narratives of common origin and same ancestor are believed to be true. Many elders and researchers (Gangmei, 2017; Kamei, 2014; Kamei, 2015) believe that Zeliangrong people came from China. Interestingly the south western region of Tang dynasty of China is in close proximity with the North-eastern India in general and Manipur in particular. In our earlier study (2016) on the Naga tribes of Manipur we did not undertake four subgroups of Zeliangrong. In the present study, we have taken all the four groups with more involved statistical tools.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Five milliliters of intravenous blood was drawn from 378 unrelated subjects belonging to 4 tribal groups (92 Zeme, 76 Liangmai, 110 Rongmei and 100 Inpui) residing in Tamenglong and Imphal West districts of Manipur. The blood was taken by a trained medical practitioner after taking informed written consent from the subjects. However, 292 samples were screened for the present study (82 Zeme, 64 Liangmai, 68 Rongmei, and 78 Inpui) because of the technical error in the analysis of the sample. The study was approved by the Departmental Ethics Committee, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, New Delhi.

Laboratory analysis

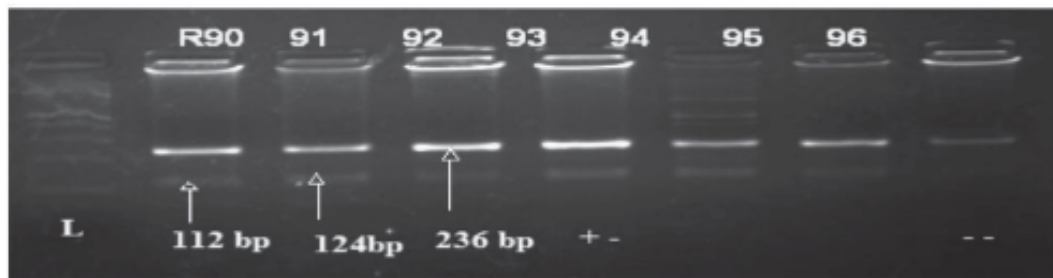
After the blood was collected, DNA extraction was done using the salting-out method (Miller *et al.* 1988). The three autosomal co-dominant bi-allelic DRD2 sites- TaqI A, TaqI B, and TaqI D- were amplified using the standard primers and protocols (Castiglione *et al.* 1995; Kidd *et al.* 1996; Iyengar *et al.* 1998). After amplification, the required fragments were incubated with TaqI (10 U/ μ l, Thermo Scientific) restriction enzyme at 65°C for 2 hours. Electrophoresis was subsequently carried out in 2% agarose gel stained with ethidium bromide



a)



b)



c)

Figure 1 : Gel Photograph Showing polymorphisms at DRD2 locus, (a) DRD2 TaqI B, (b) DRD2 TaqI D, and (c) DRD2 TaqI A

Proper care was taken while storing the blood samples, DNA extraction, and quantification to avoid degradation of DNA. To maintain quality control, lot of time and efforts were put into the standardization of the selected markers.

Standard protocols were modulated when required according to the local laboratory conditions to get required quality of results. While standardizing the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) protocols for the three markers, various combinations of concentrations of reagents used and/or number of PCR cycles and/or temperature of PCR cycles were experimented.

Statistical analysis

The ancestral haplotype B2D2A1 is simply the combination of TaqIB '+' allele, TaqID '+' allele and TaqIA '-' allele. Allele frequencies for each selected site were obtained using the software POPGENE version 1.31 (Yeh and Yang, 1999). Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium was calculated using the test for chi-square goodness of fit. Average heterozygosities were calculated using the software DISPAN (Ota 1993). The program ARLEQUIN version 3.5 (Excoffier and Lischer, 2010) was used to calculate the maximum likelihood estimates of haplotype frequencies from the multisite marker typing data and the standardized pairwise linkage disequilibrium values (D') for each pair of marker. A dendrogram was constructed using the neighbor-joining method (Saitou and Nei, 1987) to identify affinities among the tribal populations of Manipur and Chinese populations. Analysis of molecular variance (AMOVA) was computed for various tentative categories using the software ARLEQUIN version 3.5 (Excoffier and Lischer, 2010).

Secondary source for gene frequency data on different populations was compiled from Chakrabarti *et al.* (2002), Vishwanathan *et al.* (2003), Bhaskar *et al.* (2008), Kidd *et al.* (1998), Prabhakaran *et al.* (2008), Kshatriya *et al.* (2010), Saraswathy *et al.* (2009), Saraswathy *et al.* (2010), Sinha *et al.* (2015), ALFRED database.

RESULTS

The ancestral allele frequencies at all three sites are polymorphic in all the four tribal groups of Manipur (Table 1). The greater variation in allele frequency of all the three sites was seen at the TaqI A site. The allele frequency estimates at these sites were used for goodness-of-fit chi-square test to determine whether the phenotype (genotype) frequencies in the Zeliangrong of Manipur depart from Hardy-Weinberg proportion. All the phenotype (genotype) frequencies

Table 1: Ancestral allele frequencies at individual sites of DRD2 Locus

Population	Taq I B			Taq I D			Taq I A		
	B2	2n	χ^2	D2	2n	χ^2	A1	2n	χ^2
Zeme	0.627	158	2.228	0.793	164	0.951	0.475	162	0.938
Liangmai	0.602	128	2.52	0.844	128	0.228	0.453	128	1.034
Rongmei	0.618	136	1.253	0.779	136	0.754	0.493	136	2.686
Inpui	0.649	154	2.824	0.809	152	1.601	0.378	156	0.001

2n Number of chromosome tested; χ^2 -values are non-significant at df=1 and $p > 0.05$

were in agreement with their respective Hardy-Weinberg expectations. The average heterozygosity among these tribes of Manipur ranged between 41.70% (Inpui) and 44.53% (Rongmei) and showed a moderate level of diversity.

Computed values of haplotype frequencies among the studied populations are presented in Table 2. Seven of the total eight Haplotype frequencies were shared by all the studied populations. Only Rongmei tribe showed all the eight possible three site DRD2 haplotypes. All the populations exhibited highest frequencies of the same set of three Haplotypes B2D2A2, B1D2A1 and B2D2A1. Recently derived haplotype B1D1A1 was present in all the studied populations whereas haplotype B1D1A2 which is also recently derived haplotype was present only in Rongmei tribe. The haplotypes B2D2A2 is the most frequent haplotype among all the four sub-tribes. The comparison across the four studied tribes regarding the distribution of different haplotypes frequencies at DRD2 locus showed statistically non-significant results (Table 3).

Table 2: *Haplotype frequencies at DRD2 Locus*

DRD2 haplotypes	Population group			
	Zeme	Liangmai	Rongmei	Inpui
B2D2A2	0.339	0.353	0.356	0.444
B2D1A2	0.134	0.054	0.047	0.074
B1D2A2	0.054	0.133	0.053	0.101
B1D1A2	0.000	0.000	0.044	0.000
B2D2A1*	0.140	0.180	0.156	0.112
B2D1A1	0.076	0.014	0.059	0.023
B1D2A1	0.224	0.178	0.214	0.170
B1D1A1	0.033	0.088	0.071	0.076

*Ancestral haplotype frequency

Table 3: *Comparison of different Haplotype frequencies across various studied tribes*

Haplotype frequencies across tribes	χ^2
Zeme and Liangmai	0.146
Zeme and Rongmei	0.103
Zeme and Inpui	0.101
Liangmai and Inpui	0.037
Liangmai and Rongmei	0.113
Rongmei and Inpui	0.103

All the χ^2 -values are non-significant at $df=7$ and $p>0.05$

Data on pair wise linkage disequilibrium values (D') for the three DRD2 sites are shown in Table 4. The values were generally low (<0.2) for all the comparisons. All the populations showed significant linkage disequilibrium

between TaqI B and TaqI A sites. Only Zeme showed significant linkage disequilibrium between TaqI B and TaqI D sites.

Table 4: Standardized Pairwise Linkage Disequilibrium (LD) values at DRD2 locus

Population	TaqI B and TaqI D sites	TaqI B and TaqI A sites	TaqI A and TaqI D sites
Zeme	-0.128*	-0.135*	-0.133
Liangmai	-0.103	-0.121*	-0.105
Rongmei	-0.124	-0.131*	-0.120
Inpui	-0.120	-0.134*	-0.124

* indicate significant levels to test whether the disequilibrium value differs from zero (one degree freedom). Values not in * indicate that the test was not significant ($p > 0.05$)

DISCUSSION

In India, the frequency of ancestral allele B2 at the TaqIB site varies from as low as 36.7% in the Onge tribe (Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008) to as high as 91% among the Toda tribe (Vishwanathan *et al.*, 2003), with median values estimated to be 0.69 (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2002; Vishwanathan *et al.*, 2003; Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008; Prabhakaran *et al.*, 2008; Saraswathy *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Kshatriya *et al.*, 2010; Sinha *et al.*, 2015). The ancestral allele frequency for each of the three polymorphisms is shown in Table 1. The median B2 allele value of the presently studied populations is 62% which is more close to the value of 59% computed from Chinese populations (Kidd *et al.*, 1998). Similarly, the distribution of D2 allele frequencies ranges from 13.9% in Paite (Saraswathy *et al.*, 2009) to 98.3% in Mizo (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2002), with median values estimated to be 0.62 (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2002; Vishwanathan *et al.*, 2003; Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008; Prabhakaran *et al.*, 2008; Saraswathy *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Kshatriya *et al.*, 2010; Sinha *et al.*, 2015). Further, the median D2 allele value of the presently studied populations is 80% which is more close to the value 93% computed from Chinese populations (Kidd *et al.*, 1998). The ancestral A1 allele is highly variable in India (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2002; Vishwanathan *et al.*, 2003; Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008; Prabhakaran *et al.*, 2008; Saraswathy *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Kshatriya *et al.*, 2010; Sinha *et al.*, 2015) and with A1 at varying between 38 percent and 49 percent among Zeliangrong, they are akin to Chinese population groups. The overall allele frequencies among the four presently studied groups show close resemblances with each other and indicate a common ancestry for Zeliangrong and the comparison of different haplotypes at this locus among four subgroups also showed non-significant. All Zeliangrong Student Union (2009) have had held same views about the common origin of Zeliangrong.

LD refers to correlations among adjacent alleles, reflecting haplotypes descended from single, ancestral chromosomes. Genotypes at nearby markers are dependent because their genetic lengths are reduced by recombination and their organization may reflect ancestral founding haplotypes. Thus, LD is

the nonrandom association of alleles at different loci (Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008). Pair wise linkage disequilibrium (LD) generally varies with physical distance between two markers. Variation in pair wise LD is a function of the history of human populations, and reflects the combined forces of drift, admixture, and selection over evolutionary time (Zhang *et al.*, 2003). Uniformly similar significant LD across the four studied populations may among other reasons, indicate their close resemblance.

Furthermore, Haplotype analysis reveals that the studied populations share seven of the eight possible haplotypes pointing toward genetic uniformity of these populations at the DRD2 locus and hints toward a common ancestry. The presence of all the eight haplotypes among the Rongmei tribe shows that they are more heterogenous suggesting that they might have undergone admixture with Inpui because the Inpui villages on the foothill of western Imphal valley have largely adopted the Rongmei culture and dialect as the result of the acculturation (Khumba, 2001). The highest ancestral haplotype frequency among the Liangmai supports the hypothesis that Liangmai (0.18) is the oldest among the four populations (All Zeliangrong Student Union, 2009). The high frequency of ancestral B2D2A1 haplotype other than African populations have also been reported from Indian populations (Chakrabarti *et al.*, 2002; Prabhakaran *et al.*, 2008; Kshatriya *et al.*, 2009; Saraswathy *et al.*, 2009, 2010). Prabhakaran *et al.* (2008) suggested two possibilities a) these ancestral haplotypes could have arisen in India and then carried to other parts of the world and/or b) these haplotypes are not specific to Africa. Our findings in the present study also support the above observation. Average heterozygosities at all three sites are similar to the East Asian populations groups especially to the Chinese populations (ALFRED database), but lower than those found in other Indian populations (Vishwanathan *et al.*, 2003; Bhaskar *et al.*, 2008; Prabhakaran *et al.*, 2008; Kshatriya *et al.*, 2010) and the

Table 5: Extent of genetic differentiation estimated by AMOVA among presently studied populations, other populations and Chinese populations on the basis of three DRD2 markers

Category	Among groups variance (In %)	Among populations within groups variance (In %)	Within-population variance (In %)
PS and Chinese	2.04	-0.19	98.16
PS and North India	8.05	-2.03	92.63
PS and West India	2.77	-0.85	98.00
PS and Central India	2.90	-0.88	97.97
PS and South India	2.15	-0.10	97.95
Manipur and Northeast India	5.05	12.99	81.96
PS and Northeast India	10.92	10.53	78.54

All the values are significant, $P < 0.05$. PS Present Study

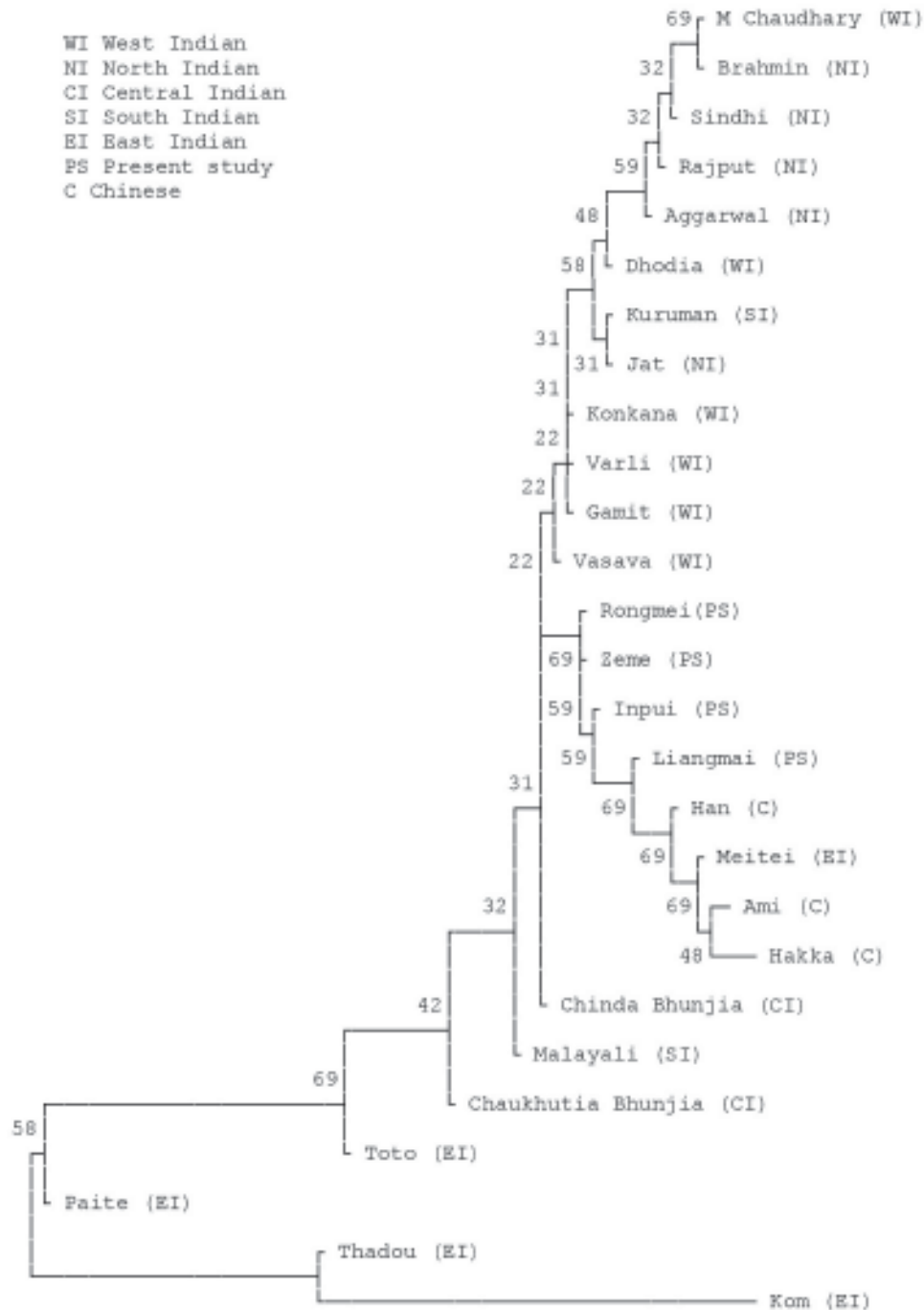


Figure 2: Neighbour-Joining Tree Depicting Genomic Relationships among the Indian and Chinese populations.

rest of the world populations (<http://alfred.med.yale.edu>). This reemphasizes their affinities with South East Asian ethnic groups.

Furthermore, analysis of molecular variance (AMOVA) carried out between different categories of populations grouped indicate that the least among groups variance has seen between the presently studied population groups and the Chinese suggesting their closer affinities with Chinese populations rather than with other Indian populations (Table 5). The highest between group variance is found between the studied populations and populations of Northeast Indian populations (10.92) followed by studied populations and North Indian populations (8.05) and Manipur and Northeast Indian populations (5.05). Clearly, the population groups from Northeast India in general and Manipur in particular have different ancestries and migratory histories. Moreover, neighbor-joining tree constructed from the genetic distance matrix taking into consideration available data on Indian populations reveals strong affinities of Zeliangrong populations of Manipur with Chinese populations (Figure 2). Thus, Zeliangrong populations of Manipur appear to be more closely related with population of Southeast Asia in general, and Southern China in particular. However, more detailed studies are required on this group to advance any further inference in this direction.

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BRIEF COMMUNICATION

A Brief Note on the Outcome of a Historic Congress of Female Islamic (Muslim) Scholars, Held in Indonesia, on Reestablishing Juridical Expertise as Reported by the International Institute of Asian Studies in 2018

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The issues and problems of empowerment of Muslim women are the subject of great debate and discussion. Due to lack of proper study and research, the socio-political process of “othering” in general has created lots of myths, stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim women and their identities. There are many who hold the idea that the Muslim women represent a static and oppressive social category and worst suffers of social victims. The popular perception of the Muslim women is almost always a visual image and fixed identity, captured in dramatic photographs and documentary files as the *burkha* lidded lady or a lady whose head is covered with a veil or *hijalib*, which is nothing but a projected identity of static, suppressed and voiceless characters of a Muslim woman. While, the other group, though very small, hold the view that like women of other socio- religious groups (SRGs), the Muslim women are also changing and thereby constructing their new images and identities which are either ignored or not appreciated for vested interests of the reactionary forces from within and from outside.

It is usually perceived that the religious and social authority of Islam and Muslim Society are exclusively in the hands of the male. But this perception is also not fully true and has less empirical justification. Actually, Muslim women play a very active and invisible role in both their religious and social domains, which are either not known or not given importance to be discussed in public for many reasons. In the following sections I shall present some information which speaks about the changing roles of Muslim women towards construction of a new identity with a historical base.

It was reported in the Newsletter no.79, Spring 2018, published by the International Institute of Asian Studies, Netherlands, that a Congress was held on the issue of “Female Islamic Scholar: Re-establishing the long-lost juristic authority of women” for producing women jurists for Islamic legal ruling. The aforesaid historic Congress of female Islamic scholars was held in Indonesia in April 2017. In this Congress, the veteran Muslim women scholars and activists like Mirjam Kunkler and Eva Nisa and other researchers with decades of experience and expertise in Islamic authority and gender studies, dissect the outcome of the first Congress of female Islamic (Muslim) scholars.

They critically examined the historic significance of the event based on interviews with many women scholars and activists including the males who attended the Congress. The major theme of the Congress is noted below.

There is an awkward question which is usually faced by the Muslims—can women interpret Islamic Law? Have you ever asked a woman for an interpretation of Islamic Law? The answer would be “no”. This is because of the fact that women are not asked to interpret the Islamic laws, though there are many who expect them to do so. The reason is, Muslim women are not sufficiently trained for this work. If they are given this opportunity they can do so and their views may be consulted on the so-called women’s issues like wife’s role and status, child rearing, hygiene, education, economy, household organization, and contribution to culture and society.

However, history reveals that in the mediaeval era there were many women who served as noted and famous teachers and scholars of Islamic tradition and even the opinion of women jurists on the question of Islamic laws carried much weight comparable to that of male jurists. As a matter of fact, in recent years there has been an echoing movement among Muslim women in various parts of the globe to reform their respective societies from within. Some women from Muslim communities of various parts of the world have started to address the gender imbalances and inequality not only in social field but also in juristic expertise. Even in India such a movement is now visible.

It is reported that judicial institutions in Malayasia and the Palestinian authority have begun to hire female judges in their Sharia Courts. At present, many countries like Turkey and India, programmes have been formulated to train women as jurists (*muftis*) who can issue the recommendations (*fatwa*), i.e., the expert legal opinions. Following this emerging trend, Indonesian organization recently convened Muslim world’s first Congress on “Women Islamic Scholars” (*Ulema perem puran*). This historic event was held in Cirebon, West Java, in late April 2017. This was a breakthrough event in terms of reestablishing the long-lost juristic authority of women to produce Islamic legal recommendations and ruling on women’s issues.

Religious Authority in Islam:

The religious authority in Islamic system is usually manifested in several ways such as leading congregation prayer, reciting the *Quran*, delivering sermon, transmitting a *Hadith* i.e. the sayings and acts of the Prophet (PBUH). The acceptance of this authority rests on its ability to interpret Islamic legal sources to make recommendations of behavior and social action. In contemporary Muslim societies this function is exercised in two main domains. The first is by issuing recommendations (*fatwas*). These are basically legal recommendations made on the basis of interpretation of Islamic texts, i.e., *Quran* and *Hadith*. *Quran* is single, but *Hadith*(s) are many. Different sects in Islam regard different *Hadith* as authentic and as a result the specific source material differs from one sect to another. A male trained to issue *fatwa* is called

Mufti and a female as *Muftia*. Similarly, the male expert of reciting *Quran* is called as *Hafij* and that of female is regarded as *Hafija*. The *fatwas* are mostly recommendations. These are not bindings, but carry a great weight depending on the moral authority of the issuer.

There are many countries, where policy makers consider *fatwas* of leading Islamic authorities into account, particularly in the context of reforms to family laws, food regulations and Islamic finance and banking. The second way of juristic authority is exercised by serving as a judge in Islamic court, where non-codified Islamic law is applied. This means judges must interpret the original sources, as there is no codified text issued by the state, like a book of law or statute. These require deep engagement and expertise in interpreting religious sources. The expertise to act as a judge of non-codified Islamic laws can take decades of studying and training to acquire the knowledge. The cases of issuing *fatwas* and as juristic authority are mostly the domain of the male scholars and authorities.

In Indonesia, for example, family courts for the Muslim majority follow Islamic laws, while the non-Muslims are subject to civil family law. Since 1950s, judges of Islamic law have been trained in the country's Islamic State Institutions. Although female judges were unheard of when the institutions first started to function, one cannot automatically conclude that the admission was restricted to men only. In the beginning of 1960s, many women completed this advanced training and overtime many have been appointed as judges in Indonesia's Islamic Courts. Ten years later, in 1970s, Sudan also began to appoint women in its Islamic Courts. In recent past, women are appointed to Islamic courts in many other countries like Malaysia (2005) and Palestinian Authority (2009). Israel appointed the first group of women judges in the Islamic courts in 2017.

Indonesia Congress on Female Islamic Authority and Resolutions Adopted:

Women's juristic authority was the prime agenda of Indonesia Congress, held in April, 2017. Due to limited participation of women in the juristic processes, the Congress in Indonesia aimed at raising awareness for strengthening local and global initiatives to promote women's juristic authority in Islam, which is suppressed by the male authoritarian power under a rigid patriarchal system of control. Interestingly, it is not only the women who supported the initiation of such a struggle and movement, the male scholars (who were less in number) who attended the Congress also supported this. The Congress followed the code of religious deliberation (*musyawarah keagamaan*) to formulate resolutions or *fatwas*. No doubt, the Congress was a historic event as *fatwa* issuing has long been monopolized by male clerics. For example, there are 7 women out of 67 members of the *fatwa* commission (*Majlis Ulama*) of Indonesia.

The Congress thoroughly discussed the various issues and their main focus was on:

- (1) **Concern for Child Marriage:** The Congress was very much concerned about the practice of child marriage in many Muslim countries and denounced this practice as harmful (*mudarat*) to society. The participants raised their voices to increase the legal age at marriage for Indonesian girls from 16 years to 18 years. The members noted that most of the marriages (including child marriages) are not registered with the state. The members reminded the Imams and *Kajis* and common people to prevent this practice and make it as an obligatory (*wazib*) practice.
- (2) **Sexual and Domestic Violence:** The Congress emphasized that such violence like marital rape (sexual violence with in marriage) is forbidden (*haram*) under Islamic law. They also made a distinction between adultery (*zina*) and rape and stressed that victims must receive psychological, economic and societal support, but not punishment.
- (3) **Environmental Issues:** The women scholars of the Congress were very much concerned about the contemporary global warming and environmental destruction as well as social and gender inequality emerging out of it. The Congress raised its voice against environmental degradation due to economic gain and taking up an ecological agenda for mass level production. This in their views was forbidden (*haram*) in Islam. They opined that in recent decades there had been a growth of rampant economic disparities in Indonesia for which women had to suffer most. The Congress noted with concern how draught had added to the burdens of rural women who were mainly engaged in fetching water, preparation of food, cleaning of cloths and washing of household belongings.
- (4) **Land and Forest Issues:** The Congress discussed at length about the issues of land and forest governance system and their impact on deforestation in general and on the life of women in particular. It was demanded that Indonesian government must impose strict rules for those who were responsible for environment and forest destruction. The Congress was also very much concerned about the protection of vast palm oil plantations (which are the national wealth) from the environmental destruction.

The Outcome of the Congress:

The Muslim women scholars and *ulemas* did their religious interpretations from four main sources, viz. *Quran*, *Hadith*, views of reputed Islamic legal experts (*aqwal-al-Ulema*) and interestingly, also by consulting the Indonesian Constitution. They adopted a methodology called “unrestricted reasoning” (*Ijtihad*) with the aim to maximize public interest and also to reduce harm (*mudarat*) to arrive at rulings.

The issues of major recommendations or *fatwas* discussed above are of great significance. This shows that the women *Ulema* have the ability and

necessary expertise in Islamic sources to formulate those recommendations. Their recommendations were suggestive of the fact that the women *ulemas* as the best judge did not restrict themselves only to consider classical Islamic texts and Muslim social issues but also could develop legal proficiency in diverse contemporary issues and problems.

The Congress considered a wide range of sources during its deliberation, including social scientific evidences and documents regarding conditions and challenges faced by the Muslim women in general and by the Indonesian women in particular. The recommendations and resolutions adopted in the Congress were certainly a historic step towards re-establishing the long lost juristic authority of women for offering Islamic legal recommendations. The Muslim women's Congress held in Indonesia and the resolutions adopted in it are clear indications of the emergence of female Islamic authority and the ideology of Islamic feminism which is certainly a struggle for construction of a new identity and imagery by a section of Muslim women.

The wave of such a women's movement has also reached India. There are now many Muslim women NGOs and civil society organizations working in various parts of the country on some of the issues that were also addressed in the Congress. In this context, mention can be made about the works of the Islamic feminists and activists of *Bharatiya Muslim Mohila Andolan*, about which I have already published an article in the JIAS as a special and felicitation volume of Prof. N.C. Choudhury in 2016..

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BRIEF COMMUNICATION

Fanconian Anemia: A Rare Genetic Disorder in Man

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Abstract: Fanconi Anemia (FA) is a rare autosomal recessive genetic disorder and found to be associated with bone-marrow failure, genomic instability, and is hypersensitivity to DNA crosslinking agents with 16 FA genes that participate in the phenomenon. FA disease exhibits chromosome instability and hypersensitivity. The rapid environmental stressors have also contributed the unprecedented changes at genomic and proteomic levels in FA disease that has implemented public health burden.

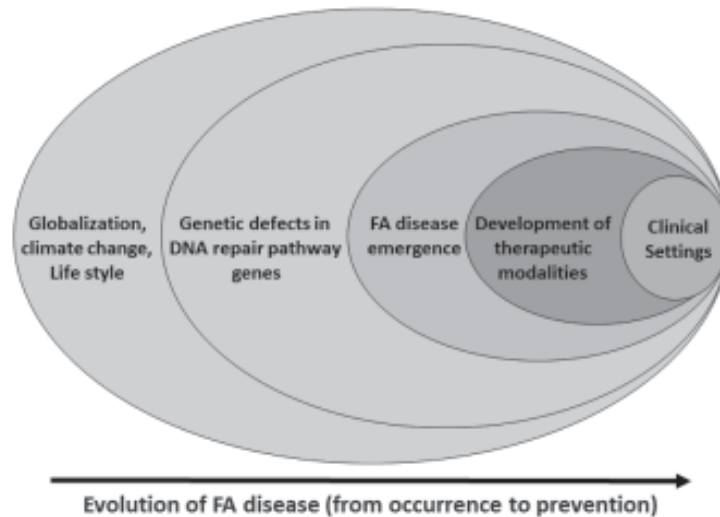
Key words : Fanconi anemia (FA), Population Variation

INTRODUCTION

Population biology is a vital ingredient in the emergence of modern evolutionary processes which deals with adaptation, speciation, population structure and genetic differences within and between populations. Modern population genetics covers all theoretical, experimental, and field work. Their genetic models are used for proving/disproving of Evolutionary Game Theory (EGT) concept and provided several statistical inferences from DNA sequence data. In population, the reduction in individual's average fitness leads to inbreeding depression. As, several populations exhibit genetic equilibrium for multiple genes but there are some exceptions. The most important example of such genetic disequilibrium is Fanconi Anemia (FA) (Alfredo et al, 2017). FA is a rare autosomal recessive genetic disorder and it is found to be associated with bone-marrow failure, genomic instability, hypersensitivity to DNA crosslinking agents and predisposition of cancer. Currently, several mutations have been documented in all 16 FA genes that participate in the FA-BRCA DNA repair pathway and other key cellular processes such as cell cycle regulation and the stress response. On the other side, genome-wide association studies identify the single nucleotide polymorphisms, common to the human genome. In Indian scenario, the progression of FA disease has been correlated with several mutations which lead to the failure of current therapeutic strategy (Shyamsundar et al., 2013).

INTEVENTION OF FA

To overcome such limitations, it is necessary to correct the abnormal gene during or prior to the reprogramming process. In Indian population, the



prognosis of FA disease exhibits chromosome instability, hypersensitivity to mitomycin C, cisplatin and so on and predisposition to mainly leukemia, head and neck cancer and gynecological cancer. In FA disease, the mRNA levels are transcribed from mutated FA gene, studied by gene expression analysis using microarray data (Shyamsundar et al., 2013). Since every ethnic group has its own pattern of endogamous status, it may increase the chance of autosomal recessive gene expression in the population. Inbreeding causes loss of heterozygosity and responsibility to carry disease in hereditary chain. Rapid urbanization, increased weather variation and climate change have also contributed to the unprecedented changes at genomic and proteomic levels in FA disease leading to public health burden. The FA disease is one of the main subject matter of studies but the study of its incidence and intervention are still lacking. Population migration and effect of changing lifestyle might be a subject matter of study of the population and molecular geneticists as a cutting edge research. In India, only a few studies depicted the importance of FA and its intervention (Shyamsundar et al., 2013).

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BOOK REVIEW

Margaret Mead- Bijoy Kumar Dutta; Granthatirtha; Kolkata; 2017; ISBN : 978-82-7572-260-6;Hb; P -107 ; Price: INR 75.

Anthropologist, like Margaret Mead (1901-1978) belongs to such an echelon that defies any generalization when we try to judge the life one lived or the works produced. Writing biography of one such individual is always daunting since there lurks a sense of incapacitating frailty lest it were something incomplete. But, it is a joyous revelation that the book *Margaret Mead*, written in Bengali does not disappoint us when it is found that the book has presented a more or less complete story of the life and works of Margaret Mead in vignette. This slender and thin text that runs only through one hundred and seven pages narrates the family, education, fragility of relations, entry into research, exploration into the new fields, challenging undertakings in research, later life and evolving views on life in eleven chapters. The book has added some notes on her books and also annexed a discussion on Mead – Freeman controversy in the appendix.

It is more or less known to the anthropologists that Mead was one of the most colourful personalities in anthropology. It is quite natural that the life of an anthropologist has every possibility to be full of adventures and exotic experiences. However, given the period, Mead's life seems to be more of a stereotype we expect to get familiar with. She was born of an enlightened parents - her father was a professor, mother a social scientist. She was groomed by her educated grandmother who was, rather contrary to the contemporary views, an advocate of equal rights for men and women. Her childhood offered her an atmosphere full of freedom and free thinking that probably had an influence upon her personality at the mature age. The time, when Mead was growing up, the American society had been passing through a great social upheaval that was questioning the conventional American ideals of women's status and role. We have no direct proof to definitely conclude whether these interrogations acted as the fuels for her future research, but, a close reading of her studies on the problems of adolescence among the boys and girls in American and Polynesia may lead us to somewhere near this conclusion. She took her graduate degree in Psychology. Later, she shifted to anthropology and did her research under the supervision of Franz Boas. Her training in psychology made her technical foray smoother for academic contribution to the particular domain called culture and personality school in anthropology. The book under review, for obvious reasons, prefers a layman's language and thus remains at the surface by avoiding such technicalities. Does her own complex relationships and sexual orientations have any role in making choices of topics for anthropological research? This type of question may not be awkward since the book has some details of her affairs and three marriages all of which ended in divorce.

After a brief courtship, Margaret married Luther Cressman in 1924. During this time, she developed a close relationship with noted anthropologist Edward Sapir. Later, Sapir married Margaret after the sad demise of his wife. Sapir was also a good friend of Ruth Benedict who happened to be one of mentors of Mead and later a colleague at Columbia University. Mead's intimacy with Benedict has also been subjected to innuendoes. After four years of her first marriage, Mead married Reo Fortune, a budding anthropologist who also earned professional fame in later years. They together carried out their ethnographic fieldwork in the Pacific islands. In this fieldwork, a British biologist joined them. Mead fell in love with that tall, impressive gentleman who became her third husband after she formally got divorce from Fortune. The third marriage with Gregory Bateson was solemnized in 1936. This was the longest nuptial bond in her life. Their only daughter Catherin was born out of this union.

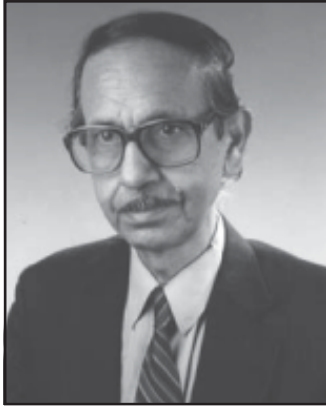
In her lifetime, Mead rose to become a legendary figure in America. Her stature was so profound that her name was once mooted as a presidential candidate in United States. She had been the President of American Anthropological Association and American Association for the Advancement of Science. She used to appear in the public lectures regularly and a prolific writer and commentator on American life. She epitomized the woman of substance. Her views and dispositions promoted the ideals of liberal womanhood. In a way, she pioneered the public anthropology before its formal emergence as a sub-discipline of anthropology.

The book under review raised one very important question at the end. The question is – why did Mead remain almost silent at the plight of the Black citizens of America, although she had studied poor and marginalized people at the far off places? None of her biographies has an answer to this question. But a reply to the question may unearth some of the hidden biases that anthropology and anthropologists carried over the centuries.

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OBITUARY



REBATI MOHAN SARKAR
(1937-2018)

Dr. Rebati Mohan Sarkar, an anthropologist of extraordinary merit passed away on 19 June, 2018 at his residence at Baghajatin, Kolkata. He was known to the professional anthropologists, students, researchers in India and abroad as an unrelenting proponent of the trail of a purely empirical anthropology based on extensive field work. However, his earliest academic fame came, perhaps, for two important reasons. Nationally he became famous when he wrote the first Indian text book titled “Fundamentals of Physical Anthropology” (first published in 1965 from Kolkata, Post Graduate Book Mart). Even today, his book *Fundamentals of Physical Anthropology* (4th edition) is reigning because of his untiring effort. The second incident which brought him global fame was his joining as the Editor of the highly reputed and historical journal, *Man in India*, in 1987 and he continued this important assignment till he breathed his last.

Dr. Sarkar was born on 4 May, 1937 in a typically underdeveloped village of Birbhum district, West Bengal, where there was a dearth of modern educational facilities. His self confidence, determination and thorough encouragement from his father let him pursuing his I.Sc. course from Suri College. He then moved to Kolkata and graduated in Biological Science from the University of Calcutta. He earned his Master’s degree in Anthropology and subsequently, his Ph.D. from Ranchi University. Finally, he was conferred the highest degree of D.Lit. from Patna University. He joined Bangabasi College, Kolkata, as lecturer in Anthropology in 1961. He continued teaching in the same college with great reputation and dignity till his retirement as the Reader and Head of Department in 1997. Apart from teaching under university curriculum, he always had special zeal to inculcate among his students an attraction for anthropology and fascination for the enormously variable colours of human life by sharing his experience of extensive field work. The brilliance of his teaching made several young minds to develop passion for anthropology and opt for careers in the subject, like the present author. Dr. Sarkar also worked as members of advisory committees and boards, e.g., for UGC and the Anthropological Survey of India and Cultural Research Institute, Kolkata.

Dr. Sarkar was a prolific writer and made significant scholarly contributions throughout his career. He published 20 books and no less than 250 articles in various scientific journals both in English and vernacular language. He undertook rigorous field work in studying the intricate relationship of local religious traditions with every facets of folk life and produced the monograph named *Regional Cults and Rural Traditions* (1986). His path breaking research on the *Bouls* and related sects and subsequently the publication of the

book *Bouls of Bengal: in the quest of man of the heart* (1990) brought him exceptional scholarly fame as a social scientist. Several of his articles and books reveal his keen interest and expertise to explore the cultural pluralism in integrated traditional social contexts. During 1990s he also worked extensively on cultural ecologies of rural and forest communities which led him to publish a number of extensively informative monographs on the 'hunger and struggles' in primitive forest tribe, *Birhor* and on the eco-cultural dimensions of the life of the fishermen in the Sunderbans during the period of late 1990s to 2009. His keen interest on literature also produced illustrative articles with anthropological approaches and interpretations to literary works of eminent writers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, as his valuable contributions to Literary Anthropology. For the last few years of life he became inclined to applied, action, and developmental anthropology which also led to the publication of his last book, *Anthropology of Development – An Integrated Appraisal* (2018). As a fully committed anthropologist, he firmly believed that anthropology had a little meaning without direct field investigation and this empirical experience must have a role in formulating plans for development of plural and diverse societies in India. The legacy of Dr. Sarkar, commonly referred to by his students as RMS, shall stay alive among hundreds of students he taught and trained for anthropological teaching and research.

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