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EDITORIAL

Northeast India has been chosen as the theme for this new issue of EBHR. This part of the Himalayas had hardly ever been covered by the Bulletin. One of the main reasons for this is that foreigners were denied access to the region until 1995. Restrictions have now been largely lifted and never as now has there been such intense research activity in Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. From all angles, this area is culturally a very complex one, even more so than those we are familiar with further to the west. Thus, despite the work undertaken by our Indian colleagues over the last forty years, a great deal of research is needed to at least understand the basic anthropological and environmental setting surrounding the Brahmaputra Valley. In this issue, we have collected contributions in equal proportions from both Indian and European authors. We hope they will give a fair idea of the type of research presently being done in the Northeast. And we also hope these works will find an echo among specialists of other Himalayan regions, and that they will stir new callings among younger scholars.

As you might have noticed, this issue has been published with some delay. We beg for the leniency of our subscribers. We shall make all efforts to fill the gap, possibly by offering thicker issues in the near future. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine is now preparing a promising n°33 issue on Social Changes in Nepal during the People's War.

Finally, we regret to say that the Bulletin has recently been suffering from a relative lack of proposals. Whatever the reasons, we would like to encourage all of you to take up your pens and submit articles, as well as to advertise the EBHR. Book reviews would particularly be appreciated. Similarly, let us know if you have any ideas about special issues on your favorite topics of research, as well as about authors who might contribute to such issues.

Philippe Ramirez

Notes on contributors

Emilie Arrago-Boruah is PhD candidate. After studying philosophy in Sorbonne, she has joined EHESS in Paris as a student of social anthropology. Since 2002, she has conducted many fieldworks in Assam and is currently working on religious anthropology, history and vernacular literature related to the cult of a local goddess. Her present research is financed by the CNRS under a programme on North-East India. In addition, she is preparing a manual of Assamese language.

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Pascal Bouchery is Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Poitiers, where he teaches Political Anthropology and Environmental Anthropology. He has a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Paris X. He is currently conducting fieldwork in Northeast India, where he first travelled in 1979 and 1980. More specifically he is carrying out comparative research into kinship and is also involved in a project to help preserve the Apatani language of Arunachal Pradesh.

Sarit Chaudhury teaches anthropology in Arunachal University, Itanagar. Since 1990 he has been doing research among the tribes of Northeast India and has jointly edited three books. Currently he is working in the field of tribal art, traditional institutions and culture change in Arunachal Pradesh.

Kiudamliu Gangmei is working as Operations Manager for KES College Regional Office in Delhi. Her command of the Rongmei language has benefited from her father's work as a translator of books (gospel literature) and religious chants from English to Rongmei.

François Jacquesson is a researcher in linguistics within the French CNRS. See his page at http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/membres/jacquesson.htm He has been working in Northeast India since 1995, especially on eastern Boro-Garo languages. He has published a description of the Deori language. He is also interested in anthropology and history.

Tanka B Subba is a Professor of Social Anthropology at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He has published several books on the anthropology of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Meghalaya and the Nepalis in the Northeast, including among others: *Dynamics of a Hill Society* (1989), *Religion and Society in the Himalayas* (1995) and *The Anthropology of North-East India* (2005).

IN MEMORIAM

A Tribute to Dr. Karen Lundström-Baudais: Paleo-ethnobotanist, ethnographer and Western Nepal specialist

by Andrea Nightingale, University of Edinburgh & Dominique Baudais

Dr. Karen Lundström-Baudais (1949-2006) was a woman with amazing energy and life force who fell in love with Nepal and devoted a significant portion of her intellectual efforts to understanding the culture, rituals and agricultural processes there. Yet despite the time and energy she invested into western Nepal, very little of her work is published. She ended a two and a half year battle with cancer in January 2006, radically cutting short her long-term vision of developing the Nepal work further. As a result, most of her data remains unpublished and her contribution to the field is not as well known, as it should be. Her meticulous field notes contain a wealth of information that could be developed into a series of articles on agriculture, caste, ritual and everyday life in Jumla.

Karen originally trained as a biologist in the United States and then as an archaeo-botanist in France. She held a position at CNRS (UMR 6565) in the Chrono-ecology laboratory at University of Besançon from 1986 until 2006. Prior to taking up that appointment, she travelled to Nepal in 1983 with her husband, Dominique Baudais, visiting the Langtang region and trekking along the ancient trade routes between Pokhara and Kathmandu, visiting places that even today are rarely visited by non-Nepalese. During their next visit to Nepal in 1985 they travelled to Jumla, with the intention of trekking through Dolpo. On the way, they found the Matwali Chhetri caste village of Bata, three hours' walk from Jumla bazaar in the Chaudhabisa river valley (Jumla Karnali region). Little did they or the people of Bata know that this was the beginning of a twenty-one year relationship that was to make a significant mark on all their lives.

Karen's professional work centred on the analysis of grain found on archaeological sites, specialising on the Neolithic, Bronze and Middle Ages in Europe. Her specialty was cereal grains, wheat, barley, millet, and oats. Millet in particular was rarely studied, yet was second only to wheat and barley as an important cereal crop in pre-historic Europe. It was gradually replaced by the introduction of maize starting in the 16th century and now has almost completely disappeared from European diets, yet it remains important in other parts of the world. Karen was a pioneer in developing techniques for interpreting grain processing mounds and molecular transformations of cereals in pre-historic Europe, mainly in the Alps and the surrounding region in France. She was one of the first to introduce palaeo-ethno-botany into French archaeology and the data she generated was thus wholly original. It was unique in its emphasis on the various

grain processing techniques and how this was related to the length of time the grains could be stored.

Karen worked on parboiling, roasting, carbonization and processing to understand how these techniques effected germination and fermentation. In particular, she was interested in discovering which techniques would allow for long-term storage and she found that varieties of millet can be stored for up to 50 years (possibly more) if processed properly. She conducted experiments not only in her lab, but also in the mountains around Brig in the Swiss Alps and in Nepal. She grew grain herself and tested different kinds of processing to see how they altered the grain and affected its germination and storage qualities. These experiments provided a basis for interpreting which types of processing were used in pre-historic Europe by comparing how the grain molecules found at archaeological sites matched those in her experiments. Indeed, it was this interest that was a key link between the work she did in Nepal partly during her holidays, and the work she did officially for the CNRS.

In Bata, Karen saw medieval grain processing techniques come to life. While most visitors to Nepal assume that the Nepalese eat nothing but rice, in Jumla, as in many of the mountain areas, millet is an equally if not more important grain for subsistence. It grows well in the harsh, un-irrigated mountain environment and provides a grain that is generally more nutritious than rice. There are three varieties of millet grown in the Chaudhabisa, *chinu* (common millet, *Panicum milliaceum*; *kodo* (finger millet, *Eleusine corocana*); *kāguno* (italian millet, *Setaria italica*), each grain being processed differently depending on its intended use. Karen was able to observe processing techniques that had long since completely disappeared from Europe. Over the course of several years, she quantified every step in grain processing in Bata to understand the remains of processing she found in archaeological digs in Europe. She also held interviews to gather information on how processing techniques had changed and which ones allowed for the longest storage times. An importantly finding revealed that two varieties of millet (Common millet and Italian millet) are almost identical in their molecular composition in pre-historic Europe and present-day Nepal. *Chinu* or "*sāno bhāt*" (small rice) is eaten far more often than rice in many parts of western Nepal and it was this same species of millet that was a key subsistence crop in Europe prior to the 17th century.

Karen's interests were very much focused on food systems, and whilst her experiments primarily involved grain processing, she also collected a huge amount of data on the entire cereal production process. In 1999 she made an inventory of agricultural production for each family in Bata (101 in total) including their field holdings, animal husbandry and quantities and types of crops grown. This inventory represents a very detailed

survey of the agricultural production and economic anthropology of Bata, yet none of the information has been published. In addition to this inventory, Karen also compiled a huge database of agricultural production in the Jumla area including comparisons of the crops grown and the relative yields across different elevational zones and between irrigated and dry fields. She looked at the main Singa, Tila and Chaudhabisa valleys and their arterial valleys. This database is extremely well organised and could be used for an analysis of agricultural production prior to the Maoist take-over in the region, or as background data for a research project.

Chinu (common millet) and other varieties of millet were her key passion, but Karen threw herself into Jumli village life and collected ethnographic information on a wide variety of ritual and daily practices. She was particularly interested in "*chwi*" or ritual pollution and the prohibitions surrounding grain processing, cooking and eating that are key ways in which *chwi* is practised. She lent an archaeologist's eye to her ethnographic work and gave unparalleled attention to detail and careful observation. Indeed, I was often struck by the systematic way in which she sought to collect and interpret data on practices, which to me were too vague and inconsistent to merit such a methodology. Yet, it was this eye for detail and her attempts to find the "truth" about *chwi* practices that led her to gather a huge amount of information on the conditions under which *chinu* becomes as ritually pure as rice. She did have one paper published on this topic, a paper which gathered together her last academic output and provided her with a focus in between her chemotherapy sessions (Lundström-Baudais in print). I visited her between these sessions and came away convinced that the *chinu* paper was keeping her alive as she poured all her energy, passion and commitment into Bata and her millet work. I am certain that she knew more about the daily practices of grain preparation than any other academic and possibly far more than most Nepalese, as she gathered comparative data from Kathmandu, Jumla bazaar, Bata and her Nepalese friends in France and Switzerland.

Her interests in *chwi* most likely emerged from her own desire to fit in and live "properly" in Bata. She always wore traditional dress in the field and sought to emulate the practices of the villagers unless they contradicted her sense of social justice. As a result, she sought to learn about all aspects of daily life. Like most people from outside Nepal, she was appalled by the *chwi* practices and the hardship it causes women. Village women are expected to stay outside while they are menstruating or giving birth. Often they sleep in the stables in all kinds of weather and are vulnerable to infectious diseases. To help combat this suffering, Karen helped the Bata women raise money to build a *chwi* house by selling their handmade *jālī* (traditional beaded necklaces) in Europe. The *chwi* house

was designed to allow women to stay together when they were considered "polluted" and to have a women's-only sanctuary for giving birth. While most of the women were enthusiastic about the idea, the project was undermined by men's attempts to gain control of it, by resistance on the part of many people to the idea of polluting any indoor space and eventually, in one of their more ironic moves, it was closed down entirely by the Maoists.

Other than her work on millet and *chwi*, Karen had one paper published on the making and use of ploughs in the Karnali, but this paper represents a tiny fraction of the information she gathered (Lundström-Baudais *& al.* 2001). Having been invited to contribute a paper to a collective volume on Himalayan ploughs, she threw herself into the project with the same energy that she devoted to all her work. She and Dominique collected comparative information on the types of wood, construction techniques, ritual practices associated with plough construction and use, and linked this to caste-based labour relations to try and understand who could make and use the different kinds of ploughs and under what conditions. She was interested in trying to find a link between plough design and its spatial distribution to make a contribution to debates on the dissemination of knowledge and technology across the Himalayas. She gathered fascinating information on the types of wood used for the different components and the forestry practices necessary to ensure a supply of these vital parts for the plough. Indeed, another two papers could easily be published from this work, bringing to life the making and use of ploughs that many ethnographers take for granted as an everyday object, only of any importance in the relative effectiveness of its design, links to caste and gender-based labour practices, or the extent to which it limits agricultural production.

At the same time, Karen and Dominique also worked on pounding and grinding tools for grain processing. They carried out a complete survey of the different tools owned by each family in Bata and the types of wood, metal, stone and techniques used to produce them. They paid careful attention to who could make certain tools, who could use them and for what purpose. They linked this work to land use issues, particularly forestry practices as it was clear that a key aspect of forestry conservation is in providing long-term supplies of wood for tool-making. This is an aspect of forestry management that is entirely absent from community forestry debates in Nepal and yet is central to people's agricultural and food processing strategies. Again, this study represents an in-depth look into the links between technology, food production and caste-based divisions of labour yet only part of the data has been published (Baudais & Lundström-Baudais 2002, Lundström-Baudais *& al.* 2002).

Through this process Karen also collected a wealth of other ethnographic knowledge about a rarely studied region of Nepal. She witnessed the rising influence of the Maoists and the kinds of farcical but also tragic consequences of these changes in political power. She faced down the Maoists when she met them on the trails, daring them with her eyes and body language to ask her for more than the Rs. 20 "donation" she offered. Yet despite this bravado, she was deeply concerned about the fate of people she knew and loved, whose lives were turned upside down and in some cases lost due to the Maoist movement. One of her research assistants went missing in Jumla several years ago and today she is presumed dead. Karen invested a lot of energy into trying to find out what had happened to her and continued to search for information until the bitter end.

Indeed, returning to Jumla was one of Karen's unfulfilled goals when she passed away, although she was able to visit Kathmandu during her final month. Her legacy lives on in Bata and Kathmandu where Dominique still supports three Bata children at school and where Karen certainly will not be forgotten for many, many years to come. Her influence is also evident in the burgeoning careers of two young men from the Karnali whom she employed as research assistants and mentored extensively. After helping one of them win a scholarship to study French in Besançon and do an MSc at Saint Xavier in Kathmandu, he has successfully worked for several international development agencies, travelling into conflict ridden areas and more recently working in Africa. He is emerging as a bright talent among the educated, committed young Nepalese who have poor, village roots. In short, Karen was an inspiring example of how to repay those people whose lives had furthered her science. It is the hope of those who knew and worked with her that some of the information she collected will be used to contribute to ethnographies of the Jumla Karnali and Nepal more generally.

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Discovering Boro-Garo
History of an analytical and descriptive linguistic category

François Jacquesson

This paper does not require professional linguistic skills on the part of the reader.[1] It is about the history of research on so-called "Boro-Garo" languages, how this started and proceeded; it emphasizes the difficulties in defining human groups and describes some thoughts involved in the pursuit of such definitions.[2]
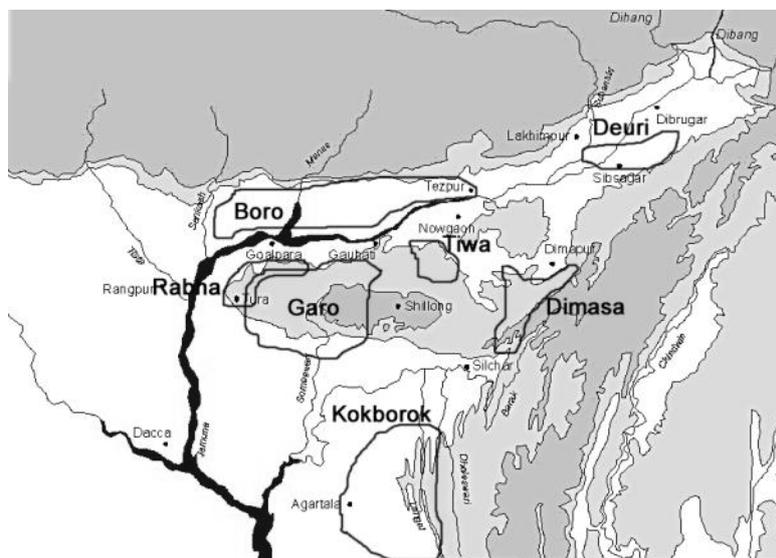
1. Major Boro-Garo languages, a sketch of the present-day distribution.

1. Boro-Garo, introduction

Using various names, Bodo-Garo, Boro-Garo, Bodo-Koch, or even simply Boro, social anthropologists and linguists define a group of "closely

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[1] I am delighted to acknowledge the help of Bernadette Sellers, who transformed my erratic speech into decent English; and the stern reluctance of Pascale Dollfus to consider all my adverbs necessary.

[2] For an excellent general book on the history of Tibeto-Burmese Linguistics, up until 1980, see Hale 1982.

related" languages spoken in North-East India.[3] Locally nobody uses terms such as "Boro-Garo": they are academic coinages, with (in principle) no political consequence. As far as the number of speakers is concerned, it is the most important group of "tribal" languages in the region. It has been identified as forming one consistent group rather early on, under somewhat interesting circumstances. We will examine how this came about.

Eight of these languages are identified in the official 2001 Census of India. The numbers for Bangladesh are of course not given: they are significant for "Garo" and for "Tripuri" (Kokborok). The names in the left-hand column below are those of the Census; some of these are highly debatable.

	in the 7 states	in W Bengal	elsewhere in India	total in India
Boro	1311348	37654	1476	1350478
Garo	887060	1457	962	889479
Tripuri	853196	98	729	854023
Rabha	153714	10967	89	164770
Dimasa	111878	4	79	111961
Koch	29299	1583	237	31119
Deori	27897	6	57	27960
Lalung	27067	0	5	27072

There were, and are, two different practices regarding names and communities. One is the "approach", for instance, when you discover a country: proper names are given to you, and you have to look for their meaning. There is no proposed hierarchical processing; the categories are not exclusive. You slowly discover ambiguities and homonyms or quasi-homonyms. The leading metaphor is generally the map.

The other practice involves the "census", when you have to provide a comprehensive picture. Categories are strict, you cannot use two names for the same notion, and hierarchical processing is a must; any ambiguity is forbidden. On the other hand, below a certain level of detail, categorization becomes useless or clashes with the prime purpose. The leading metaphor is usually the tree, and the method "branching".

These two practices have been used from the very first descriptions, those of Buchanan-Hamilton, and will probably continue.

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[3] North-East India encompasses 7 or 8 "states" within the Indian Union: Assam (which roughly corresponds to the valley of the middle course of the Brahmaputra River), Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. Sikkim is sometimes included.

2. From narrative to list, and from list to chart

2.1. 18th century and before

The earliest information we have from Assam comes in the form of maps and narratives. Maps prior to the British ones[4] reveal practically nothing about Northeast India, which was hardly known at the time. The earliest information we have on such groups are from "Muslim" chronicles, generally written in Persian — the court language in India until British colonial times. The first one is the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, by Mihraj us-Siraj, composed and compiled c. 1250.[5]

Muhammad Bakhtiyar, an ambitious general of the Afghan dynasty, conquered Bihar c. 1200. His patron Aybak, from Delhi, thought it wise to push him further east towards Bengal, against the Sena dynasty. In 1204, Muhammad Bakhtiyar established his capital in Gaur. From there, he was tempted to invade "Bhutan and Tibet" and went against Assam, called *Kamrud* (sic, with a "d"). The description of his disastrous campaign provides us with some information about the populations (Siraj 1881: 560-1):

> In the different parts of those mountains which lie between Tibbat and the country of Lakhanawati are three races of peoples, one called the Kūnch [N6[6]], the second the Mej (Meg), and the third the Tihārū; and all have Turk countenances. They have a different idiom, too, between the languages of Hind and Turk [N7[7]]. One of the chiefs of the tribes of Kūnch and Mej, whom they were wont to call "Alî, the Mej, fell into the hands of Muhammad-i-Bakht-yâr, the Khalj, and, at his hand also, the former adopted the Muhammadan faith. He agreed to conduct Muhammad-i-Bakht-yâr into those hills, and act as a guide; and he brought the latter to a place where there is a city, the name of which is Burdhan [kot] [N8[8]]

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[4] The earliest British map for this part of India, Rennell's, in 1780, goes as far as the border with Assam and includes Goalpara and an area some miles further east. It was published again recently in Deloche 1984. Sketches were drawn during the 1792-1794 British expedition; they have never been published. Rennell's map gives no information about names of human groups or languages. The 1794 maps give some names.

[5] This important work was translated by Raverty and published in 1881. The Persian text had been published in 1864.

[6] Raverty's Note 6. In some copies the nasal *n* is left out - Kûch.

[7] Raverty's note 7. In some of the more modern copies of the text, "Hind and Tibbat".

[8] Raverty's note 8. The oldest and best copies generally contain the above, but two add *kot* and one copy gives the vowel points. The Zobdat-ut-Tawârîkh also has Burdhan twice. The other compiled copies have Murdhan and Murdhan-kot, and the printed text, in a note, had Durdhan [Wurdhan ?] as well as Burdhan?

Konch, sometimes written Koch, (the same hesitation occurs in Buchanan-Hamilton's manuscripts), is what we today write as Koch. Mej or Meg is the name we write as Mech. We can safely conclude that these names described important groups of people in the 13th century, in the area between the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. The relation with Buchanan's "Koch" and "Mech", is obvious, but the kind of entity (ethnical, political etc. ?) implied is not at all obvious.

2.2 Buchanan-Hamilton: listing and description

Francis Buchanan[9] (1762-1829) came to India in 1794, as Assistant-Surgeon and with a taste for ichthyology. Most of his time was taken up with special missions and surveys: he went to Ava (Burma) with Capt. Symes in 1795, surveyed Chittagong in 1798 and travelled in southern India, then to Nepal with Capt. Knox in 1802-3. His greatest accomplishment is the survey of Bengal (1807-1814), to which he added a wealth of information about Assam. After that, for one year he took charge of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta, which he handed over to Wallich (23rd Feb. 1815), leaving India forever on the very same day. He then assumed the name Hamilton.

Francis Hamilton left a hoard of manuscripts in the India Office, the complete list of which can be found in Kaye & Johnston 1937. His descriptions are at first geographical, giving *zila* (district) after *zila*.[10] For each *zila*, the description follows the same pattern and a comparative vocabulary concludes each description. His descriptions and lists concerning the Boro-Garo languages and populations are given in the Rangpur manuscripts. These vocabularies are compiled in a special volume.[11] Only a small part of these documents have been used or published. The first extensive use of Hamilton's work is in Martin 1838, *The history, antiquities, topography and statistics of Eastern India*; the 3rd volume, pp. 600-696, is about Assam.[12]

In his comparative vocabulary volume for Rangpur, Hamilton had hundreds of words copied (into both Bengali and Latin scripts, with great care) in several languages designated in this way (Rabha, Garo, Kachari, Pani Koch and Mech are Boro-Garo languages):

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[9] See Kaye & Johnston 1937. A biographical note, with sources, is available p. 580.

[10] Dinajpur, Kaye no. 162; Ronngopur [sic, Rangpur], 163; Puraniya, 164; Bhagalpur, 165; Bihâr & Patna, 166; Shâhâbâd, 167; Gorakhpur, 168.

[11] Ms Eur.G.13 (Kaye no. 169).

[12] The Ms Eur.D.77 contains the *Account of Assam*, copied by S. K. Bhuyan, published by him in 1940 and repeatedly reprinted by the D.H.A.S (see Hamilton 1940), with an index.

English		
Prakrīta banggadēsīya bhāsā	Bengali	desi
Kōchārdēsīya bhāsā	Koch	desi
Rābhājātīya bhāsā	Rabha	jāti
Gārojātīya bhāsā	Garo	jāti
Kāchārījātīya bhāsā	Kachari	jāti
PāniKōch jātīya bhāsā	Pani Koch	jāti
Mechjātīya bhāsā	Mech	jāti
Āsāmdēsīya bhāsā	Asam	desi
Manipūrdēsīya bhāsā	Manipur	desi

The second case for instance, *Kōchārdēsīya bhāsā*, means "language of the country of the Koch". Some languages (*bhāsā*) are described as characteristic of a country (*dēs*), others as characteristic of a human group (*jāt*). This distinction has a political basis: Bengal, As(s)am, Manipur and Koch were regions, since Manipur and Koch Bihar were then independent kingdoms. Therefore, *jāt* is a default term: those designated as *jāt* languages are those that do not have a political status.

Assam was very much a kingdom. Actually, Buchanan could not enter Assam, which was then closed to foreigners. All his information, as he himself explained, was collected from people he met in Rangpur or closer to the border. His approach came from outside. This explains why the lexicons he was able to collect were either from languages spoken in the Rangpur *zila*, or from languages in Assam but spoken close to the western border — except for Manipur, though the lexicon he compiled for meitei[13] is rather strange anyway.

Apart from this substantial lexicon, Buchanan-Hamilton also wrote (often excellent) descriptions.[14] For instance, he explained that the language of the Koch (country) is very much like Bengali, but that he had found a village where "Pani Koch" was spoken. He correctly assumed his "Pani Koch" language to have been the language of the Koch before most of them "deserted their ancient customs", and he rightly remarked that this language is not like Garo but very much like Rabha. Buchanan-Hamilton was wiser than most linguists of his time, who still used the Leibnizian idea of tracking ancestry via language: Buchanan had noticed language borrowings and language shift.

Buchanan-Hamilton combined narrative description (based on his own field trips) and listing. Listing vocabularies in order to survey populations

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[13] Meitei (or Metei) is the language of central Manipur: Manipur is the name of a country, Meitei of a language.
[14] Notably in Ms Eur.D.74.

was not a new idea: prior to this, Catherine the Great had had the same idea for her Russian empire, and she herself had participated in the venture.

What Buchanan-Hamilton did not do, was to classify the languages.

3. From Buchanan to the 1881 Census

3.1. Nathan Brown, 1837

The first outstanding character in the colourful field of North-East Indian British anthropology-cum-linguistics was Nathan Brown. He was the first to publish lexicons of a dozen local Tibeto-Burmese languages, and the creator of local Tai studies.[15] In 1837, he gave two papers to the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (*JASB*) (Brown N. 1837a & b). One showed that Ahom, the historic Tai language in Assam, retained consonant clusters that had been lost in Shan. One should bear in mind that comparative linguistics as such were quite a new field.[16]

His second paper compared 60 words in 27 languages, among which was Garo. These were the first steps in Tibeto-Burmese fieldwork (the first works by Csoma about the Tibetan language were published in 1834 in Lahore). About Garo, he wrote:

> It is difficult to decide from the specimens before us, whether it is to be ranked with the monosyllabic or polysyllabic languages. It probably belongs to the latter. The Garos inhabit an extensive range of hills below Gawahati, and are in a completely savage state. So meagre is their language, that they have not even a term for *horse*, nor do they possess any knowledge of such an animal.

While this concern over horses is indeed funny, the question about syllables is not. The polysyllabic character of Assamese was well-known, and considered typical of Western languages, while the monosyllabic feature was considered diagnostic of Eastern ones, such as Chinese or Thai. The border between the West and East could therefore be defined by linguistic experts, so examining Garo in this respect was meaningful. He computed percentages of a common lexicon between languages. For Garo, his only Boro-Garo language, he finds more correlation with Jili, Singpho, northern Tangkhul.

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[15] One of the first books about Tai languages was James Low's *Grammar of the Thai or Siamese Language*, Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1828. This book was probably well known to Nathan Brown.

[16] The first comparative essay by Franz Bopp, *Über das Conjugationssystem*, was published in 1816; the first version of his *Vergleichende Grammatik* was published in 1833.

Nathan Brown began comparing languages on a large scale. However, his concern with Boro-Garo was still restricted. The next phase was of course to feed the impulse with data.

3.2. From 1840 to 1850: fighting with hierarchies
In 1840, another *JASB* paper is Capt. Fisher's "Memoir of Sylhet, Kachar, and the adjacent Districts". This represents the southern point of view, since the British were actually more familiar with Bengal and Arakan. The paper is about the economy and agriculture, but ends with notes on the local people: the first information we are given about Dimasas and "Tipperas". He does not say anything about languages, but adds:

> The people of Tippera are said to have the same origin as the Kacharis, and the similarity of religion, customs, and appearance, makes this probable. It may be added, that the Rajas of both countries have formerly acknowledged the connexion; the Tippera family being described as a younger branch of the ancient royal family, which in their expulsion from Kamrup established itself independently in the country which it formerly held as an appendage.

Family ties are similarly touched upon the following year, 1841, in the same *JASB*, with Lt Phayre's "An Account of Arakan", again a view from the south.

> The people called Mrung, by the Arakanese, announce themselves as descendants of persons carried away from Tipperah several generations back by the Arakan kings. They were first planted on the Le-myo river, with the view I suppose of cutting off their retreat to their own country; but when Arakan became convulsed in consequence of the invasions of the Burmese, they gradually commenced leaving the Le-myo, and returning through the hills towards their own country. For a time they dwelt on the Kola-dan; now, none are to be found on any part of Arakan, save on the Mayu in its upper course, and only a few stragglers there. Many still reside, I understand, on the hills of the E. frontier of the Chittagong district. By a reference to a few words of their language, given in the appendix, those acquainted with the language of the Tipperah tribes will be able to decide whether the tale the Mrungs tell of their descent be true or not.

Phayre's guess is right, as far as the language is concerned: the Mrung lexicon is close to what we now call Kokborok (and was then dubbed Tipperah). This will be demonstrated by Lewin twenty-six years later, in 1867. The lexicon is here taken as evidence, through the native narrative, of their descent. This is one of the numerous details that show the slow but clear racialisation of language concerns, when we progress through the 19th century.

Hodgson saw his 200-page book, *Essay on the Kocch, Bodo, and Dhimal* tribes, 1847, as the first step in a complete description of all tribes of India.

The book contains lexicons (Hodgson 1847: 11-103), and sketch grammars of Bodo and Dhimal (105-140). His Koch is (he probably did not read Buchanan's work) what he calls "corrupt Bengali". He makes the first attempt at a definition of a Boro-Garo grouping (p. 151-2):

> The Bodo are still a very numerous race (...) in the eastern marches from Gauhati to Sylhet, they are less numerous only than the Garos, Rabhas and Hajongs, not to mention, that the two last, if not all three, are but Bodos in disguise. I look upon the Rabha as merely the earliest and most complete converts to Hinduism, who have almost entirely abandoned the Bodo tongue and customs, and upon the Hajongs or Hojai Kacharis of Nowgong, as the next grade in time and degree of conversion, who now very generally affect a horror at being supposed confreres in speech or usages with the Bodo, though really such. Nor have I any doubt that the Garos are at least a most closely affiliated race, and no way connected with the monosyllabic-tongued tribes around them. I do not, however, at present include the Garos, or Rabhas, or Hajongs among the Bodo, who are now viewed as embracing only the Meches of the west and the Kacharis of the east and south; and, so limited, this race numbers no less than 150,000 to 200,000 souls.

This is not very clear for people unfamiliar with the local names of people and places. As he admits in the end, his way of seeing the "Bodos" is twofold: he starts by using "Bodo" to designate a wide range of people ("a numerous race"), then wonders if some others are not "Bodos in disguise". He ends on a cautionary note and refrains from unmasking the dubious tribes, registering only the Mechs and Kacharis, which is indeed better from the present linguistic point of view. However, Hodgson does not cite any linguistic argument here. His approach cannot be taken as a classification, but rather traces more or less tightly linked circles with the Bodo as the centre:

centre	farther away	outside
Bodo	Rabha	Koch
Kachari	Hajong (=Hojai)	Lalong (=Lalung)
Mech	Garo	

Only in a footnote (p. 142 †) does he give more accurate sources:

> Fifteen in sixty words of Brown's Vocabulary are the same in Garo and in Mecch, and the whole sixty or nearly so in Kachari and Mecch. Again, the Kacharis call *themselves* Bodo, and so do the Mecch; and lastly the Kachari deities Siju, Mairong and Agrang are likewise Mecch deities - the chief ones too of both people, to whom I restore their proper name. These are abundant proofs of common origin of Garos also.

Robinson knew Assam well, as his 1841 *Descriptive Account of Assam* shows. He had an informed and wise opinion about the respective position of Assamese and Bengali, the reduced influence of Tai languages, the importance of comparing not only lexicon but also grammar and about the importance of archaeological research for a better understanding of the past peopling of Assam. Robinson's position concerning the importance of writing tones and the existence of grammar even in Chinese are excellent. In his 1849 *JASB* paper, he gives a grammatical sketch of Garo:

> The Garos have no traditionary legends whatever that may serve to enlighten us on the subject on their origin. Their remote situation, and their physical appearance, together with their modes and customs, so diverse from those of the Bhotias, would at first militate against the supposition that they were in any way connected with the Cis-Himalayan tribes. This connection however is now made apparent from the strong affinity existing between the language of the Garos and the several dialects spoken by those tribes. Though these present several modifications, they may nevertheless be traced to the same radicals, so as to prove that an essential affinity existed in their primitive structure, thus affording historical evidence of such a nature as it is impossible for either accident or design to have falsified.

The scope and orientation are of particular interest. He says that whatever the physical or social anthropology, language shows the link between Tibetans (Bhotias) and Garos. The same theme is emphasised regarding the Boros ("Kacharis or, as they term themselves, Borros", 215-223):

> An examination into their language however furnishes abundant proof of their intimate connection with the tribes of the Cis-Himalayas. A large proportion of their vocables are identical with those of the Garos, and almost all the rest can be traced to some dialect of the Thibetan, while the idiom of the language and the peculiarities of its grammar show abundant traces of descent from a common origin. Closely connected with the Kacharis, among the inhabitants of the plains, are the Hojai Kacharis, the Kochis (including the Modai Kochis, the Phulgurias, and Hermias), the Mechis, and the Rabhas.

At the end of his paper, he gives about 250 words in five languages (Bhotia, Changlo, Garo, Kachari, Miri).

It is clear that Robinson, just as Hodgson, describes the "connection" at two different levels. The relationship he describes between Boro and Garo or "some dialect of the Thibetan" is described as an "intimate connection" and then interpreted as "traces of descent from a common origin". Yet, the arborescence metaphor is not explicit; his phrasing rather evokes a common pool. Then come the "closely connected" ones: Kachari, Hojai, Kochi, Mechi, Rabha. These latter ones obviously form a tighter unit. Yet,

the hierarchy is not explicit either: there is no overt scheme of levels of implication by "families" or "branches".

In 1850, Nathan Brown published nine lexicons, four on Tai languages, four on Naga languages, and the first ever data about Deuri (or Deori), which he called Chutia ("The Chutia is the language of one of the old tribes of Assam, now nearly extinct."), opening a long debate - since the "nearly extinct" language is still very much alive. I re-edited Nathan Brown's Deori lexicon in my book about the language (Jacquesson 2005). His paper does not indulge in any comparison, only in presenting data.

3.4. The wider field, 1866-1874

The biological metaphor enters our sphere in 1866, in a special issue of the *JASB*, where Campbell published an *Ethnology of India*, which included notes about Boro-Garo people, plus a lexicon of the Mech language.[17]

> The people of the very lowest hills of Bhootan and of all the low country at their foot are of another race, the Meches or Mechis (before alluded to in marking the boundaries of the Indian Aborigines), who are apparently the same as Hodgson's "Bodo". They are, it appears, now quite ascertained by their language to be Indo-Chinese of the Lohitic or Burmese branch of the Turanian family,[18] a connexion which their physiognomy confirms. They seem to be a good sized, fair, but rather yellow-looking people. They are described as rude in their agriculture (using the hoe, not the plough), and erratic in their habits, but good-natured and tolerably industrious. They profess a kind of debased Hinduism, but are very omnivorous in their habits.

Biological metaphors ("sister language", "family of languages" etc.) had been in use since the late 18th century, but never systematically, nor did it convey any specific methodology. Things changed with the *vergleichende Grammatik*, and Bopp's first preface to his famous book (1833) has a different ring. The same kind of assessment can be found in authors such as Max Müller, in the 1850s. Yet, the real transformation had to wait for August Schleicher in the 1860s, who harboured the idea that languages evolve like species and, like them, differ from each other. Schleicher's teaching — although his main book, the *Compendium* (Schleicher 1866), was translated into English only in 1874 — or at least the spirit of it, spread far and wide very quickly.

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[17] In Appendix B.

[18] The term "Turanian" was coined by Max Müller and became popular after the 2nd edition (1855) of his influential book, *The Languages of the seat of war in the East, with a survey of the three families of language, Semitic, Arian, and Turanian, with an appendix on the missionary alphabet, and an ethnographical map, drawn by Augustus Petermann*. The term "Turan" itself dates back, at least, to the *Shah Nameh* by Firdousi, where it described the Steppe dwellers, the traditional enemies of the Iranians.

Lewin published *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the dwellers therein* in 1869. It has several pages about the "Tipperah" (the Boroks) and the Mrungs. Lewin explains that Mrung is a name given to the Tipperah by the Arakanese people. Lewin also read Phayre, 1841, as mentioned above, compared Phayre's data with his, and showed them to be the same language. This is the first demonstration of the wide geographical extension of Boro-Garo speaking populations: Lewin showed that the approach from Rangpur in Buchanan's time, the approach from Cachar during the British advance from the plains of Bengal, and the approach from the Chittagong Hill Tracts eventually faced the same phenomenon.

In 1873, Captain Butler[19] published his "Rough Comparative Vocabulary of some of the dialects spoken in the "Naga Hills District". The paper exhibits the same quality of data aimed at a future synthesis. He gives several hundreds of words in 7 languages (Assamese, Kachari, Mikir, Kuki, Angami naga, Rengma naga, Kutcha naga). His "Kachari", the only Boro-Garo language in the group, still has the /əi/ diphthongs, a feature that most Dimasa dialects, and Haflong's among them, does not have (it has /i/ for the same words). Since the same words in both Boro and Kokborok carry this diphthong, this dialect proves to be a link between Boro and Kokborok. I could demonstrate (Jacquesson 2006: 288) that this dialect still survives and is none other than what is now called Riang or Bru. The work of those first pioneers is still of great use.

3.5. Systematicians and the era of classification
Two *JRAS* essays lay the foundations of the classification of Boro-Garo languages. One is by E. J. Brandreth dated 1878, "On the non-Aryan languages of India", the other by G. B. Damant in 1880, "Note on the locality and Population of the Tribes dwelling between the Brahmaputra and the Ningthee Rivers". Sten Konow, when writing the Tibeto-Burmese volumes of the *Linguistic Survey of India*, writes that he started from Damant's classification.

Many predecessors had not only gathered the material, but made successful comparisons and clever groupings. Much of the work had been done: (1) Mech, Hojai, Bodo or Boro, and Kachari from Cachar Hills are closely related languages - this is right. (2) Garo, Rabha, Koch and Tiperah are often cited as more or less close languages - right again. If the group itself, or its core, was quite clearly identified, the outer margin remained very vague, and its description fluctuated greatly from author to author.

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[19] There are two John Butlers. The father is usually called Major Butler and the son (who died in January 1876 from a wound received in a Naga ambush) Captain Butler. Major Butler published two interesting books, *A Sketch of Assam*, 1847, and *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*, 1855.

Brandreth and Damant were not restricted to Assam. Their purpose was wider, and they had to draw limits for each group they were concerned with. Their practice was to put together what looked[20] similar, or not, to a Boro core. They worked mainly with lexicons. Here are their classifications, with their original names for the languages. What they call Hojai is our Dimasa ("Purbutta Kachari" means *Hill Kachari*), and "Tipura" means what we now call Kokborok.

Brandreth 1878	Damant 1880
Kachari or Bodo	
Mech	Mech
Hojai	Hojai, or Purbutta Kachari
	Rabha
Garo	Garo
Pani-Koch	Koch
Deori-Chutia	Chutia
Tipura	? Tippurah

Brandreth neatly grouped Mech and Hojai (Dimasa) with Boro; this is less clear in Damant's essay. Both were puzzled by the exact status of Tipura, which they both indicated at the end of the list: Brandreth decided that it was a Boro-Garo language (he is right) while Damant only suggested it.

The overall result is convincing, and the only important discoveries still pending during the British period concerned the Lalung/Tiwas and the Morans. The Lalungs were to arrive with a note by E. Stack in 1883. The Morans were to appear in extremis, in the paper by P. R. T. Gurdon in 1904, when only very few speakers were left.

The work by Brandreth and Damant concludes a period. Their comparative "technique", actually very rough and informal, had been in use for some time: we saw how Nathan Brown already worked in such a way in the 1830s. The advantage in the 1870s was the larger amount of data, which was induced by colonization, and the subsequent curiosity of officers and administrators, enhanced by the possibility of publishing in two prestigious journals.

4. Between the first Census and the Linguistic Survey

4.1. The 1881 Census

The first British *Census* of 1881, the results of which were published in 1883, was an outstanding feat of administration and publication. Here are

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[20] "Looked", because they worked with printed data, not from a direct study.

the data, for numbers of speakers, concerning Boro-Garo groups, with the names used at that time. These numbers are to be compared with the 1,361,359 Assamese speakers, an incredibly small number (today more than ten times more), and 2,425,878 Bengali speakers. The general population of Assam was calculated as being 4,881,426, giving an average density of 104 hab/square mile; densities in the same period, also per sq. mile, are: Scotland 123, England 484, the United Kingdom 287.

Census 1881	Assam	Bengal	Burma	TOT
Cachari	263 186			263 186
Garo	112 248	24 949		137 197
Hajong	1 246			1 246
Koch		5 631		5 631
Lalung	46 920			46 920
Mech	57 890	11 101		68 991
Rabha	56 499			56 499
Tipperah	3 984	95	11	4 090
TOT	541 973	41 776	11	583 760

Boro-Garo languages: number of speakers in 1881.

4.2. Handling categories with care

We have now reached the "Census period", when labels have to be exclusive and non-ambiguous. This is no longer an "approach" (see Introduction), but a planned and systematic view. Therefore, the labels that have been selected for people and/or language are something like an official identity stamp. They are to stick for a long time.

Yet, census results for languages and for "castes" or "tribes" may differ widely, especially in the case of Koch, which the Report (p. 284) describes as "the remnant of an aboriginal tribe inhabiting the north-east of Bengal".

	caste	language
Kachari	281 611	263 186
Koch	1 878 804	5 631

The Report commenting the Census is an interesting document. Officers in charge have their own *franc parler*. For the name "Kachari" (p. 291): "Under the term Kachari, 282,566 persons are shown. Of these 281,611 are recorded in Assam and 955 in Bombay. I doubt whether the designation is properly used to describe a caste. It appears to be a territorial designation for the inhabitants of Kachar in the Assam territory

(...)" Such doubts have many causes. An obvious one is the fact that "caste", be it a "system" or not, was not easy to handle as a category. All the less so when you are attempting, as any good *census* should, to interpret each caste name in the same way throughout India.

As we saw with Hamilton, the British administration had a technique for understanding these complications. The general idea was that most castes were transformed aboriginals, who usually wished to be integrated into the Indian "system". The price to pay for this integration was to become the shadow of an aboriginal. British officers, especially those working or travelling in the hills, were not happy with the Plains people, while they often admired the Savage and the Primitive in the Mountains - one model of which was "the Naga".[21] Notwithstanding its obvious shortcomings, this view helped British officers to handle local designations with care: they knew that most names or categories in the North-East were those created by the Assamese or the Bengali clerks, and they handled this with some suspicion. This is one reason why descriptive anthropology was so prolific in North-East India: Western science had to know what was on the other side of the Indian curtain, had to "deconstruct" the Indian or Hindu approach, in order to reconstruct the Primitive reality.

A typical case of the Shadow Aboriginal was the Koch. Buchanan-Hamilton, in his description of the Pani Koch, already described them as a relict population, the last witnesses. He was largely right. In his book, *History of the Koch Kingdom 1515-1615*, published in 1989, D. Nath, in the footsteps of Gait who often agreed with Buchanan, tells how the term "Koch" had had for some time a Barbaric flavour which induced many people to prefer the designation "Rajbangsi" (or Rajvamsi), a term which means "of the royal clan". In their steady 19th century process of integration into Hindu India, these people for some time tried to change their name. However, earlier 18th century sources in Assamese called them Koch or Mech, and we saw in Section 2.1. that these two names were already in use in the 13th century.

4.3. About "Kachari" and "Chutiyas"
Sidney Endle's 1884 *Outline of Kachari (Bârâ) Language*, was the first of these Outlines that became quite an institution.[22] In 1895, Anderson's book of

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[21] See the excellent book by Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteeth century*, 1969.
[22] The type was T.J. Keith, *Outline Grammar of the Garo Language*, published in 1874 in Sibsagar, on the Baptist Mission Press. But Endle's volume was the first to be printed by the Assam Secretariat in Shillong. Several followed: Soppitt 1885 (Kaccha Naga), Needham 1886 (Shaiyang Miri), MacCabe 1887 (Angami Naga), Soppitt 1887 (Rangkhol-Lushai), Witter 1888 (Lhota Naga), Needham 1889

Kachari texts, *A Collection of Kachári Folk-tales and Rhymes, intended as a Supplement to Rev. S. Endle's Kachári Grammar* built on that, and the same Anderson helped publishing Endle's ethnographic work in 1911, after Endle's death in 1907. The whole enterprise marks a first attempt at a monograph about people and language. Endle was clear about what is to be understood by "Kachari". He explains that we have Plains Kacharis, viz. the Bodos (or Boros), and the Hills Kacharis, viz. the Dimasas. He also knows that there are good historical, ethnological and linguistic reasons to group the Plains and the Hills people under the same label, "Kachari". Although his book, *The Kacharis* is mainly about the Boros, he gives a comprehensive view of the situation. He is also driven by a kind of love for the people described, which was not rare among such authors; this loving attitude does not preclude paternalism.[23]

Between them, these books present a rather modern outlook. We can certainly discuss their content, and disagree with some aspects. But on the whole, they offer a first model of what, during the 20th century, will be this kind of description. Anderson's lines in his introduction should be quoted here (Endle 1911: XVI):

> Now, the anthropologists rightly caution us against rashly concluding that common speech, where races are in contact, implies a common origin, since everywhere, and especially among people who use an unwritten language, nothing is more common than the borrowing of a neighbouring tongue. But where, as here, we have five absolutely separate communities of semi-savage people, who nowadays are not so much as aware of one another's existence, and yet speak what is to all purposes the same language, it is plain that they must have been united at no very distant date by some common social bond.

Another attitude is illustrated by William B. Brown's book about the Deoris. Deori was the smallest Boro-Garo language, in terms of the number of speakers (c. 4000) at that time, while Boro-Kachari was the by far the biggest. This explains why the Deoris were "discovered" only in the 1840s. They were a rather discreet group, living mostly in Lakhimpur district, at least for those (the Dibongiyas) who still spoke the language.

(Singpho), Needham 1894 (Khamti), Brown 1895 (Deori-Chutiya), Hamilton 1900 (Dafla), Phillips 1904 (Garo), Barman 1908 (Dimasa).

[23] Anderson in his introduction (Endle 1911: XIII): "The Bodos (...) are, like most of the aboriginal races of Assam, cheery, good-natured, semi-savage folk; candid, simple, trustful, but incorrigibly disrespectful according to Indian notions of good manners."
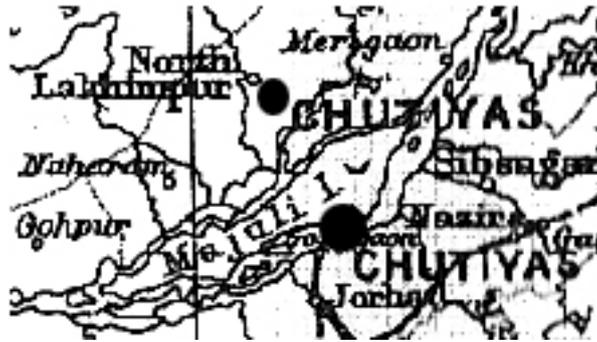
2. The two "Chutiyā" (i.e. Deuri) spots in the 1911 Endle map.

In the chronicles of Assam, either in the Tai-Ahom or Assamese languages, two kingdoms were important in 15th and 16th century Upper Assam. These two "peoples" were called Kachari and Chutiya in the Assamese language, and respectively Tumisa (or Timisa) and Tiora in the Tai-Ahom language. It was clear that a link existed between the Kachari-Timisa and the present-day Dimasas; such as to be Edward Gait's position in his great *History of Assam.* The question was: what about the Chutiya-Tiora? Many were the people throughout Assam who considered themselves "Chutiyas", especially in Upper Assam, but they were considered to be an Assamese "caste" since they were (and still are) quite indistinguishable from common Assamese people; actually, they were (and still are) one of those traditional groups of Assam that came to form the Assamese people. Maybe part of their ancestors were "tribal" at an earlier period, and probably the present-day Chutiyas are but another illustration of the accretion process that came to form the mainstream population.

William B. Brown did not "discover" the Deoris (a small lexicon was published by Nathan Brown in 1850), but he was the first to describe their language, in his small 1895 monograph, *Outline Grammar of the Deori Chutiya Language.* As the title of his book makes clear, he also followed the tradition (Nathan Brown's, at least) claiming that the Deori language was actually the Chutiyas' language, and therefore that he had unearthed, hidden in this small Deori tribe, the lost language of the old and famous Chutiya Kingdom (Brown 1895: III): "the original language of Upper Assam".

Modern Chutiyas, who would be very pleased to be registered as a schedule tribe, have now and then used Brown's book (or at least its title) as a political weapon. The Deoris, on the contrary, are not happy with this unfortunate misunderstanding, because they hope their smaller tribe will not be merged into the much larger Chutiya group. In my book about the

Deori language, I showed that the Deoris are right, since the features that have given their language its specific shift[24] show that it was shaped in the north-easternmost recess of Assam, close to the Dibang valley, where indeed according to traditional lore the Deoris came from, whereas the numerous Chutiyas have never been isolated in this small place, but were widespread throughout Upper Assam.

The point I want to illustrate here concerns the connexion W. B. Brown tried to make between linguistics and history. He was fascinated (as many British people were, and sometimes very knowingly) by the Antiquities of Assam. He was not the first, and not the last, to discuss at length the reputation the Deoris had had, until recently, of being responsible for human sacrifices in the temples of Upper Assam. He thought that such people could only have a very old language (a rather meaningless phrase, I am afraid), and therefore be related to a famous kingdom. It is of course quite biased to deduce that what is remote should be old, and what is savage should be remarkable. The Deori people are remarkable, but for quite different reasons.

When languages are classified, there is the temptation to use the device in order to classify people as well. Very often, the idea was to put them on a scale ranging from the hoary Savage to the most refined Civilized. Surprisingly, the Civilized is the one that describes the scale.

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[24] For instance, the Deuri language has 5 nasalized vowels, a rare feature that also emerged in eastern Tani and some Mishmi languages. Deuri is the only Boro-Garo language that has nasalized vowels, and the contact with Tani and Mishmi could only occur in the Dibang valley region.

5. The Linguistic Survey, 1903

5.1. The LSI on Boro-Garo

3. "Languages & dialects of the Bârâ or Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family"[25]

The famous *Linguistic Survey of India* (*LSI*), or rather the volume we are concerned with, III-2, published in 1903, benefited from most of the previous publications, and from systematic enquiries in the field. The work was carefully planned, carried out, and published. At first sight, it is a pure product of the engineering age which also produced the Surveys. On second thoughts, it is something rather different. Although, regarding most points, it is now outdated, it does deserve its ongoing reputation, would it not be for the infelicitous consequence that some scholars still uncritically copy it. The Konow-Anderson classification is:

Bârâ, Bodo, or Plains Kachari
    Mes or Mech
Lalung
Dimasa or Hills Kachari

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[25] *Linguistic Survey of India*, III-2. This extract, with the north-western part of the map, illustrates the westernmost extension of Boro dialects.

    Hojai
Garo
    Achik or standard dialect
    Abeng
    Atong, Kuchu or Ating
    Garo of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri
    Other dialects
    Koch dialects
    Tintekia of Goalpara
Rabha
Tipura
Chutiya
Moran

The number of speakers is added:

	Assam	Bengal	Total
True Bârâ (Kachāri & Mech)	247 520	25 011	272 531
Rābhā	31 370	0	31 370
Lālung	40 160	0	40 160
Dimā-sā (or Hill Kachāris)	18 681	0	18 681
Gāro (or Mānde)	120 780	28 313	149 093
Tipurā	300	105 550	105 850
Chutiyā	304	0	304
	459 115	158 874	617 989

Konow wrote (p. 2):

The philological interest of this group of languages consists largely in the fact that they are agglutinative tongues which have learned inflexion by coming into contact with the speech of Aryan peoples. Thus, a Boro living in Darrang can talk, not only Assamese and a rich idiomatic Boro, made picturesque and vivid by the use of polysyllabic agglutinative verbs, but also an Aryanised Boro which freely borrows the linguistic artifices of Aryan tongues, such as the use of the relative clause, of the passive voice, of adverbs, etc, and which almost wholly abjures the characteristic agglutinative verb that does the work of these more analytic devices of language.

Were I an old-fashioned guru with disciples studying Boro-Garo languages, I would first order them to learn the above quotation, and to ponder each sentence. After an abridged presentation of the grammatical features, his introduction gives a small comparative lexicon, in order to help the reader to grasp the consistency of the group of languages. The volume also contains an excellent map — I am sorry to say that since then

no other linguistic map of this quality, for Boro-Garo languages, has ever been published.

The *LSI* lexicons give 241 entries for 15 languages or dialects. Some of them are borrowed from previous (and duly acknowledged) publications, others result from specific questionnaires.

	water	fire	sun	moon
Bârâ or Plains Kachāri (Darrang)	dui	at	san	noka-buri
Mech (Jalpaiguri)	doi	wat	san	nokhafor
Lālung (of Nowgong)	di	sara	sala	sanai
Dīmāsā or Hills Kachārī (Cachar)	di	wai	shāin	dāi
Dīmāsā or Hills Kachārī (Hojai of Nowgong)	dii	wai	sheng	deng
Gārō (standard, and Kamrup)	chi	wa'al	sal	ja
Gāro (Abeng, of Garo Hills)	chi	wal	sal	jajong
Gārō (Jalpaiguri)	chika	oar	rasan	rangret
Gārō (Ātōng, of Garo Hills)	tai	wal	rangsan	changae
Gārō (Rugā, of Garo Hills)	ti	wala	rasan	rarek
Kōch of Dacca	chi	al	sal	chānd
Konch (Williamson)	ti	war	rashan	narek
Tipurā (of Dacca)	tui	hor	sal	tal
Deuri Chutiyā (Lakhimpur)	ji	nye	sa	ya
Deuri-Chutiyā (Sibsagar)	ji	nye	sa	ya

For Rabha, which does have a short description (pp. 102-105), no satisfactory lexicon could be compiled in time.

The method is excellent. Local languages (what we call *parler* in French) are provided, with indications of location, and they are grouped according to eight more comprehensive and standard categories: Boro, Mech, Lalung, Dimasa, Garo, Koch, Tipura and Deuri.[26] Even the average reader may remark that the same label "Dimasa" groups two distinct *parlers*, one in Cachar (probably not far from Haflong) and a more northern one. The southern one does not have the /əi/ diphthong alluded to above, when describing the 1873 *JASB* paper by Butler, and people there pronounce /di/ for water, for which reason they are called *Dimasa* and not /dəimasa/: the first syllable here means "water, river". This southern dialect is influenced by the local Bengali dialect and before final /ŋ/, here

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[26] Note that the *LSI* writes "Deuri", more exact than the previous Deori, since the Assamese orthography corresponds to /deuri/, not /deori/.

written *-ng*, the /a/ sound shifted to a nasalized diphthong /ãĩ/. This difference between the two *parlers* was still true when I wrote this paper (2008).

4. Another extract from the LSI Boro-Garo map, showing the central region, where Lalung, Hojai and Bârâ meet.

If the reader studies the complete presentation the *LSI* makes of this language group, he will certainly be interested by the absence, not of evidence for the shaping of the group, but of any systematic use of the evidence. About the fast disappearing Moran dialect, it is said that "A list of a few of the words of this language (...) shows clearly its affinity to the Bârâ group", but how? Later in the text, we read:

> These languages have vocabularies which are evidently closely related, and their grammars have also a special point in common. To illustrate this, I here quote Mr Gait's account of the salient peculiarities of the grammar of Bârâ or Plains Kachāri,[27] nearly all of which applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other languages of the group.

A lengthy quotation follows, but this description of Boro cannot prove the consistency of the group of languages, which are only claimed as "evidently closely related". But related how and to what extent? Finally, Konow decides to quote Anderson.

The following note by Mr. J. D. Anderson on the mutual relationship of the languages forming the Bodo group will be read with interest:

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[27] *Report on the Census of Assam for 1891*, p. 159.

So far as the vocabulary of the specimens goes, Dimā-sā, Hojai and Tipurā are nearer the standard dialect than the others, and Chutiyā is least like Bodo. But many words run through the whole group, and in some cases afford interesting phonetic changes. I give some instances. [the chart follows]

And after the chart, we find only these two lines:

The words "give", "seize' and "cloth' seem to show that Bodo is a degenerate member of the group and has softened its sounds.

Here are the 3 degenerate words:

	give	seize	cloth
Bârâ	hŭ	hom	Hi
Rābhā	rā	rim	nen
Lālung	as	ram	Re
Dimā-sā	ri	rim	Ri
Hojai	ri	rem	rei
Gāro	-	-	-
Tipurā	ru	rom	Ri
Chutiyā	re	-	-

We understand what he means: instead of the common /r/ sound, Boro has a /h/: a specific change.

But this is the only definite change which is described. Any other important question (Why do these languages have to be grouped together? Why do some form a closer unit? Why are others such as "Chutiya" (Deuri) less close to the supposed Boro center? And why choose Boro as a centre?) is not even touched upon. We are supposed to look at the comparative lexicon and conclude.

5.2. Comparative practice in Europe: the professional context
The comparative practice at that time was theoretically different. You were to follow the method (borrowed from Natural History) of common innovations. The languages in a group were supposed to "descend" from a common ancestor and inherit all its characters. Sometimes, a character changed (an innovation occurred), and all languages within the group showing this change descended from this specific ancestor-language, which then formed the specific branch where this change occurs. "Reconstructing" the history of the language group involved (and still does so to some extent) tracing back over the history of specific changes

through a kind of genealogical tree with "mothers" and "sisters".[28] For instance, the "r- to h-" change is specific of "Boro" as a whole, which means that all *parlers* that exhibit this change are considered Boro.

Ideally, one should find features that exist in all Boro-Garo languages, and only in Boro-Garo languages; they would technically define the group. Such features do exist. For instance, all Boro-Garo languages have something like /aŋ/ for the pronoun "I, me"; and neighbouring languages do not have this specific pronoun, they mostly have words like *ŋa* or *ka*. However, neither Anderson nor Konow mentions such important features.

Of course, there is another possibility. Suppose one language, say Boro, developed such a change from *ŋa* to *aŋ*; then, this innovation was borrowed by the other Boro-Garo languages. In that case, the "*ŋa* to *aŋ* change" is not as old as expected: it was widespread among speakers of languages that were already distinct. Thus, it cannot be considered as the direct witness of an older common language from which all Boro-Garo languages ultimately descended, but only as an indirect witness of communication and exchanges between speakers of these languages, at some period. Such borrowings do happen, even with pronouns. For instance, most Khasi languages have *ŋa* for "I, me", although they are, given all the other features, very different languages from their neighbouring Tibeto-Burmese languages. This fact supports the "diffusion" theory, rather than the "inheritance" theory — even if in that case, the borrowed pronoun is not from a Boro-Garo language.

The debate between these two theories, diffusion vs. inheritance, was at its peak in European universities, at the time of Konow and Grierson, at the end of 19th century. In the *LSI* nothing transpires.

However, it is not quite fair to describe the professional arena in this way, as if two contrasting theories were opposing each other, one more dependant on biological metaphors (family, sister, descent, inheritance), with the other more socially oriented, taking into account contact, gift and exchange. It gives the wrong feeling that you were to side either with physical or with social anthropology. If such ideas were indeed published and supported, especially in Germany, the first one most notably by August Schleicher (1821-1868), the second one by Johannes Schmidt (1843-1901), yet Max Müller (1823-1900) in England harboured a critical view of Schleicher's *Ursprache*. Müller explained, in one essay about Phonetic Laws,[29] that the very idea of an Original Language is wrong because the diversity of dialects always precedes any classical or standard language

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[28] Linguists spoke of "sister language" (not "brother") because *die Sprache* is feminine in German, the language in which the professional terminology was developed.

[29] In *Contributions to the Science of Mythology*, 1897.

that could only rely on them. Even in Germany, a strong reaction blew up against the transposition of Natural Sciences and the reign of "phonetic laws", for instance in the work of Hugo Schuchardt (1842-1927).

5. "To milk": distribution (Brun-Trigaud *et al.* 2005: 30).

The French situation is interesting in this respect, because dialectology was flourishing during the very period when the *LSI* was written. French dialectology underwent impressive developments, partly for political reasons after the unpleasant defeat by Germany in 1871. The idea of publishing an Atlas of the French *parlers* was considered a national feat, and planned for the International Paris Exhibition, to be held in 1900. The extraordinary enterprise of the *Atlas linguistique de la France* was achieved by two men, professor Jules Gilliéron and his assistant, Edmond Edmont, a retired grocer and a gifted amateur linguist. Between 1897 and 1901, thanks to the railways, a bicycle, and his own feet, Edmont visited 639 spots where he investigated the actual pronunciation of hundreds of words, which he all wrote down with a special system he had been trained in by Gilliéron, who also drew up maps where the data could be efficiently compared. In 1911, Edmont also visited Corsica. The upshot of the scientific findings fell like a bolt of lightning on the (almost) peaceful

theoretical landscape: the "laws" and predictions of "German science" were not working so well, because the real words in the villages displayed a much more variegated picture than was expected.

One expected vast areas, each with a characteristic pronunciation and, after a more or less definite border, another dominant area, something similar to states controlling countries. But in reality it was rather different. One main reason is the "lexical replacement". Suppose you want to know how "to milk (the cow)" is said all over France. You would perhaps expect two main areas, northern (with a Germanic influence) and southern (closer to the Latin lexicon). What you actually get can be represented, after due simplification, by map 5 above.

Indeed, one observes two main zones, one from the Latin *mulgere* (giving *molzer* and *moude*), another from the Latin *trahere* (giving *traire* and *tirer*), but the extension of each is rather unexpected. The *mulgere* zone is strikingly divided into two, the south and the north, and the *trahere* zone goes as far as the Basque country in the SW. Moreover, intruders appear right in the middle: the small zones with *ajouter* and *aria*. Finally, small spots pop up in many places. There are detailed explanations in most cases, but our main point here is that words do extend their influence: some words do gnaw away at the influence of others, and cross expected borders. More embarrassing: some words do that, and others do not, with the logical result that, depending on which word you study, you will get different borders, different maps. Of course, when we write "words do this or that", we only try to depict the behaviour of speakers.

This is vividly illustrated by the comparative table given by Anderson in the Boro-Garo section of the *LSI*. Let us select 3 different "words" (that is: meanings), "to die", "swine", "good". When drawing maps from this chart, you would have to draw three different border lines.

	"to die"	"swine"	"be good"
Bârâ	Thoi	oma	ham
Rābhā	Si	bak	nem
Lālung	Thi	oa	
Dimā-sā	Ti	hono	ham
Hojai	Thei	han	
Gāro	Si	wak	nam
Tipurā	Thui	wak	
Chutiyā	Si		

For "to die", all Boro-Garo (BG) languages have a comparable word, which can reasonably be ascribed to a common older etymon, say BG *thəi. For "swine", contrary to all appearances it is also true that most

languages have a common etymon, say BG *hwak, sometimes reduced to /o/, then augmented with a suffix *-na* or *-ma*; but Deuri does not have this, except if it can be supposed in *meja*. For "good", according to Anderson's chart, the etymon BG *nham is only found in 4 languages. Research shows that it also existed in "Tipura" (Kokborok) *ham*, but it is not attested in Lalung-Tiwa (which has *ku-mun* instead), nor in Deuri (which has *ču*). One possible explanation for the restricted spreading of this "root" is borrowing: Tai languages have a word *ŋaam* that might be the source.

Scholars such as George Grierson, Sten Konow and James Anderson, though unfamiliar with contemporary developments in French dialectology, knew the difficulties met when using too a rigorous view of "phonetic laws". Their methodological indifference when forging classifications and establishing linguistic groups was only partial or apparent. Moreover, they wanted to provide a linguistic Survey, not volumes of discussions.

Nevertheless, once again, comparison was a rather clumsy exercise. The reader is provided with lists of words, then lists of "closely related" languages. But the gap between the cause and the consequence is still quite wide.

5.3. The consequences of the LSI
Until the 1950s, the picture portrayed in the *LSI*, as far as Boro-Garo languages are concerned, was left practically untouched. All Indian or foreign scholars involved in languages in India used it. Nothing was ever done on the same scale and, I believe, is ever likely to be done.[30]

The political consequences, which are real, are more difficult to assess. The British power in India developed a system of schedule, basically a list of "tribes", to mark them out from "the average Indian". Among the criteria for "being tribal", the use of a specific, non Indo-Aryan language was all important. This system was completely adopted by independent India after 1947, even if some modifications were made to the list.

Therefore, the definitions and labels provided by the *Linguistic Survey of India*, a quite official venture, became the Book and the Law about finding who is tribal and who is not. Nowadays, many revival movements, and efforts to teach the old language to youngsters, have no other obvious aim than assessing or confirming the scheduled status of the group. This tendency is certainly not limited to India.

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[30] This is not to diminish the importance of the "New Linguistic Survey of India" enterprise launched by our Indian colleagues. But circumstances are different and, in North-East India, investigations in many places would now be more difficult than in the 1900s, as is perceptible from the gaps in the recent 2001 Census.

6. Boro-Garo after the LSI

6.1. The LSI imposes its labels
The older labels were not always maintained in the later Census, after the *LSI* became influential. The label "Minor Bodo" was merged in "Kachari", the label "Mech" as well, while "Dimasa" was differentiated, also because it had a different geographical asset. The fantastic drop in the number of Lalung is probably due to the fact that Meghalaya is not Assam. A similar remark is relevant to "Tipura". Part of these changes appears in the statistics, although comparisons are made very difficult by the shift in district borders.

	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Kachari	263	199	239	283	260	283
Min. Bodo d.		4				
Mech	58	91				
Dimasa			20	17	11	15
Moran			78	24		
Tipura	4	122	112	136		
Koch		8		10	5	1
Hajong	1					
Rabha	56		20	29	22	27
Lalung	47	40	16	12	10	9
Garo	112	145	186	193	173	192
Chutia			2	3	4	4
TOT	542	609	596	682	485	531
Assamese	1 361	1 436	1 539	1 534	1 726	1 995

Number of speakers (in thousands) according to *LSI*

Such numbers do not give the real linguistic situation in Assam, if only because they do not represent the importance of bilingualism (taken into account in the modern Census). Other problems come into play. A major one is the ongoing numerical minorisation of the "local" tribal languages. The enormous increase in population, especially in Upper Assam, was the result of causes which are not shown above: the importation of a massive labour force for the tea gardens, an important cash crop; a massive influx from its overpopulated neighbour, Bengal.

6.2. On classification: Shafer and Burling
The first sharp divergence from the *LSI* can be seen in Robert Shafer's classification, proposed in his 1953 paper:

LSI	Shafer
Bodo + Mech	→ Dimasa
Lalung	Lalung
Dimasa + Hojai	incl. Moran and Bodo-Mets
Garo (incl. Atong and Koch)	Garo
	Koch, incl. Atong and Rabha
Rabha	→ Koch
Tipura	Tipura
Chutiya	Tsutuya
Moran	→Dimasa

Shafer reviewed the whole of Tibeto-Burmese languages, mostly from a Himalayan point of view because data from China hardly existed at that time, and those from Burma were also rare, except for Jingpho which Shafer calls "Kachin". Shafer was neither a British officer on duty, nor responsible for public opinion and therefore quite free to busy himself only with linguistics.

The main points in Shafer are the following: (1) Boro-Mech, Dimasa and P. R. T. Gurdon's Moran data are one language. (2) Koch is distinct from Garo but identical enough to Rabha. He puts Atong with Koch. I cannot vouch for Atong, but as far as his two main points are concerned, I believe he was right. Shafer briefly commented his classification. I quote his paper because it has become rare. This first extract shows how he used the *LSI*:

Atsik, Awe, and Abeng differ from each other only slightly. Dacca, however, is a slightly aberrant dialect of Garo. I have used "Koch' to designate a branch of Barish which was not clearly differentiated by Sten Konow in the *LSI*. The Cooch Behar text in the *LSI* is the same as the Jalpaiguri dialect. Konow placed Cooch Behar and Atong texts under Garo, where they do not belong. Konow listed as a source on Koch the *Essay on the Koch, Bodo, and Dhimal Tribes* of Brian Houghton [Hodgson] of which the Koch is worthless except as an Indic dialect, and he omitted Hodgson's Garo, which is Jalpaiguri (Koch), in the latter's article "On the Aborigines of North-Eastern India". Tipura is phonetically similar to Koch, but in vocabulary is probably more like Garo and Dimasa. The classification of Lalung is based on very meagre material, but is believed to be approximately correct. (Shafer 1953)

Schafer was also the first scholar to specify the generic features of the "Boro-Garo" group, which he called "Barish". He thought that he could group his "Barish" with his "Nagish" in a "Baric" larger unit. TB is for Tibeto-Burmese, ST for Sino-Tibetan.

Although most Baric stems are found in TB or ST languages, I have classified Baric as a separate division because it has some very common stems that have not been found in most of the ST languages. Thus most TB languages have a

word for "sun" corresponding phonetically to old Bodish *nyi-*, but the Baric languages have **sal* "sun". Most TB languages have a word **mei* "fire", but Baric has **war*. Now, most of such stems are also found in Kachin, and the question arises whether Baric and Kachin should not be included in a single division of the ST family. This cannot be answered definitely at present; but since Kachinish has a much larger number of comparisons with Burmish and Kukish than with Baric, I have tentatively placed it in the Burmic division. The determination of the position of Kachin depends on whether Baric once extended into territory now occupied by the Kachins and Kachinish borrowed those words from Baric, or whether Baric and Katchinish both borrowed from a substratum language, or whether these unusual words were newly coined and replaced the old ones. One can only say that the extent to which such unusual words are used becomes less as one goes from west to east, from the Garo Hills to the Kachin country, so their place of origin seems to have been in the west.

These ideas will be made more explicit still by Robbins Burling in his 1983 *Language* paper, "The Sal languages", where Burling develops Shafer's idea of a specific link between Boro-Garo and Jingpho, starting with this same example of *sal* for "sun", but discards the link with Kuki and substitutes Northern Naga.

Since 1956, when as a young anthropologist, he did his PhD fieldwork in Rengsanggri, a Garo village, Burling has been working on Boro-Garo languages and the Boro-Garo grouping.[31] At that time, he compared his Garo data with the Boro lexicon, and in 1959 he published, in *Language*, a paper entitled "Proto-Bodo". In this paper, he more or less starts with Shafer's work, but then takes a different direction, perhaps because he considers that Garo has a major role to play: although he still refers to the whole group by the name "Bodo", the long privilege of Boro as a core language for the group, dies out.

After his return to North-East India, Burling published his 1983 paper and many other ones. Among the more important ones for us are his 2004 *Mandi Grammar* which elaborates on his earlier *Garo Grammar*, the 2006 *Comparative Bodo-Garo* book he wrote with U. V. Joseph, and his 2003 paper about the languages of North-East India, which sums up his views about Boro-Garo classification. As the 2006 book shows, Burling concentrated on western Boro-Garo, because he had easier access to languages in and around Meghalaya, and because he thought — not without good reason — that Garo was more a "core language" than Boro.

This is clearly shown in his 2003 classification below.

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[31] From his experience in Garo country, he published his PhD work (*Rengsanggri, Family and Kinship in a Garo village*, 1963) and a small but good *Garo Grammar*, 1961.
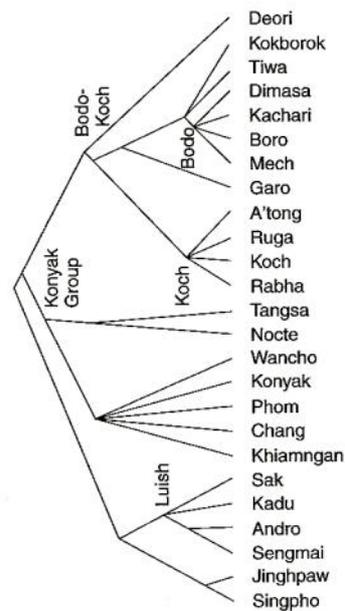
It looks like a rather complicated stemma, where the length of branching suggests a degree in relatedness. He has 4 (or 3) main groups under his "Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw" : (1) Bodo-Koch, (2) "Konyak group", (3) "Luish" and (4) Jinghpaw, the last two being somewhat closer to each other than to the others.

His "Bodo-Koch" includes (1a) Deori, (1b) "Bodo", from Kokborok to Mech, (1c) Garo, (1d) "Koch", from A'tong to Rabha. Deori belongs here but is farther from the norm; Garo (Burling's favourite language) holds a central position between "Boro" and "Koch".

Burling tends to use *group*, he is embarrassed by the metaphor with *branch*: "I do not use "branch", as Shafer did, to imply a specific level in a taxonomic hierarchy, but only as an informal way to label one part of a larger group." Then he adds:

> The data given in Burling (1959) suggests that Garo is closer to Bodo than to Koch, which is why I prefer to call the larger group Bodo-Koch, but most published classifications imply that Garo is closer to Koch.

The most important points for us in these developments will be commented in section 7.

Burling's paper was published in a state-of-the-art volume, and gives a panoramic view; this perhaps explains why no technical reason (except the citation of his 1959 paper) is given for his classification. Reasons will be made more explicit in his 2006 book written with Joseph. The basic idea, as with Jacquesson's 2005 essay on the same topic, is that comparative phonology provides a sound basis. However, lexicon plays an important role in Burling's classification, since he accepts Shafer's ideas about the "sal" vocabulary as specific to a whole western area or branch of Tibeto-Burmese languages. According to Burling, "sal" words are not borrowings: they are as many witnesses of an older common lore between Boro-Garo and Northern Naga ("Konyak") languages, and they are the reason to propose a higher "Bodo-Konyak-Jingpho" branching.

7. Grouping languages

7.1. *"Les mots et les choses"*
Although the Boro-Garo group of languages has certainly, been the most distinctly identified in North-East India,, and the one that has been studied most closely for longest, the "Boro-Garo" label is still undergoing transformations.

It has been transformed in three ways. This will act as a brief conclusion to this paper. The first one is its inner meaning: which languages are concerned, and how should the inner history of the group be understood. The second one is the inscription of this group in the wider grouping of Tibeto-Burmese languages: what about these Northern-Naga (or "Konyak") languages that Burling wants to graft on them, and what is the aim of the discussions about "Baric" or "Barish"? These questions are supposed to have been "technically" answered: with convincing evidence and clear reasoning.

One important aspect should be pointed out. In linguistic discussions held over recent years, the amalgamation between people and language has stopped. If local scholars, for "nationalistic" reasons often want to parade their language as evidence that they are the true people, the oldest ones etc., very few linguists and very few anthropologists would now induce "race" from "language" or vice-versa. This precaution is all the more necessary in North-East India, where matrilinearity (a favourite keyword of ancient classificatory anthropology) is widespread among people of very different languages; and where the court language of old, Ahom, completely disappeared when the speakers gradually shifted to Assamese.

The third and final aspect is about the label and its implications.

7.2. "Boro-Garo", the label

All through this paper, I have favoured the label "Boro-Garo" against several other ones that have been offered. There are a number of reasons for this, which will also illustrate, as examples, a wider concern about "what is at stake, when forging critical entities?"

I think it unwise to extend the use of a well-defined name by introducing "Northern Naga" inside, as one sometimes does. Whatever we think of the relationship between Northern Naga languages and actual Boro-Garo, it is clear that this relationship is looser than within Boro-Garo proper.[32] Therefore, if one uses "Boro-Garo" for any extended group, one blurs the focus and the result. The consequence is that we should keep "Boro-Garo" for what *LSI* calls "Bârâ or Bodo", and find other names for extended groups.

Burling explains (quoted above) the technique of the *dvandva* (a two-member label), by pointing out that two of the most distant members in a group should be used for coining the name of the group (that is why he prefers "Bodo-Koch"). Historically, as for instance in "Tibeto-Burmese", it is not true that the two languages involved are linguistically the most distant; they were only the most well known when the label was created. The same principle of notoriousness is satisfactorily applied to "Bodo-Garo" or "Boro-Garo". Suppose we discover (I wonder by which ratio) that the most distant languages within Boro-Garo are Atong and Deuri, the resulting label (Atong-Deuri instead of Boro-Garo) would be no better.

The *dvandva* technique is better than, for instance, calling "Bodo" or "Boro" the whole group, whatever its extension. Using "Boro" for the whole group would lead, in indexes or out-of-context literature, to severe misunderstandings (most people would not realize whether the group or the eponymous language is being referred to). Secondly, by using one name only, as a kind of symbol or metonymy for the whole, we run the risk of mixing up extensions of different sizes, depending on reference or fantasy.

Now, Boro or Bodo? Anderson explained in the *LSI* that the term Bodo received so far is phonetically inadequate, that the true pronunciation is closer to Boro, actually open /o/ (hence his "â") and retroflex /r/: he writes it consistently with a dot under the "r". In present-day literature we find a tendency to write "Boro" for the language, and "Bodo" for the

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[32] This was exactly Burling's position in 1959, note 2: "It is true that these "Naga" languages show enough specific lexical correspondences with the Bodo group to make this an attractive conjecture; but even if this should prove to be justified, it would not disturb the coherence of the older Bodo group." In his 2006 book written with U. V. Joseph, Burling takes into account only the Boro-Garo group *stricto sensu*.

people. This might be interesting, were it only consistent in the press or, more modestly, in professional literature. Unless some agreement is reached, the difference in orthography looks superficial and, since Boro is better (on phonetic grounds) and received in common usage, I think we should write Boro. And therefore "Boro-Garo" instead of "Bodo-Garo". This is what Joseph & Burling did in their 2006 book.

7.3. Playing with names

Linguists who are interested in the history of their discipline, more specifically when they review (with the usual sympathetic smile) the history of their own field of research, are often amused by the constant shifts in names. These shifts may occur among scientists as well as among the populations studied: on both sides there is a constant shift in domains, in names and in their content.

From the groups under scrutiny, we somehow expect this behaviour: people do change identities, and names are powerful tools for that purpose. My personal example in the small field of Boro-Garo studies (Jacquesson 2006) is found in the constant improvements in dialectal grain, when the numerous lexicons gathered and published by British officers and/or scholars can be organized, and compared with new data collections. We then realize the subtle shifts and shades that unite Dimasa, Moran, Boro, Kokborok and Bru-Riang. And we understand better not only the linguistic area and the work ahead, but also why considering Boro a "core language" was after all not so misleading, at one level: it is true that, historically, communications between the people who spoke these languages are all important in order to understand the history of the region.

On the other hand, debates such as the position of "Koch" are stimulating: is it closer to Garo or, as I suggest, a historical unit with Rabha — which actually tends to isolate Garo in a specific position instead of considering it as the new "core language"... These tactical moves explain why linguists also play with names, behind their spectacles. Putting this here, moving that forward, using this label here may indeed seem like a game. The very label "Boro-Garo", or its many transformations in form and content, illustrate how coinage can serve as probing hypotheses. Rather often, a new coinage picks up momentum and enjoys a large distribution, while the puzzled scholar still wonders if he or she was right or wrong. Or, conversely, while the scholar basks in the sun of scientific success, the concept he or she coined takes on quite another meaning and comes back to him or her as a nasty snake.

Abbreviations & References:

BSLP. Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris, Paris.
JASB. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
JRAS. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London.
LTBA. Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area, Berkeley.

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Matriliny, Reproductive Health, and Reproductive Rights
An Essay on the Khasis of Meghalaya, Northeast India[1]

Tanka B. Subba

Introduction

Tiplut Nongbri, a well known Khasi scholar, in an article published in 2000, explores the relationship between gender and matriliny in the specific context of her own tribe, Khasi. She argues here that while Khasi women enjoy relative security due to matriliny they are not equal to their men, who have successfully created an ideology that helps them subjugate their women. She notes that the exclusion of women from traditional political domain has been to their disadvantage. Enlarging her focus and drawing her ethnographic materials from the Khasi, Garo and Tiwa tribes of Northeast India she writes in a more recent article (2003) that the asymmetry in these societies between the principles of descent and structure of authority is responsible for subordination of their women (Nongbri 2003). The purpose of this article, however, is not to question the conclusions Nongbri has drawn but to look at the very poor reproductive health among the Khasi women and see if it is a possible consequence of this asymmetry that significantly increases the responsibility of women without corresponding increase in authority and economic independence. While the empirical situation is diverse and fast changing the stereotyped notions about Khasi matriliny, based mainly on upland or Khynriam Khasis, seem to have continued and even spread over the years.

The paper is based primarily on the ethnography of Khasi society, made possible by my stay in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, which is the only matrilineal state of India where one's identity and even civil laws are based on the principle of matrilineal descent. During the past 16 years or so of living in this city I have interacted with Khasi men and women on a day-to-day basis consciously as well as unconsciously, and come to know of them from close quarters. In a certain sense I might even qualify as an insider. Several Khasi friends and colleagues share their personal and family problems with me and I do mine with them. We share our

resources to overcome some of our crises together as much as we share our moments of joy and sorrow that come to everyone's life.

The Khasi Matriliny

Meghalaya, bordering on Bangladesh on the south and west, and Assam on the north and east, is home to three matrilineal tribes called Garo, Khasi, and the Jaintia. Regarding the identity of the Jaintias, there is however no complete unanimity as some scholars consider them to be one of the five Khasi sub-tribes, the other four being Khynriam, War, Bhoi and Lyngam. However, there are today innumerable organisations bearing the word "Jaintia", not to speak of the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council, and the fact that the Khasis themselves refer to the Jaintias as Jaintias. The Jaintias often refer to themselves as "Pnar' whereas the Khasis earlier referred to them, rather derogatorily, as Syntengs. The Khasis admittedly do not understand the Jaintia dialect but the Jaintias understand and speak the Khynriam dialect, which has assumed the status of the Khasi language and is taught as the first or second language in the Jaintia Hills District as well.

The Khasi matriliny has been constructed as a system that privileges the youngest daughter, called in the local language *ka khadduh,* as the "custodian" — and not the "owner" — of the ancestral property. The youngest daughter is not the "owner" in the sense that she does not have the right to sell the ancestral property inherited by her nor is she supposed to do that according to Khasi customs and traditions. Nongbri sees in this system a strategy of the men to have control over her ancestral property (2003). But the youngest daughter does make full use of the property in the way she likes, which makes her more than a mere custodian. But more importantly, this is a stereotyped version of the system of inheritance of property, which in reality has significant variations among the various sub-tribes in Meghalaya and even within each sub-tribe. Both Gurdon (1907/1990) and Dasgupta (1984) have brought out this variation, which I will briefly present below.

P. R. T. Gurdon (1907/1990: 82-85) writes that the Khynriam (called "Khasi" by Gurdon), Lyngam, and Pnar laws of inheritance are "practically the same", the War Khasis differ "greatly" from the (Khynriam) Khasis, and the Bhois are "totally different" from the same. Among the Khynriam Khasis, the largest share of the property, the jewelry, and the family house go to the youngest daughter due to her responsibility towards old parents and family rituals or ceremonies. Regarding the system of inheritance among the War Khasis, he writes: "In the War country the children inherit both ancestral and acquired property in equal shares, both males and females, with the exception that the youngest daughter is given

something in addition to her share, although not such a large share of the property as amongst the Khasis" (p. 85). And about the Bhois he writes: "...males succeed to all property, whether ancestral or acquired. Thus, if a man dies, leaving son, mother, wife, and daughters, the son takes all. If there are several sons, they divide. If there are no sons, the property goes to the nearest male heir..." (p. 85). The above statement indicates that the Bhoi area probably had very few Khasis during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, when Gurdon was touring the area, and was mostly inhabited by patrilineal tribes like the Karbi and Kachari.

What Gurdon has said in the beginning of twentieth century about the War Khasis is also corroborated by Dasgupta's study on this sub-tribe carried out towards the end of the same century (1984). Dasgupta shows that children inherit parental property equally although the ancestral house goes to the youngest daughter and jewelry is shared equally among daughters. He further shows that step-children and children born of extra-marital relationship may also inherit the property of their parents. In Shella area, which borders Bangladesh, the system of inheritance is again different. If a man from outside the village marries with someone from the village his right to the property in the village is limited to his lifetime only and if their children leave the village, they lose the right over the property in the village (Dasgupta 1984:111-114).

The variations in Khasi matriliny are actually quite unlimited but for the sake of brevity they may be grouped under the following four categories:

Families in which the children trace the descent from mother's side and both daughters and sons inherit the ancestral property more or less equally.

Families in which the children trace the descent from mother's side but the sons do not inherit any ancestral property.

Families in which the children trace the descent from mother's side but only the sons inherit the property of the parents.

Families in which the children trace the descent from mother's side but the youngest daughter inherits the lion's share of ancestral property and rest of the property goes to other daughters.

Regarding inheritance of property, it should be added here that property in Khasi society is broadly divided into ancestral and self-acquired, although the distinction between the two is often blurred. The matrilineal system of inheritance, wherever prevalent, is strictly applicable only to ancestral property. As regards self-acquired property the parents have the freedom to decide whom to give how much, and it is valid only for the particular generation which has earned such property. It turns into ancestral property in the next generation.

With regard to descent too it is well known that some Khasis trace their lineage from their father and not from their mother, as is the Khasi tradition. Taking patri-lineage is seen especially when the father has a high status in the society or where the mother is a non-Khasi. However, such cases are quite few and do not yet qualify to be considered as a separate category altogether. Further, such cases are reported mainly from urban areas due to prevalence of mixed marriages there but are rare in the rural areas. In mixed families, where the father belongs to a non-Khasi community the children qualify to be members of the Khasi community in their own generation whereas those who are born of Khasi father and non-Khasi mother are customarily not accepted as Khasis in the very first generation, albeit it is quite common for such children to adopt their father's clan name as their surname and enjoy all the state-given privileges. Adopting the clan name of the mother or father depends on who is a Khasi because the children become eligible for constitutional benefits and it gives them a sense of security and power in Meghalaya if they bear a Khasi surname. And anyone who bears a Khasi surname and can speak the language is generally accepted as such both by Khasis and non-Khasis.

Analysing the merits and demerits of matriliny, Patricia Mukhim, one of the most prominent and influential Khasi women in Meghalaya, writes that this system gives women the right of lineage but also makes her bear the heavy burden of her family. This system does not protect her or her children from the consequences of a divorce, as the wife has to take care of her children if such a contingency arises. Commenting on the inheritance of ancestral property, she points out that only a few clans have large properties, which means, for most Khasis this right derived from the right to lineage is actually of little significance (Mukhim 2000).

It is true that in the event of a divorce, which is considered to be quite high among the Khasis, it is the mother who has to take the primary responsibility of bringing up the children. But one should not forget that her clan members come to her rescue as far as possible. Therefore, I do not think that Choudhury is correct when he writes: "Khasi social organisation is a unique example of the 'functional automization' which reduces the importance of the clan merely to regulating selection of spouses and defining the matrilineal identity of a person" (Choudhury 1978: 138). The clan is not only a vibrant but also a highly visible group. To limit its role only to what has been pointed out here is to ignore its obligatory role of providing both economic and social security to its members, especially *kur* (matri-clan) members. Even the *kha* (patri-clan) members are generally not ignored if they live nearby.

The other point that Choudhury seems to have missed out is matriliny's extremely important role of granting legitimacy to the

children. Matrilineage protects the children from the possibility of ever
being called "illegitimate", which is a serious social stigma in patrilineal
societies. Since the children take the surnames of their mothers, who their
fathers are is not important from the point of view of legitimacy, although
for emotional and economic reasons the presence of a father might be
equally important. No one can appreciate the importance of this in Khasi
society better than the illegitimate children from patrilineal societies.
However, it is unfortunate that Khasis are recently using words that
stigmatise children of unknown fathers.

Gender Bias in Khasi Society

Nauriyal's study (1999) on reproductive decision-making among the
Bhotias found gender preference as a factor influencing fertility decisions.
At least theoretically, one expects a preference for female children in
Khasi society the way male children are generally preferred in patrilineal
societies. It is not so surprising in a patrilineal society for a husband
marrying one (or two) more women in order to have a son, who will carry
on the lineage of the father. It is also common for a wife in such societies,
who could not give birth to a son, to tolerate her husband's second or
third wife, who might be her own younger or classificatory sister.

On the gender preference in Khasi society, it is generally believed that
they both men and women welcome daughters more than sons; although
such a preference is not reflected in the way they treat their sons and
daughters. An anthropological study in Shillong city based on a sample of
225 married Khasi women and 195 men shows that wives and husbands do
have a preference for female children, but the reason for this was neither
continuation of lineage nor inheritance of property but old age security
(Pakyntein 1999: 171-182). The study however found that in case of a
single child there was an overwhelming preference of both male and
female respondents for a female child. The Khasi tradition demands that
the youngest daughter stay with her parents in the ancestral house and
look after them in their old age (Gurdon 1975: 76). The parents are
however not forced to stay with their youngest daughter if they do not
feel like so. She is also custom-bound to look after other members of the
family if they need any help provided she is in a position to do so.
Although there are deviations from this rule, the youngest daughter still
has very important role to play in Khasi society; thus the institution of *ka
khadduh* has survived despite Christian proselytisation.

The findings of the study referred to above could partially be the
function of a methodology based on interviews of Khasi men and women
by a Khasi woman. It is quite difficult to get a true picture of gender bias
through interviews of urban, educated Khasi persons by a Khasi woman.

Matters of cognition can be highly concocted in auto-ethnography because too much is likely to be assumed by the researcher about the researched and vice versa. We should remember that the respondents engage in the act of impression management as much as the researcher might be engaged in the same. A more appropriate methodology would perhaps be to study the sequencing of children, and observing how the sons and daughters are brought up, socialized, and to study the behaviour of sons and daughters as they grow and relate to each other. For instance, if a family has a daughter after four or five sons, and another has just one or two sons after a daughter, both indicate a gender preference in favour of girls to boys. By counting the sequencing of the male and female children it should be possible to understand, at least to some extent, the gender bias in Khasi society. There is no denying that a multi-pronged approach should be taken before generalizing anything on a complicated and sensitive subject like sex preference.

Now the state-level data on sex preference, which is also relevant for the Khasi society, may be briefly presented. The *NFHS Survey of 1998-99* shows that the percentage of who want at least one daughter is not the highest in matrilineal Meghalaya (93.6) but in patrilineal Mizoram (97.1). And the percentage of who want at least one son is lower in Meghalaya (94.7) only to Manipur (96.2) and Mizoram (97.6). Similarly the percentage of those who want more daughters than sons is also not the highest in Meghalaya (16.9) but in Mizoram (19.0). Finally, the percentage of who want more sons than daughters is higher in Meghalaya (20.9) than in patrilineal states like Goa (17.0), Andhra Pradesh (19.8), Karnataka (13.0), Kerala (14.6) and Tamil Nadu (9.6). All this does not indicate that Meghalaya has any perceptible sex preference for girl child, as one would theoretically expect from a matrilineal state, as Pakyntein's study referred to above showed. Therefore, preference for girl child in Meghalaya in general and Khasi society in particular still remains tentative.

Reproductive Beliefs

Despite the fact that a majority of the Khasis have embraced Christianity there are a number of reproductive beliefs that are widely known and presumably have some influence on the reproductive behaviour of Christian Khasis as well. Hence, they may be briefly considered here.

H.O. Mawrie's *The Khasi Milieu* (1981) is the only publication that I know of which deals with the subject although under a chapter titled "Children" (Chapter X). According to Mawrie, there is a belief that the father of a child who is still in the mother's womb should not heat a piece of iron red or use it. If he does so it is believed that there may be a red or purple birthmark on the body of the child when he is born. If the would-be father

is an ironsmith he has to plead with the yet unborn child to move away from the place of work. The father should not kill a snake or go for hunting, or complete the weaving of basket. If he does this knowingly the child in the womb may be endangered. Mawrie narrates two stories in this context. The first incident is believed to have actually taken place at Mawlong, a place 20 kilometres from Cherrapunjee. In this case, the father of an unborn child went hunting in spite of his friends advising him otherwise and he even shot and killed a tiger. The tiger was hit on the mouth and its upper lip was torn. When his daughter was born she too had her upper lip torn. The next incident is believed to have taken place at Nongsteng in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, where a would-be father killed a snake by hitting it on the waist with a stick despite the villagers asking him not to do so. When his daughter was born she could not move due to waist-bone deformity. Mawrie also narrates how the labour complication is believed to be due to infidelity on the part of the husband or the wife and how the woman in labour as well as her husband are asked to confess if either of them had any illicit sexual act outside marriage. It is believed that if only both the parents confess their crime the child comes to this world peacefully.

The non-Christian Khasis (better known as Niam or Niamtre Khasis) perform a ritual for the benefit of the expecting mother and the child-to-be-born. This ritual is called *ka tap kpoh* (literally, consecration of the mother's womb). Each such house keeps a dry gourd for this ritual and it is called *klong Iawbei* or ancestress gourd. This is kept carefully so that it does not break or get damaged. This ritual involves sacrifice of a hen with the help of a sacred specialist. Should any death occur during delivery, they have another purificatory ritual called *mait tyrut* (literally, word of evil spirit) so that similar death is not repeated in the family. The unmarried women and pregnant mothers are not allowed to witness or participate in this ritual.

Such myths have some influence even on the Christian Khasis. Although they do not perform any ritual mentioned above they try and conform to such beliefs as far as possible for if they do not do so they believe that they are always haunted by the fear that something may go wrong at the time of delivery. All this indicates at the least that delivery complications and delivery deaths occurred in their lives.

Status of Reproductive Health in Khasi society

Reproductive health, which means healthy physical, psychological and emotional condition of women to bear and rear children, is vital to the future of any society. It is generally believed among public health workers that if the women who bear children are themselves unhealthy and unhappy they cannot raise healthy and happy children, for the children's physical as well as mental health depends to a large extent on the health

of the mothers who give them birth. Hence it is extremely important to assess the status of reproductive health in any society. This assumes special importance in Khasi society because the available data indicate a deplorable status of the reproductive health of Khasi women. For instance, the *National Family Health Survey 1998-99* shows the following about reproductive health of the women in Meghalaya:

Percentage of women aged 15-49 with any reproductive health problem :
    66.9 (highest in the country).
Percentage with any abnormal vaginal discharge :
    64.2 (highest in the country)
Percentage with symptoms of a urinary tract infection :
    24.5 (lower only than Bihar and Manipur)
Infant mortality : 89 per 1000 live births (highest in the country)
Women who received at least one ante-natal check-up :
    53.6 percent (the lowest in Northeast India, higher only than Bihar and Uttar Pradesh)
Women aged 15-49 who have heard of AIDS :
    44.2 percent (one of the 10 states with low percentage)
Under-nourished women with BMI below 18.5 kg/m^2 :
    25.8 percent (second highest in Northeast India, the highest being 27.1 percent in Assam)
Mean age at marriage for females aged 15-49 years = 19.1 years.

The above data indicate that women in Meghalaya have one of the lowest status of reproductive health in the country. Let us now examine the available data in respect of certain limited parameters but with specific reference to the matrilineal Khasis. The data here relate to prenatal and postnatal mortality among the War Khasis (see Khongsdier 1995). The total sample size is 366 households taken from the following five villages: Nongkenbah, Mawsiangei, Nongla, Wahumlein and Lapalang. The study was conducted during November 1990. The results of the study show that infant mortality rate to the mothers of all ages is higher among the non-Christians than among the Christians, whereas the juvenile mortality rate is more or less equal between both the religious groups. Among the mothers of 45+ age group both infant and juvenile mortality rates are higher for both the religious groups. The figures are higher than for many other patrilineal societies of Assam though they are lower for certain other patrilineal societies. It is further observed that the reproductive wastage is higher among the non-Christian War Khasis than among the Christian War Khasis but the figures for both the religious groups are higher than for some other patrilineal societies of the region. The difference between the Christian and non-Christan War Khasis is,

however, found to be statistically insignificant. In any case, in respect of both infant mortality rate and reproductive wastage the study shows a pitiable condition of the matrilineal Khasis vis-à-vis some patrilineal societies of the region.

Let us now take up a study on the Jaintias. This study is based on 68 households of Sutnga and Moopala villages of the Jaintia hills. The data were collected during January-February 1989. Some important reproductive traits of the Jaintias are as follows (Khongsdier 1992: 492):

Mean age at first marriage: 19.64± 0.23 years
Mean age at first child birth: 21.37± 0.32 years
Child-woman ratio (No. of children aged 0-4 per 100 women): 86:96
Mean number of live births per ever married woman: 6.04± 0.28
Mean number of surviving children per ever-married woman: 4.84
Infant (-1 yr of age) mortality rate: 11.92%
Juvenile (-15 yrs of age) mortality rate: 8.00%
Spontaneous abortion rate: 1.37%
Stillbirth rate: 2.39%
Frequency of reproductive waste (both abortion and still-birth): 3.93%

The few studies considered above clearly indicate that the status of reproductive health among the Khasi women is one of the lowest in the country. This is difficult to accept in view of the matrilineal social milieu, which is supposed to be more empowering for women than a patrilineal social milieu is. With both descent and inheritance of property being in favour of women they are theoretically expected to have a better status with regard to reproductive health than that of their counterparts in patrilineal societies. That it is not so compels us to see if at all the explanation for their poor reproductive health lies in their being matrilineal. Or, one may wonder, if the matrilineal system actually privileges the men by enabling them to have monopoly over the inheritance of power both in the public and domestic domains.

While reading matriliny in Khasi society, one often looks at the rights the women enjoy and ignore the huge responsibilities that befall on their shoulders especially after marriage. If they have children, are separated from their husbands, and have poor or no source of income their condition is deplorable even if they are helped by their matri-kin members. The women in patrilineal societies are free from some the responsibilities that Khasi women shoulder. They are partly relieved of the economic and psychological burden of supporting the family, which is mainly the responsibility of men in such societies.

Should the Khasis then switch over to patriliny as demanded by certain sections of their society from time to time? This is for the Khasi society to decide. However, in the event of such a transition taking actual shape the Khasi women will certainly be deprived of whatever little empowerment the tradition has gifted to them. Actually, there are men in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies who are highly devoted to their families and have a high sense of responsibility towards their wives and children. Without a comparative study of such societies it is difficult to arrive at a conclusion about which men — patrilineal or matrilineal — are more responsible towards their family or are less adulterous. A lot of writings in this regard are unfortunately based on personal observations or ideologies and not data collected from a scientific research. Hence, the conclusions they have arrived at are liable to be less reliable than the ones based on a comparative study.

Let me close this section with an interesting account published in *Tbeh Jingshai,* the newsletter of North East Network (a women's NGO), in its Fall Issue of 1999, which opens an entirely different window to understanding why the reproductive health status in Meghalaya is one of the worst.

All the traditional birth attendants in the Syntein (Jaintia) villages of Mawsynram, East Khasi Hills District of Meghalya are men. These men either work in the fields or are involved in the basket weaving tradition of these villages for their livelihoods and attend to the women when the need arises. One of them, Hamlet Kynter of village Mawkaphan came into this quite accidentally. The TBA (Traditional Birth Attendant) of the village was out in the fields when his sister-in-law went into labour. Hamlet told us that he could not simply stand by and watch her suffer so he helped her to deliver and since then has been aiding the women of the village. Hamlet in the meantime has perfected the skill and in addition has also learnt the technique of traditional Khasi massages to correct breach positions of the foetus. He is a constant source of advice and support for the women on matters related to reproductive health and held in great affection by the women of Mawkaphan. In the Garo hills the husband holds the wife by the shoulders and assists her in delivery. The rest of the men folk of the clan sit out in the courtyard to run errands or carry the woman on a stretcher for medical help should the occasion arise (*Tbeh Jingshai* 1999:2).

The above information about men assisting women in labour is quite unusual, as birth attendants are usually women everywhere in the world, but the above report shows that men birth attendants are possible.

Reproductive Rights

There is no disputing the fact that reproductive rights are quite a new concept even among some of the highly educated women in Shillong. I talked to several highly educated women friends about the present article and solicited their help but most would ask: "What exactly do you mean by reproductive rights?" If some reproductive rights activists in the West talk about cloning rights and embryonic rights some women in Khasi society are not yet aware of their basic reproductive rights.

The North East Network mentioned above has been one of the most important actors in the field of reproductive rights in Meghalaya. Roshmi Goswami, formerly of this NGO, conducted a study on reproductive rights in Meghalaya as a MacArthur Fellow for Population Innovations 1996-1998. The relevant portion of her findings, based on 519 women and men respondents belonging to all the three matrilineal tribes of this state and to both indigenous and Christian religions, may be reproduced below:

> As there was very little understanding of child bearing... there was no question about (sic) choice of number of children and who decides the numbers. In most cases it just happened and unlike patriarchal (sic) societies because there is no pressure for a male heir the women did not feel oppressed in that kind of way. In these societies girls are highly welcome and precious but nowhere did we find any bias against the male child either. Moreover the need for a girl/heiress is felt more by the woman than by the man for obvious reasons. In fact as pointed out earlier while there may not be individual coercion the burden of carrying on the lineage and increasing the strength of the clan is a heavy burden and it sits squarely on (the) woman's shoulders!

> While sexual relationships are less rigid, evidence of control over sexuality especially of girls from the royal families is evident in the importance placed on virginity for performance of ritual dances for girls. In the annual Nongkrem Dance which is also associated with fertility rituals and is one of the most sacred and revered ritual(s) of the Khasis, only virgin girls dance (Goswami 1996-98).

Let me now briefly present the essential ideas about reproductive rights and try and relate them to the Khasi women. The concept of "reproductive rights" being very recent even globally no UN body has adopted them although they are broadly considered under human rights. Effort is still on to both define these rights more clearly and to press the various national and international agencies to give a formal recognition to them. There has been some acceleration in these activities after the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo (1994), followed by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995).

The literature on reproductive rights has grown phenomenally during the past one decade or so although it is still confusing to many as to what

exactly constitutes reproductive rights. Are they same as sexual rights or rights to sound reproductive health? Do they or do they not conflict with men's reproductive rights? Do they not conflict with the child's right as P. van Esterik (1989) points out? Do they conflict with their culture? With the culture to which the child belongs? And what if they do? A lot of such questions are not yet settled, at least to the best satisfaction of all concerned.

I discuss now four key reproductive rights, following Turmen (2000 35) and others like Karkal (1996), Nafis Sadik (2000), and Rosalind Petchesky (2000) on the basis of my Khasi ethnography.

1. The right to found a family. The right of Khasi women to found a family has never been contested and they are doing this since time immemorial. What has been always a challenge to some of them is to give stability to the families founded by them due to frequent incidence of domestic violence and breaking down of families, which in my observation, has greatly reduced among the educated middle class Khasis but continues to occur among the lesser educated and lower class Khasis.

2. The right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of one's children. If an educated woman wants to have just two children and wants to space them by three years she is in a position to do so at least in a city like Shillong where various birth control measures are available. Even abortion is not at all a big deal in this city. There are a number of doctors who conduct abortions by dozens in a single day. So if they fail in having the desired spacing and number of children it is mainly their ignorance about it. The number of children in Khasi families is usually six if the children belong to both sexes. It is larger normally only when the children born are all male and/or the parents are educationally and economically backward. The number may also go up when a woman engages in serial monogamy but such cases are few and far between. The relatively larger number of children in Khasi families could also be attributed to a high rate of infant and child mortality, as indicated above, although it is not very uncommon to treat conception as God's gift and abortion a sin, particularly among the Roman Catholics.

3. The right to have access to family planning information and education. Like in most other developing societies talking about family planning is not easy and the women in particular do not open up even to women researchers until a good deal of rapport and trust is built. There are some sources of family planning information and education like the radio, television, and magazines but the illiterate and semi-literate women often have no access to such modern and reliable sources. Such programmes on radio or television are at times too subtle for such women to get the message through. They are rarely customised to benefit such women. The government's responsibility is deemed to be over by making

such programmes free or by printing such information in the newspapers once in a while. The NGOs usually do not have either manpower or the resources to undertake such programmes at the level of the masses. The educational institutions are bound by their own routines. In such a situation, who will educate the women about their reproductive rights? And who will educate the men about theirs?

It is also a fact that men require such information as much as women do. The beliefs that vasectomy will damage their image of a "man", as someone who should be able to copulate, whose virility should not decline as long as he is alive and healthy, and who should not be the reason for their wives to "wonder about", etc. have done a lot of damage to many societies around the world and Khasi society is no exception.

4. The right to have access to family planning methods and services. Some scholars have particularly emphasized on quality service in this regard. For instance, Nafis Sadik writes: "Central to ensuring reproductive rights is universal access to high-quality services" (2000: 8). No one contests the view that there should be no compromise on the quality of services provided in respect of reproductive health. But with quality comes cost and most developing societies compromise on quality because of the cost factor, although at places quality is not available even though someone is prepared to pay the extra cost. It is not unusual to hear in India about leaky condoms or about conceptions after vasectomy, leading to avoidable consequences on conjugal life. Although vasectomy and tubectomy are minor surgical operations utmost care should be taken in respect of hygiene in operation room and after operation in order to avoid infection. Infection in the operated area is quite common due to lack of hygiene. As regards the use of contraceptives the ones sold in the market are good but expensive whereas those distributed freely at primary health centres are of poor quality. Hence, most men tend to insist on sex without condoms and the women oblige fearing that their men might go to some other women if they refuge. The result is unwanted conception, which is not always detected early because many women do not have regular periods due to poor reproductive health. When pregnancy is confirmed it is often too late for abortion.

Due to various reasons, many married couples in Meghalaya use traditional methods of family planning, including the use of certain vegetables like rice-gourd and papaya or some herbs to avoid conception or to cause abortion. Though such means are not always successful the people in remote villages have little choice. For many women the choice is between buying cooking oil and condom and for the men between buying cigarettes or alcohol and condom. Further, while the women may occasionally buy cigarettes or alcohol from shops they can never buy contraceptives from any shop, which can be done only by men. While

preparing this article, I asked several shopkeepers in Shillong city whether they ever remember any woman buying any contraceptives from them. The reply from them was invariably a clear no.

Conclusion

It is true that Khasi matriliny has begun to be contested by some Khasi men. However, many among them still consider matriliny as the true foundation and symbol of Khasi identity. We have seen above that all Khasi sub-groups neither practise the same rules of inheritance nor follow matrilineal descent, at least in Shillong. In fact, there is considerable variation in the way matriliny is followed even within the Kynriam or Upland Khasis in Shillong.

The data considered in this article undoubtedly show that reproductive health of matrilineal Khasi women is worse than that of patrilineal women. The poor reproductive health of Khasi women, as the limited data in this paper indicates, raises a number of questions which have no easy answers. Does it, for instance, mean that patrilineage has a positive role to play in reproductive health? How does one explain the wide variation in the status of reproductive health of women among the patrilineal societies available in the NFHS report mentioned above? How does one account for the possible role of education, occupation, class, environment, religion, media, gender bias, etc. in this regard? Has any research ruled out the role of such factors in reproductive health?

In closing I must also state that while evaluating the status of reproductive health and rights in the matrilineal Khasi society, we unconsciously make the mistake of having the patrilineal societies as the reference point or tend to evaluate the matrilineal societies on the basis of patrilineal parameters. We tend to see these two systems of kinship as contrastive rather than overlapping or complementary ones. Are not both matrilineal and patrilineal societies after all patriarchal? Are not both matrilineal and patrilineal families headed by men? Are not the role of women in family and kinship very similar in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies? Ignoring the presence of some such common characteristics by the apparently two different systems is a mistake most researchers on matrilineal societies commit, making them arrive at conclusions that would otherwise not have arrived at.

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The Notion of Virginity in South Asia and its Impact on Religious Practices and Oral Literature[1]

Emilie Arrago-Boruah

> Kumārī pūjāphalaṃvaktuṃ nārhāmi sundari/
> jihvākoṭisahasrais tu vākyakoṭiśatair api //
>
> "O Beautiful, even with ten thousand million tongues and one thousand million sentences,
> I could not define the result of a ritual dedicated to a virgin girl".
>
> Yoginī tantra, I.17.29

Virginity is still an important notion of contemporary Hindu marriage. Early marriages at village level evidence this fact. The ritual dedicated to pre-pubescent girls, namely *kumārī pūjā*, also corroborates this. During this ritual, the girl is called *kumārī*, which according to the Monier-Williams Dictionary means "a virgin girl between ten to twelve years old" or "a virgin girl up to the age of sixteen or before menstruation has commenced". According to this tradition, a girl may represent a living image of the goddess provided she is not yet polluted by menstrual blood. However chaste she is, the pre-pubescent girl worshipped during this ritual represents womanhood.

Observations mainly come from a place of pilgrimage, considered to be one of the Hindu goddess's favourite seats (*pīṭha*), located in the capital of Assam, Guwahati. It may be noted that there are fifty-one such sites in India. According to mythology, the places where pieces of Satī's dead body fell are said to have become one of these sites. In Hinduism, these scattered places appertain to the development of the Śakti cult, which is part of the Tantric tradition, where adoration of the goddess is the focus and magical and possession practices are fully distinct. However, the temple in Assam holds a prominent position because the vagina of the goddess is said to have fallen there. The Sanskrit term by which this local goddess is known highlights this view as she is "the one whose name is

love", namely *Kāmākhyā*. A stone moistened with water and situated two metres underground represents her icon. But pilgrims can also worship the goddess through a living person. It is in this context that a pre-pubescent girl — between the ages of six and ten years old — is used during a ritual when, for the pilgrims, she becomes an incarnation of *Kāmākhyā*.

The ritual generally begins in the largest section of the temple called *nāṭmandira*. In Sanskrit, *mandira* is "the residence" or even "the temple" while *nāṭa* designates "the act of dancing". In fact, many accounts regarding this temple have given evidence to the prevalence of female dancers or sacred prostitutes (*devadāsī*) in early times. The pilgrim can meet a little girl here. She sits, hunched up, on a piece of cloth. She remains silent while a priest covers her body with flowers and recites magical spells. As the incarnation is real, the pilgrim loses all restraint, forgets the border between the visible and the invisible world, feeds the little girl and touches her feet with great devotion. Satisfied with what he has done, the little girl looks at him imperiously, touches his head and pronounces these words: "*kuśal hāok, mangol hāok*", which in Assamese roughly means "be happy and be fortunate". When the ritual is over, the girl collects a few rupees from her devotee and becomes an ordinary girl again. In contrast the veneration of the pre-pubescent girls in Nepal as an incarnation of the goddess lasts until their puberty. However we shall demonstrate that the same values are ritually performed in both countries. To fully understand this ritual, an apparent paradox has to be explained: on the one hand, a pre-pubescent girl participates as a symbol of purity, while on the other hand, she also represents a sexual person. Women worship, for example, a pre-pubescent girl to seek a cure for infertility. This paper deals with this particular aspect with the aim of showing that the notion of virginity refers to a period very close to puberty, which implies fertility. To do this, we shall combine the results of a study of a few extracts from Sanskrit literature and of fieldwork on a ritual of puberty still practised today among the Assamese community.

Bodies and Sexuality

The medical texts use the same terms, *ṛtu* or *ārtava*, to speak about menstruation or ovulation. Indeed, according to Susruta the time of ovulation coincides with the beginning of menstruation and lasts for twelve days. Once ovulation is over, *dṛṣṭārtava* occurs, that is the time where ovulation is regarded as having "appeared" (*dṛṣṭa*). Moreover, it is explicitly said that the behaviour of a woman during her menstruation determines the nature of her future child. For example, if she has a tendency to take naps during the day, she will give birth to a sleepy child;

if she undergoes oily massages, the child will be born a leper, if she cuts her nails it will suffer from fragile nails, etc.[2] To ignore the difference between menstruation and ovulation and to describe the menstrual blood as a sexual fluid which transmits biological heredity means that here menstrual blood represents the same generative function as sperm.

A more recent text, a domestic handbook written in the nineteenth century to oppose British values, also describes this link. Dhirendranath Pal, a prolific Bengali writer in the 1880s, projected menstruation as a sign of sexuality. Here, the first menstruation is generated by sexual intercourse, which gives the impression that both the sperm and the menstrual blood are defined as sexual fluids:

> What is menstruation? It is a sign of maturity in women. For only when each and every part of the body has completely matured, do the astonishing laws of the Creator allow this miraculous event to occur. For the womenfolk of our country the proper age of menstruation should be 13 or 14. But child marriage — I won't say it's exactly the fault of child marriage — but it is the fault of an uneducated husband when a woman begins her periods too early. If he does anything to stimulate his wife's senses before her periods have started, her menstruation will begin before it should.[3]

Besides worshipping the goddess during a ritual dedicated to a pre-pubescent girl, the devotee confirms his belief about the generative power of the menstrual blood. The pre-pubescent girl, who is characterised as "the root of all forms of existence"[4] (*sarvajātisamudbhavāṃ*) expresses in fact the essence of motherhood even before the generative fluid becomes manifest. Like the seed of a tree is the most essential element for germination, a pre-pubescent girl is seen as the most fundamental living being for the hereditary process. This ritual has been developed among worshippers of the goddess as this cult gives more importance to women categories. Our fieldwork revealed that this idea is expressed during *Ambuvācī mela*, the festival that celebrates the menstruation of Kāmākhyā in the month of June. In literature, rain is usually generated by the sperm of the gods, which is the origin of the earth's fertility.[5] But here the beginning of the monsoon is associated with the goddess's menstruation which is tantamount to life, just as rain is needed for the crops. However, this festival reveals a tension between impurity and fertility. On the one hand, the temple is closed for four days because the goddess is considered to be impure. On the other hand, the small pieces of her red sari, believed

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[2] *Suśruta-Saṃhitā, Śārīrasthāna*, II. 24.

[3] *Strīr sahit kathopakathan*, [*Conversation with the wife*], Calcutta, 1883. Reprint in Walsh (2005).

[4] *Yoginī tantra*, I. 17,30.

[5] See, for example, in the *Kālikā purāṇa*, 11, 28-30.

to be impregnated by her menstrual blood, are collected by pilgrims at the reopening of the temple and seen as the most effective amulet.

Another example of the ambiguity of menstrual blood is that the girl's body is purified during her first menstruation and her new status is formally announced to all the villagers, during what is called *tolŏni biyā*. The term *biyā* means marriage and derives from the Sanskrit *vi-VAH*, "to marry". However, the definition of *tolŏni* is less clear, but it most probably comes from the Assamese verb *tola* meaning "to bring up, to nurture". Thus the term *tolŏnīyā* is also used to speak about "an adopted child". *Tolŏni biyā*, then, signifies a formal ceremony to promote and designate the new identity of the girl. In villages, this function starts on the fourth day of menstruation where the girl is given a ceremonial bath — the same Assamese word, namely *nowā*, is used for the ceremonial prenuptial bath given to the bridegroom and the bride. Three days later, after another ceremonial bath in the morning, the girl must look at a fruit-laden tree. She is also required to gaze at the sun, which in Vedic mythology is the god responsible for coordination between acts and sacrifices, namely *ṛtu*. In Sanskrit, *ṛtu* designates menstruation as well as the season. When this first stage is over, the girl is married to a banana plant (*kŏl gŏs*) under the guidance of a priest. In the afternoon, she is made to dress like a bride with the red mark of vermillion (*sendūr*) of married Hindu woman on her forehead. When I observed this ceremony in Koliabor, in the district of Nagaon, more than a hundred women were invited to see the new bride (Fig. 1).

Fig.1: Puberty's rite of Chumki Bora, a girl from Koliabor; September 2007 (photo: E. Arrago)

A dinner was offered while the girl distributed sweets and rice cakes to three children she had seated on her lap. According to the women, this practice guarantees the fertility of the newly pubescent girl. The precise nature of the girl at that moment is then suggested in the song performed by the elder ladies[6]:

kǒrǒdoi[7] sakǒl	A slice of carambola
rebābǒr[8] bākoli	the skin of a pomelo
rebāb ṭhāle bhǒri lāge he	the branch of the tree is full of pomelos
rebābǒr tǒlǒte bǒrǒmel pātise	the assembly is gathered below the tree
ai rām āideu olāle bhāge he	ai rām the young girl appears separately;
belikoi ābeli hǒle chandrāwalī	the afternoon has come late Chandrāwalī
belī ki ābeli hǒl,	the afternoon has come late
bhokǒt chandrāwalī gā mǒrǒhile	Chandrāwalī's body faded because of hunger
māk bā kehǒloi gǒl ?	where has her mother gone?

The analogy between bodies and fruits — the girl's body is sweet like the flesh of a carambola, her skin is firm like the skin of a pomelo and the round shape of her breasts is like that of the pomelos in the tree — these metaphors link up the song with the term which designates menstruation. When describing menstruation the context refers to a temporal picture: "the afternoon has come late", like the crop dependent on seasons. Moreover when *ṛtu* is used to designate ovulation, in medical texts for example, it becomes closer to its Vedic definition which suggests a "coordinative activity" (Silburn 1955: 36), that is, a process combining action and time. There is another significant metaphor in this song. The girl's name, Chandrāwalī, evokes a milkmaid who offered milk to Kṛṣṇa. A new moment has come: since the girl has reached puberty, she can now give milk like a mother. The fact that her body "faded" reveals at the same time the diet she has to follow during purification at her first menstruation.

This symbolic marriage is common among all the Assamese even today, whereas it does not exist among the Bengali community. Some

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[6] We prefer to transliterate the first Assamese vowel as <ǒ> when it is pronounced [ɔ], although the IAST transliteration scheme would require a simple <a>.

[7] *kǒrǒdoi:* Carambola, or star fruit (*Averrhoa carambola L.*). Exotic fruit looking like a star with five or six sides.

[8] *rebāb:* Pomelo (*Citrus decumana*), a kind of large grapefruit.

orthodox rituals may have been strongly promulgated in Assam in order to establish the necessity to purify the newly pubescent girl's body. It is in fact what may be observed by comparing the history of this tradition and its ritualistic parallels today. The goddess's cult, which has prevailed in Assam at least since the tenth century was, significantly, based on eroticism. The *Kālikā purāṇa*, which is the oldest text dealing with Kāmākhyā, is explicit: *yadyonimaṇḍale snātvā sakṛt pītvā ca mānavaḥ / nehotpattimavāpnoti paraṃ nirvaṇamāpnuyāt //,*[9] "A person who takes his bath in the vagina of the goddess and sips from it once is never again born in the mortal world and achieves supreme liberation". The depiction of the goddess as a fluid is also referred to in the *Yoginī tantra*. Here, she is located in the cave of the god of love, encircled by a thousand lingas, the phallic form of Siva and depicted as *raktapānīyarūpinī*,[10] which is to say that she assumes the shape of a pool of blood.

The only reference to such practices nowadays is found among the adepts of the Assamese sect called *rāti khowā*, which means "night eater". Most of these adepts are located in Upper Assam, mostly confined to the non-Brahmin community and a few tribes who have been converted to Hinduism. Although the rituals take different forms, in each case, the sexual organ of the head of the group, known as *sādhu*, is venerated. Besides, the female adepts on the first day of their menstruation enjoy a rather important status during the rituals. In Majuli, a fluvial island near Lakhimpur, Torun Payeng, a respected man of sixty eight years old and member of the Mising tribe, is considered as a *sādhu* in the Eknong Borgoya village. I first met him at a village meeting in Goramur and then at his place where he performed a dance with his wife, Nimeswari Payeng. At one time, both of them were ready to undress. This ceremony is performed to ward off any kind of misfortunes in the village. This ritual, which is practised in Majuli by a few adepts, is performed naked for the whole night and is known as *Bara sewā*. Though it has been developed in reference to the cult of Kṛṣṇa, the erotic songs, the erotic dances and the personification of the main adept in the image of Digambara, a form of Śiva, evidence the influence of the goddess's cult.

In Kāmākhyā, the ritual dedicated to young girls seems to be what remains of any evidence of an erotic cult, except that today the girls performing this ritual are younger. Damodara Misra, a writer from the fifteenth century seems to be at the origin of this transition. He created an analogy between the goddess's menstruation and rain by imposing a calendar of prohibition which is still performed during *Ambuvācī mela*, "the four days of impurity of the earth». He retained the main image of

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[9] *Kālikā purāṇa*: 72.89
[10] *Yoginī tantra*: I, 11.37.

the goddess, a sexual fluid, but disguised it with a series of cultivation rites. During the four-day ban, when the temple of Kāmākhyā is closed for four days, it is forbidden to engage in any kind of act connected with cultivation: *na svādhyāyo vaṣatkāro na devapitṛtarpaṇam / halānāṃ bāhanaṃ caiva bījānāṃ bapanaṃ tathā / yatra dagdhā bhavet pṛthvī yatra vā syādrajasvalā //,*[11] "When the earth is consumed by fire or when she has her menstruation, the study of Veda, the recitation of the mantra during the sacrifice, rites offered up to the gods and to the forefathers should not be performed, just as ploughing and the sowing of seed is prohibited." In this text, the burning of the earth, called *bhūmidāha*, lasts seven days and her menstruation starts three days later and lasts four days.[12] According to my fieldwork, this calendar corresponds exactly to the rituals of today. Durga Devi, a Brahmin woman from Kāmākhyā, performed a seven-day ritual, locally known as *sathā barata*, in order to find a good husband for her daughter. According to the female participants, the burning of the earth represents the burning sensation in the abdomen before menstruation starts. The vernacular "*barata*" is derived from the Sanskrit *vrata*, which means a votive rite, while "*sathā*" may be the Kamrupi pronunciation of *sāt* (seven) as the same ritual is performed in Upper Assam and called *sāt loga.*[13] This ritual involves collecting some clay and sowing seed on it, and is associated with the beginning of the monsoon in anticipation of a good harvest and implicitly a good conjugal life. Moreover, the four days when the temple is closed corroborate medical texts:

> "Performing sexual intercourse on the first day with a menstruating woman is unwholesome for life of the man; moreover, if conception takes place, the foetus dies during delivery (...). If conceived on the fourth day it has fully complete body parts and has a long life".[14]

Indeed, this idea is illustrated in our field data as a thousand widows, which traditionally implies chastity, gathered to celebrate the four days of the earth's impurity.

Damodara Misra's message, which has much weight in Assam, may explain why until the nineteenth century the Brahmin community in Assam was still known to practise child marriages. Today, this practice is defunct but puberty rites among the Brahmins evidence this fact: they do not perform *tolŏni biyā* like the other castes but *sānti biyā*, "a marriage of purification" which was supposed to occur after the child's marriage.

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[11] *Smṛti-Jyoti-Sārasaṃgraha*: I, 14. 94.

[12] *Smṛti-Jyoti-Sārasaṃgraha*: I, 14. 92-93.

[13] The Kamrupi is a form of the Assamese language spoken in lower Assam.

[14] *Suśruta-Saṃhitā, Śārīrasthāna*: II. 31.

Nowadays, the distinction still exists because Brahmins are the only caste in Assam which does not openly celebrate a daughter's menstruation. In India, the doctrine of *karma* was actually religiously employed to confirm the strong foundation of early marriages. An orthodox text says that a father who did not give away his daughter in marriage on time should drink her menstrual blood every month for instance (Yalman 1963: 49). In practice, it is doubtful whether this view had much effect on the cases of late marriages. The point here is that the ancestors of a girl, who is not married at puberty, are bound to become responsible for the embryo's monthly destruction. It should consequently be admitted that the ritual dedicated to a pubescent girl emphasises a period of transition where the girl is pure, i.e. not yet pubescent, yet sexually attractive because her body has almost reach maturity. The obvious transformation of the girl's body at puberty thus seemed to project her as a sexual person embodying all the qualities of womanhood.

The Child Girl and the Demon

One text that combines the two female identities of a girl close to puberty is the *Yoginī tantra.* In this text the goddess Kālī is summoned by the gods to fight Kolāsura, an invincible demon born of the heart of Viṣṇu. This text may be regarded as the original myth of the ritual dedicated to virgins. It is said that after this episode the gods and the men worshipped a virgin girl in order to achieve any goal:

> Once Kālī reached the Kingdom of Kolāsura, she took the form of a virgin and asked the demon: "Could you give me something to eat? I am an orphan and dying of hunger". The demon was touched by her innocence. He brought her to his palace, asked her to sit on a chair decorated with gem stones and offered her an assortment of food. The young virgin ate everything and said: "I am still hungry, please give me something more". The demon provided more food but the girl was never satisfied. Then the demon told her to eat whatever she liked. It was done in a few minutes: she ate everything - elephants of the kingdom, residents, army, and even Kolāsura.[15]

There are a number of significant inferences from this myth. First, as in several Hindu myths, women are used to seducing the enemy. But in this case, why does the myth involve a pre-pubescent girl? The belief that girls are sexually dangerous as they approach puberty is implicit. But the main element seems to be the similarity between mythology and ritual. Just as the demon gives food to the girl, the devotee has to feed a pre-

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[15] This abstract constitutes the main intrigue of Chapter 17 (Part I) of the *Yoginī tantra.* This text has not been translated in English, but a translation in Assamese has been made by Biswanarayan Sastri.

pubescent girl in order to worship her. There is one reason: food is often used in Indian narratives to refer to sexuality.[16] Sexual appetites are thus expressed through hunger.

Other passages of the myth establish how to select the girl. Any girl who has remained pubescent can incarnate the goddess — there is no caste discrimination: *tasmāccha pūjayet bālāṃ sarvajātisamudbhavāṃ / jātibhedo na kratāvyaḥ kumārīpūjane śive //*,[17] "O Siva, we have to worship a small girl as the root of all forms of existence, and hereby during a ritual dedicated to a virgin girl we should not make any caste distinction". In the first *sloka*, the Sanskrit word *sarvajāti* does not mean "all castes" but "all living beings". In other words, it suggests that any pubescent girl represents the concept of Existence because, as a female, the ability to give life in the future is already inscribed in her body. The metaphysical basis of this practice must explain why this ritual does not make any discrimination. However, it should be noted that it is mostly girls from low castes who performed this ritual daily, the reason being that they do not all go to school and receive a small remuneration when they perform such rituals. Monu Rajbongshi, a girl of ten and member of the Koch Rajbongshi community, which is at present making attempts to be included in the category of scheduled tribes, performs this ritual with the priest, where her mother works as a cleaner.

However, when the institution of sacred prostitution was in vogue in Kāmākhyā, pre-pubescent girls for the ritual probably came from these families. In the *Kāmrupar burañjī*, an old Assamese chronicle written in the seventeenth century, the institution of female dancers in Kāmākhyā is indirectly confirmed:

> Kendukalai, a Brahmin from Kāmākhyā, used to sing for the goddess who would be propitiated and thus dance naked inside the temple. The King hearing this story asked the priest to allow him to witness the dance. The Brahmin let the king see the goddess through a small hole in the wall. The goddess understood the trick, immediately hid her body and threw a curse (xāp diyā) on the royal family and this family's priest.[18]

Indeed, in the *Yoginī tantra*, it is recommended that the pre-pubescent girl be from a family of prostitutes: *yadi bhāyavaśād devi veśyākulasamudbhavāṃ / kumārīṃ labhate kānte sarvasvenāpisādhakaḥ / yatnataḥ pūjayet tās tu svarṇaraupyādibhir mudā //*,[19] "O goddess, if with luck a young virgin girl comes from a family of prostitutes (*veśyākula*), O my dear, the worshipper gets the young girl but this joy has to be celebrated

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[16] On metaphors about food in Indian narratives, see Raheja (2003: 36).
[17] *Yoginī tantra*: I. 17. 30.
[18] *Kāmrupar burañjī*: I, 3.
[19] *Ibid.* I. 17. 34.

with fervour with gold, silver, etc". In fact, the ritual dedicated to virgin girls combines the two female identities, both erotic and non-erotic. Mythology and rituals show this principle — the presence of two opposite notions — which seems to be the reason for the magic in this ritual.

By contrast, the royal Kumārī of Kathmandu is selected from a specific caste. But, there, virgin girls are chosen to incarnate a goddess — often the tutelary goddess of the Malla kings — until their puberty, i.e. sometimes for more than ten years. Despite the erotic connotations in this ritual, which has been studied by Allen,[20] the selection of pre-pubescent girls is linked to the royal institution. It is then difficult to assert whether this practice was imported to Nepal from Assam. But it should be noted that the *Yoginī tantra* specifies that the content of this text was circulated in Kāmākhyā as well as in Nepal: *bhagavan sarvadharmajnaṃ sarvajnānamaya prabho / sūcitaṃ yoginītantraṃ tanme vada jagadguro // māhātmyaṃ kīrttitaṃ taśya purā śrīśailamandire / vārāṇaśyāṃ kāmākhyāyāṃ nepāle mandarācale //*, "O God, O master, the one knowing all religion, the one who is the teacher of this world. O master of the universe, tell me about the *Yoginī tantra* which is [already] expressed. The greatness of that, told in ancient times in the temple of Saila, in Vārānasi, in Kāmākhyā, in Nepal and in the mountain Mandara".[21]

Sacrifice and Pollution

Durgā pūjā
More significant is the image of the pre-pubescent girl during the ritual. To begin with there is a shift in the girl's innocence, as the predominant colour rather brings to mind sexuality than virginity — a red paste (*āḷtā*) is applied to parts of her body, namely her feet, her hands and her forehead, just like a married woman (Fig. 2). She is often dressed in a red sari. This association with the red colour, though deeply equivalent to the goddess's cult in India, is strongly reminiscent of bloody sacrifices. Thus the representation of chastity does suggest both sexuality and sacrifice. If this view contradicts the notion of virginity, which emphasises extreme purity, it is not surprising because pre-pubescent girls always represent a goddess who is satisfied at the sight of blood. Common animals, such as goats or pigeons, are sacrificed in the temple of Kāmākhyā. But the relationship between pre-pubescent girls and sacrifices is evident during *Durgā pūjā* which celebrates the goddess's victory over the demon Mahisa. During this nine-day festival, buffalos are sacrificed daily and special rituals dedicated to pre-pubescent girls are performed by the Kamakhya Debuttar Trust, the committee governing the land and possession of the

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[20] Allen, 1976.
[21] *Ibid.:* I. 1. 2-3.

temple. The term "debuttar" comes from the Sanskrit *devattar*, the land "given to the god". On the first day one virgin is worshipped, on the second day two, until the ninth day when nine girls are worshipped.

Fig.2: Preparation of the ritual with *āḷṭā*, October 2003 (photo: E. Arrago)

Fig.3: Brahmin *kumārī* during Durgā pūjā, October 2007 (photo: E. Arrago)

The belief that worshipping the goddess with many virgins is more auspicious occurs in the *Yoginī tantra*: *ekā hi pūjitā bālā sarvasya pūjanaṃ bhavet /vahūnāṃ pūjane caiva trailokyaśya pūjā bhavet //*, "By worshipping a young virgin, we worship all [the gods], by worshipping several young virgins at the same time, we worship all [the gods] of the three worlds".[22] It should be noted that the daughters of Brahmins perform this ritual. In fact, there are two reasons. First, they do not attend school during this festival and secondly performing this ritual at this time is particularly auspicious for their family as it is for the temple. On this occasion they are very well dressed, in a sari, whereas usually pre-pubescent girls do not have such decorum (Fig. 3).

Similarly, the enthronement of the royal Kumārī in Nepal takes place in autumn during *Dasaī*, the equivalent of *Durgā pūjā*. If the girl can withstand the sight of blood covering all the ground, only then is she selected as the new living goddess (Allen 1976: 306-307). This connection between the pre-pubescent girls and sacrifice appears in the *Kālikā purāṇa*. In the chapter describing the end of *Durgā pūjā* the relationship between virginity and sex becomes evident:

> People should be engaged in amorous play with single women, young virgins, courtesans and dancers, amidst the sounds of horns and musical instruments, and with drums and kettle-drums, with flags, wearing a variety of clothes, by strewing parched grains and flowers, by throwing dust and slinging mud, by sporting, cutting jokes, doing auspicious things, by mentioning the name of male and female organs, singing songs audibly(?) about male and female organs, and uttering the words denoting male and female organs, until they have enough of it (60: 19-22). [Then] The act of the dismissal [of the goddess] should be performed with the following mantra; this is to be done in order to obtain prosperity by putting the image of the goddess in the water and after having abandoned her, in order to obtain prosperity (60: 25-26): "What was worshipped by me, O goddess, let this complete for me.
>
> Let you flow in the current of the water, and also remain at home to bring prosperity (60: 28).[23]

Here again virginity and sex are intertwined. Yet the focus of this festival is the performance of animal sacrifices. Why did sexuality, then,

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[22] *Ibid.* I. 17. 33.

[23] Two translations of the *Kālikā purāṇa* are available in English. Van Kooij (1972) translated it partially while Biswanarayan Sastri translated all the text (2001) and edited it in Sanskrit (1972).

become a glorified event — especially with pre-pubescent girls — at the end of *Durgā pūjā*? The answer can be found in the annual calendar. As the rainy season is associated with sexual activities through particular rituals, *Durgā pūjā* celebrates the end of the monsoon with erotic songs. The effigy of the goddess is then plunged into the water. The reason for this analogy is the generative function of rain. The *Kṛṣiparāśara* (verse 10) which deals with agriculture stated that: "all agriculture is rooted in rainfall and life is rooted in rainfall". If the rainy season appears to be the most appropriate time for cultivators to sow their seed, it is just as if this time was the most suitable for sexual activities or fertility.[24] It is therefore suggested that bloody sacrifices coincide with the end of the monsoon; they return a gift to the goddess. In other words, as life and death belong to the same process, the goddess gives life and takes it back by receiving sacrifices. But these views may also constitute an account of the manner in which this festival ends today. Although present-day participants do not refer to erotic songs during the final part, which is performed with joy throughout Assam and Bengal — mostly by males — gigantic idols of Durgā, made out of clay, are still submerged in water, i.e. in rivers or ponds. When the goddess returns to the water after showering the world with water, it then confirms the definition of the Hindu goddess as the one whose name is life or love, i.e. food from the rain and birth from sex. It is in this context that pre-pubescent girls who represent the "root of existence" are assimilated with sensuous women, such as prostitutes or dancers.

Deodhā

Before exploring another ritual in which pre-pubescent girls are also involved, mention should be made of their particular function in the assimilation of some of the ethnic minorities' practices to Hinduism. Another major festival in Kāmākhyā is a trance performance in which male dancers are said to incarnate some gods or goddesses. This dance is known as *deodhā* (in Assamese *deo* means any kind of spirit). Although some Assam tribes have been familiar with this dance for a long time, this practice, incidentally, did not exist in Kāmākhyā one century ago. It occurs in various localities in lower Assam and coincides with the worship of the snake-deity in the month of August. Yet one element differs when it is performed in Kāmākhyā. This three-day trance accompanies bloody performances where dancers eat raw pigeons' heads and drink the blood of sacrificed goats. The participation of pre-pubescent girls from Kāmākhyā is required at the final stage. First of all, at the end of the public performance, the girls walk around the temple followed by the *deodhā* (Fig. 4). Then, two days later, when the deity is said to have left the

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[24] See, *Suśruta-Saṃhitā, Śārīrasthāna*: II, 31.

dancers' body, all the *deodhā* perform a ritual dedicated to pre-pubescent girls. The point here is not that girls represent an ambiguous position between chastity and sexuality, but that the purity of a pre-pubescent girl's body, not yet polluted by menstrual blood, acts as purification. As this performance is mostly practiced among the Bodo-Kachari and the Pati-Rabha, the ritual dedicated to pre-pubescent girls is clearly a way of adapting this shamanistic dance to a Hindu point of view.

Fig. 4: A group of kumārī during the deodhā performance at Kāmākhyā, August 2006 (photo: E. Arrago)

Virginity and Marriage

When a girl reaches puberty, her virginity seems to lose its value. Moreover, the representation of pre-pubescent girls in rituals reveals that they are destined to have a sexual life, to get married. Although these examples convey male domination, expressed by the control of a woman's body, it may be suggested that from the perspective of the intrinsic relationship between the virgin girl and sex, women acquire a dominating role once they are married. The view that married women acquire respectability in marriage is expressed in Hindu cosmology, which asserts that the only way for them to attain liberation is to carry out their duty towards their spouse. As Mary McGee reported, "Mokṣa is liberation. This is what is asked for at the time of each votive rite. And that goal is framed in this request: May I die a happily married woman!"(1992: 86). The notion of virginity, as a temporal segment before bodies become mature, cannot

be an end in itself. This is illustrated in rituals since girls cannot incarnate the goddess throughout their lives, but only until their first menstruation. In Nepal, however, a few girls were still regarded as living goddesses after puberty, though this no doubts reflects a problem of rehabilitation. These girls have difficulty in marrying since they incarnate the goddess over a period of several years, which leads to the belief that they can do magic all their life. In Kāmākhyā, another ritual practised exclusively by residents also introduces the temporal values of virginity by stressing the relationship between husbands and wives. It takes place during the whole month of *māgh*, from mid-January to mid-February, and requires girls under ten to participate early in the morning.

Kumārī Śivadoul pūjā

Although this ritual attracted few participants in 2007 as observed by the author, a song suggests why virgin girls from Kāmākhyā do not see their aptitude to incarnate the deity as an end in itself. This song does not focus on the worship dedicated to virgin girls, but only refers to love. It belongs to the oral literature of the residents who call this ritual *Kumārī Śivadoul*. *Doul* in Assamese means "temple", which is represented here by a small linga, the phallic symbol that girls make with clay. The song transcribed below is in fact longer, but it is just a short example to illustrate how a woman's duty in affairs of the heart is passed down from one generation to another.

After reaching the sacred tank at five o'clock in the morning, six little girls took a bath, put on saris, placed small linga of clay in front of them, and started to sing while pouring water onto the god's icon:

nājāni nuhuni dilo pānī	Taking him on trust, we give water to him,
siva devatāk pūjo āmi	we worship the god Siva,
pritivī nŏndŏn	the earth is green,
pritivī sŏndŏn	the earth is like the powder of sandal wood,
pritivīt pŏri nŏkŏrŏ kŏndŏn	don't cry while coming to earth
nŏkŏrŏ kŏndŏn, nŏkŏrŏ kŏndŏn	don't cry, don't cry
pritivīt rule agŏru sŏndŏn	the eaglewood and the sandal tree are planted,
agŏru sŏndŏn, agŏru sŏndŏn	the world is full of eaglewood and sandal tree,
phule phul, phule phul	everywhere flowers open up
tumi hŏbā sŏntoso, tumi hobā sŏntoso	you will have everything that you could wish for

nŏmŏskār, nŏmŏskār	all hail to you, all hail to you
nite dim moi phulŏr bhār	I will give you a bucket of flowers everyday
phulŏr bhār moi di jām	I will give you these flowers without doubt
āsis moi loi jām	I will bring you felicity

Then girls cover the *linga* with flowers from various pots of herbs while singing:

mūlā[25] dim mŏi, mūlā hŏm mŏi	*mūlā* I will give, *mūlā* I will be
lāi dim mŏi, lāi hŏm mŏi	*lāi* I will give, *lāi* I will be
pāleng dim mŏi, pāleng hŏm mŏi	*pāleng* I will give, *pāleng* I will be
sukā dim mŏi, sukā hŏm mŏi	*sukā* I will give, *sukā* I will be

In this song, the series of attempts to seduce Śiva, who is invoked onto the earth to meet his wife, turns Nature into Heaven. The first line indicates the faith of girls in matters of marriage. What is translated by "giving him on trust" in Assamese literally means "without knowing and hearing", *nājāni nuhuni*. Besides, the sandal tree recalls a fresh perfume, just like eaglewood (*Aquilaria agallocha Roxb*), which is a common tree in Assam. But they are also both associated with rituals. Paste which mostly comes from sandal wood is used to make marks on the body and many types of incenses are made out of the oil extracted from eagle wood. That is why the representation of the girl is also expressed here with metaphors: "everywhere flowers open up", or "I will give you a bucket of flowers everyday". The second part of the song also refers to flowers. It should be noted, however, that here the flowers in question grow on the stems of some edible green plants, namely *sāk*; this term comes from the Sanskrit *śāka* but the variety of recipes using it seems to be an Assam speciality. In a chapter relating young girls' first experience of intercourse, the *Kāmasūtra* (3. 2. 6) reads: *kusumasadharmāṇī hi yoṣitaḥ sukumāropakramāḥ /*, "As women (*yoṣitaḥ*) have the same nature as flowers (*kusuma*), the beginning should be tender" otherwise, as the text adds, "if they are brutalised by men, who have not yet won their trust, they become women who hate sex."

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[25]

mūlā	radish	*Raphanus sativa*
lāi	pot herbs	*Brassica toria*
pāleng	pot herbs	*Amaranthus viridis Linn.*
sukā	spinach	*Rumex vesicarius Linn.*

Conclusion

The contrasting attitudes towards the notion of virginity in the West and in India come across quite clearly: the one regards virginity as essentially chastity, while the other as essentially a temporal stage before complete maturation of the body, i.e. a biological stage prior to sexual maturation. To ignore this difference may led to confusion. For example, when the *Kāmasūtra* refers to a girl who marries someone out of love, Alain Danielou translates "she can give herself, renouncing her virginity" (2003: 296) while the original Sanskrit text precisely refers to "a childhood state from where she is liberated", *bālamāvamokṣaya* (3. 4.46). In the first case, she seems to lose her purity while in the second she seems to undertake a liberating path as she becomes a married woman. Thus if we admit that virginity is a central notion in Indian kinship, it becomes easier to consider the institution of marriage in India. Although the *Arthaśāstra* establishes that "the gift of one's virgin daughter" in marriage makes for the most appropriate wedding, it does not disqualify other forms of marriage. According to what as been shown, this statement rather stresses the notion of virginity which is monitored by the father until the girl's puberty. In the *Kāmasūtra,* where love marriage is regarded as the best of all, since it stems from mutual love (3.5.30), the girl's virginity is also fundamental. A girl whose menstruation has started, *rākāṃ jātarajasaṃ* (3.1.11), is disqualified and the text advises to choose a woman "who has not been with another [man] before", *ananyapūrvāyāṃ* (3.1.1).

There is no doubt that the concern for virginity clearly reflects male domination which contradicts the supremacy of women categories as illustrated in the goddess's cult. Besides, the ritual dedicated to the pre-pubescent girl is rather a phenomenon which derives from social discrimination. Only uneducated girls perform this ritual daily as a source of income while Brahmin girls, who go to school, only perform it once a year. Moreover, if we compare the ritual dedicated to a *kumārī*, with those related to puberty, we can see that they are quite different. In the first case, menstrual blood is not exclusively associated with a biological fluid. Menstruation is rather a social force which is used as a magical substance. It is in this context that in Sanskrit the virgin girl connotes a girl who is at the threshold of puberty. Consequently, virginity is more appropriately equipped to create a transitional image which fit the category of magic.

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Plight of the *igus*: notes on shamanism among the Idu Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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> "The problem of religion in NEFA is a complex one, for the sudden impact and rapid development to which the people have been exposed is without precedent, and it is thus not easy to predict what their reactions will be." (Elwin 1999/1957: 207)

> "... tribal religion gives the people the power to reconcile themselves to the eternal emergencies of life". *(ibid*: 214)

Locating the Idu Mishmis

Idus Mishmis are considered to be one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh though their total number only amounts to 57,543 persons (as per 2001 Census, Govt. of India) located in the Upper Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh. They are sometimes included as part of the larger constellation of the Mishmi group, which also includes Digaru and Miju Mishmis.[2] Culturally speaking, Idus are to a large extent distinct from the other two which is reflected in various aspects of their day-to-day life and social structure as well as their system of values. Idu Mishmis are commonly known as Chulikata Mishmis because of their distinct hair style and perhaps this nomenclature was given by the people of the plains with whom Idus used to do trade (Bhattacharjee 1983:13). In a few colonial documents, some Idus were wrongly identified as a separate tribe called Bebejiya who were negatively portrayed (Needham 1900, Allen 1905, Cooper [1873] 1995).[3] Dalton (1872:

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[2] The Miju Mishmis are now commonly known as Kamans, whereas Digaru Mishmis are called Taraons. One distinguishing feature of the Mishmis is their hairstyle (Dutta Chaudhuri, 1978).
[3] The Intelligence Branch of the Division of the Chief of the Staff, Army Headquarters, India, reported (1907:181) that the Chulikattas are the largest and

18) reported them as being Midhi people and mentioned that they were intensely detested and mistrusted by their neighbours, the Abors and Tanis, and they were much dreaded by the Saudiya[4] population due to the sneaky expeditions they made to kidnap women and children.

Bhattacharjee (1983) and Baruah (1960:13-33) tried to textualise their origin and migration on the basis of various elements of oral narrative, while in his recent publications (2003-2004, 2005) Blackburn touched upon this area and critically discussed their memories of migration and their journey compared to some of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

Traditionally, an *igu* represents the central icon in the arena of religious beliefs and practices in Idu society. Almost every major aspect of Idu life revolves around their *igus* and its importance is reflected even beyond the sacred boundary, since they are involved in profane activities. For them, the key concept of spirit (*khinyu*) rules the world of the unknown, which may be benevolent or malevolent, while nourishing the concept of a Supreme Creator known as Inni.

"The Supreme God Inni, embodies the highest ethical conception reached by the Idus. Besides being the Supreme Creator of all things, he is the impersonal principle of justice, and the upholder of the moral order of creation" (Baruah 1960: 69). According to Bhattacharjee (1983: 117), "An Idu is constantly haunted by the spirits (khinyu) who abound in jungles, hills, shadowy recesses, rivers, gorges, cliffs as well as in the house and the village. They are dreaded as no one knows when and where one may fall into the trap. The spirits are the real masters of their fate. Any calamity-befalling them is attributed to spirits".

Idu mythology reflects this syndrome. Since the origins of the universe, man and spirits have been the progeny of the same forefathers. According to their beliefs, even in the world of the unknown, hierarchy still exists among the variegated deities who were responsible for the creation and the survival of the moral order of things (Linggi and Miso 2000: 23). It is the *igu* or shaman who works as the mediator between the Idus and their world of the unknown by performing various rituals, magic-

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boldest tribe, while the Bebejias, occupying more remote areas, are known to be the least civilized and the source of violence in the plains.

[4] During the colonial period, Saudia was a famous trade centre in the plains of Assam near the Brahmaputra River. This was the place where hill tribes of NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) used to come down along distinct trade routes to barter, sell or exchange their indigenous products with the people of the plains. During the return journey they used to take back whatever they needed, such as salt, beads, clothes, iron implements etc. Most annual administrative reports from Assam during the colonial period contain detailed accounts of such trade activities which British administrators encouraged and for which they had to draw up a distinct policy regarding trade in Saudia.

religious acts and most importantly, by a unique dance assisted by some team members. The *igu* has such pervasive influence in the whole social system that even today when their society is undergoing a transformation process most people still have a strong cognitive perception of the divine power of the *igu*s; an institution which has fallen into gradual decline.

Fig. 1 Healing dance (S. Chaudhuri)

Concept of the shaman

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000: 1176), a shaman is a person in some religions and societies who is believed to be able to contact good and evil spirits and cure people of illness. In general parlance, shamanism implies power possessed by medicine men and sorcerers who are used to controlling or manipulating spiritual forces for human ends. Eliade (1964: 3) contested such a notion and said that if the word "shaman" is taken to mean any magician, sorcerer, medicine man, or ecstatic found throughout the history of religions and religious ethnology, we arrive at a notion at once extremely complex and extremely vague. He did not deny that a shaman is also a medicine man or magician but he emphasized that beyond that, a shaman is a psychopomp and he may be a priest, mystic or poet (*ibid*: 4). According to him, shamanism in the strict sense of the word is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon which

originated in Siberia and Central Asia, and the very word came from Russian, from the Tunguisic saman *(ibid:4)*.

In the context of North-East India, the rise of *shaktaism* or *tantrism* out of the local shamanistic religions of the Indo-Mongoloids has been widely acknowledged by scholars (Bhagabati 1998: 1). According to Stirn and Van Ham (2000: 95), "By instituting the shaman, the peoples of Northeast India created an expert who is able to establish direct contact with spiritual beings. This becomes necessary when an imbalance arise in the world. Such shamanistic insight into the world's interrelations and the ability to make direct contact with these forces distinguishes man from his fellow earthly creatures". In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, which is an excellent example of religious syncretism, shamanism still plays a very important role among most non-Buddhist tribes even though Christianity is gradually becoming a dominant reality in this Indian frontier region. Every tribe has its own nomenclature for religious specialists, though many scholars do not distinguish them in terms of priest or shaman.[5] But if we look at the functional aspects, then undoubtedly most of them can be conceptualized as shaman. This paper attempts to understand this very phenomenon of shamanism in the life of Idu Mishmis and the plight of such shamans commonly called *igu* in the contemporary context where society as such is undergoing a transition phase. They perform different types of ritual starting with life-cycle rituals, rituals related to health and sickness, for a good harvest, for successful hunting, for the construction of a traditional house and even to settle disputes, and especially with the aim of identifying the guilty person.

The origin of the *igu* shaman is linked to the myth of the emergence of humankind itself. In short, a person called Inni Asili Mili gave birth to powerful priests, namely Sineru, Lomo Asili Mili, Lunjuru, etc., who are considered to be the masters of the different activities described below. According to Baruah (1988: 72), "All sacrificial ritual is conducted by priests, of whom the Idus recognize two classes, the Igu or Igu Meme and the Igu-A. The former is a person of experience and dignity who officiates at a wide variety of ceremonies. The Igu-a is a trainee, not yet fully qualified, who is concerned with lesser rituals such as ascertaining the cause and cure of diseases. He is simply a medicine man, but capable of falling into trance. In Igu-A can become an Igu, if by his association with other experienced Igus or, through initiation by the spirits, he gains

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[5] Chaudhury and Duarah (2004:19-34) briefly reviewed the institution of priesthood in relation to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh where they have given tribe-specific nomenclatures for priests or shamans. The People of India volume, which deals with Arunachal Pradesh, gives a brief ethnographic account of the tribes where one gets a basic idea about religious specialists (Dutta and Ahmad, 1995).

sufficient knowledge and proves himself capable of dealing with the powerful and malicious spirits".[6]

It is believed that each *igu* has a tutelary spirit known as *drawn* who guides him or her while diagnosing disease or performing various rituals. And it is this tutelary spirit whom *igu* invokes while in a trance to guide him or her in the proper direction. Baruah mentions (ibid:73), "I have been told that the tutelary spirit of a male priest is generally male, but occasionally, he may have a female tutelary also. Rukhu Meme of Aonli village, for example, told me that his tutelary spirit was female, who visited him in trance when he presided over the more important sacrifices. A female shaman on the other hand always has a male tutelary spirit".

In former times one was always careful while visiting the house of an *igu* to ensure that the *igu* was not disturbed as he or she may have been involved in spiritual acts or may even have been holding a dialogue with the supernatural powers. People avoided visiting such a house early in the morning.[7]

Some popular stories about *igus*

Pai Miou once went out to hunt with four villagers in the jungle. They hunted a big wild buffalo but they did not have any matches with them to light a fire to roast the meat. Pai Miou noticed smoke coming from a mountain. So he sent his friends one after another to trace it but no one came back. He waited for a long time then he himself went to the mountain where smoke was coming out. He saw that a demon was roasting all his friends in a pan. Fuming with rage, he asked him to meet in five days' time. However, in the meantime he could not control his anger and he destroyed that mountain which led to the death of the demon.

There is another such story about the priest Gomti Alapro. Once he visited his cousin, also a priest, who challenged him and flew away carrying a pig on his back. Then Gomti Alapro also demonstrated his power by making a hole in a stone, placing it on his fingers and using the stone as a fan.

Arati Melon, a great priest from Anini, is said to have crossed the Dre River by walking along a fine thread.

Sondo Umpo is remembered for having flown from Kroling through Alapa around 2 a.m. in the dark to reach Mehao Lake.

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[6] See also Bhattacharjee (1983:121-122)

[7] The situation is now far less rigid as I managed to visit many igu houses at different periods of the day and interacted with igus freely. Some of them allowed me to see and touch their costumes and even allowed me to take photographs.

Rano Mihu is reported to have travelled back to his village, a distance of ten kilometres in one month; he had to erect special obstacles (*laro),* everywhere to deter the spirit from accompanying him to the village. Although the Idus believe that those who have drowned in rivers are claimed by a water snake, it is also said that Rano Mihu was able to drag the snake out of the water with a tremendous pull. In fact, people affirm that once he pulled out a thin black thread, which represented such a snake, from the Dri River near Ahunli village when a man accidentally slipped in and died.

Fig. 2 Rano Mihu, one of the famous igu from Anini circle (S. Chaudhuri)

Becoming an *igu*

In Idu Mishmi society, *igu*s do not have any gender bias though the majority of *igu*s belong to the male group. There is awareness of hierarchy among the *igu*s and it is generally believed that female *igu*s, who are actually much fewer, are quite powerful and even more powerful than their male counterparts.

No one can become an *igu* by virtue of a wish. Such spiritual power is transmitted as a gift of god, which may be reflected by some symptoms; mostly through abnormal activities. So a son or daughter of an *igu* does not automatically become an *igu.* On the other hand, a son of a non-*igu* (*minga*) may become a powerful *igu* by the grace of god. The hymns which an *igu* chants cannot be understood by common Idus except for a few

elderly people, as well as those who have assisted *igu*s for a long period of time while dancing or performing other rituals. Idus believe that if any *igu* tries to teach such sacred hymns to his or her offspring against the wish of God to make him or her an *igu*, then the trainee may even die.

The process of becoming an *igu* is quite varied and many popular beliefs can be traced back to describing unusual events, such as sleeping on tree leafs, consuming human excreta and many other such acts. Apa Mega of Arenli village in the Desali circle recounts, "I started playing the role of *igu* in 1973 when Mr. Das was Circle Officer at Desali. It was my sincerest wish to become an *igu*. I used to chant again and again even when I was working. My friends also encouraged me to become an *igu*."

It is a matter of destiny as to who will become an *igu* and with what status and to what degree. The Idu strongly believe that such a plight is determined while an individual is in their mother's womb. It is generally perceived that by pervasive training one cannot simply become an *igu* by divine power. The very first instance of an *igu* undergoing divination in his or her life is reflected in some abnormal acts which are beyond the comprehension of an Idu, such as wholeheartedly eating human excreta and instructing others to do so, lifting huge baskets containing 5 to 10 bags of paddy etc. Such a situation may last a few hours and this period of divine transition is called *atombo*. Only then does one becomes *igu* and is empowered to act as a mediator between human society and the Gods, Goddesses and spirits who control the world of the unknown. Indeed, Baruah (1988: 74) writes:

> Not everyone can be a priest. A man so destined should be born with certain signs, such as the umbilical chord around his neck at birth. Sometimes, the mother gets a prediction in her dreams that her child will be an important priest. A pregnant women, who dreams of caressing a child lying in a basket which is hung in the *egamba* or *iu-amba* tree expects that her child will be a priest. So does a woman who dreams of the bird *praerru* making its nest on the roof of the house. In such cases, when the child attains maturity, or sometimes even at an earlier age, he falls into a trance, and his soul travels to the spirit-world. There it becomes acquainted with the spirits and lives with them for a long time, thus becoming capable of conducting various ceremonies. Very often a man destined to be priest leaves his home at the beginning of a long trance, and stays in the jungle for several days till his soul comes back to him. At this stage he loses his senses and does unusual things. He may eat human excreta and regard the most delicious food as dirt.

While narrating his experience of becoming *igu*, Yango Mow of the Angrim Valley said that when his mother fell ill, instead of calling the *igu*, he took a *kalih* (herbal medicine/root used by an *igu*) and sat outside his house on the verandah and began chanting hymns very quietly. As he chanted, many passers-by asked him what was he muttering about. As

they came nearer, he hid the *kalih* on his lap. In doing so, he performed *aanyongo* (see below) and cured his mother. It was because of God's wish that he became an *igu*. But after this incident he made no further attempt to act as an *igu* because he felt that if anyone heard him they would laugh at him. Once he went with friends to build a house. After the house was built, when an *igu* was needed, his friends told the owner that he was an *igu*. On hearing this, the owner asked him to perform the *thruh* ritual (protection of a new house by sacrificing a hen). He was very nervous as well as shy, and was sure that he would be laughed at. He suddenly began in a very loud voice that startled everybody; they all burst into laughter. After a few minutes everything carried on smoothly. He was not even aware of what he was saying. At the end of the ritual everyone applauded him for his hymns. In this way he became a professional *igu*.

Similarly, Buchu Tacho of Etabe village said that he became an *igu* thanks to the blessings of the Almighty. He had no teacher. He learnt the chanting on hearing the *igu*s during rituals. During these rituals he was only a follower and he gradually developed *igu* behaviour as well as learnt the art of chanting. He began as an *igu* with the *meshala* ritual performed in the case of murder or disputes where a heavy fine is imposed. Indeed he was the person called upon to settle his own uncle's murder case. As he could not find an *igu* to conduct *meshala*, he did it himself. Then he performed death rituals such as *broacha* and *yah* numerous times.

Smti Imuno Linggi from Anini narrated her experience of becoming an *igu*. Her father was a renowned *igu*, but he never encouraged his daughter to become an *igu*, though villagers talked to her father about her *igu*-like behaviour. When she came to stay with her husband, she began to develop some peculiar habits such as eating mud from the toilet, which is a sign that one is becoming an *igu*. Seeing this, her husband's grand-mother, herself a powerful *igu*, encouraged her to become an *igu*. Her grandmother started taking an interest in her but she didn't teach her any hymns or chanting because she herself had developed the spiritual power to chant the hymns. The chanting of hymns came to her spontaneously. She believed that self-acquired power and wisdom is worthier than learning it from a senior *igu*. Her husband's grandmother made her an *igu* by making her perform the *amraseh* ritual to protect all the family members of the house and grant them peace for the first time at their home. Her next performance was when she acted as *rehguh* during the *reh* festival. She was nervous because it would be her first major ritual, which she had never imagined herself performing, and she was aware that many great *igu*s would be assembled to hear her. The one she feared most was an *igu*, known as Towshi Miuli, who said that she would not be capable of chanting hymns, especially the *shacha*, the hymns that are chanted when a *mithun* or *sha (Bos frontalis)* is to be sacrificed. These hymns about the

origin of the *mithun* are chanted while leading the soul of the *mithun* to its place of origin.

On her way to the village, she was so nervous that her hands trembled. She could not properly cut the bamboo which an *igu* carries to perform *reh*. She was unable to speak or look at the face of her followers. Then when she proceeded with the ritual and started chanting hymns they were all amazed. After listening to her hymns, Towshi Miuli showered her with praise regarding the fact that she knew all the hymns and rules for chanting during the *reh* ritual. Hence she performed 23 *rehgu*s and 15 *yah*s.

Odah Miwu of Maruli village revealed his experience of becoming an *igu*. Since his boyhood he had always wanted to become an *igu*. He took an interest in *igu*s and attended every ritual though he understood nothing. Even with his friends he never played any other game than dancing like an *igu* with undecipherable hymns that he had heard. He and his friends made the *igu* costume by collecting the dried bones of monkeys and other animals. They also collected bamboo roots to carve into tiger jaws. After preparing this costume they would dance for hours. As he was well and truly an adolescent by then and his friends and relatives asked him to think seriously about becoming an *igu* and advised him to train under some senior *igu*s. But he was not sure of his own capabilities or even of what he actually chanted while dancing.

Once it happened that a neighbour was suffering from *aya-thu* (food poisoning) and his friends forced him to perform *aanyongo*. He began chanting whatever came to mind. To his utter surprise, the man was cured. This was at the age of 18. After this he had a dream. Then after a few days there was an invitation from another village to perform *ayiih* (a ritual conducted to cure illness) for somebody who was suffering from *apomother* (a kind of illness where part of the body swells then starts itching and develops wounds which could be very dangerous). He was nervous because he did not know what to say. It was not like *aanyongo*, where one has to chant for only 20 to 30 minutes and no one actually hears it. For *aayih,* an *igu* has to sit and chant for 12 hours. Moreover, there would be many people within earshot. On that occasion as well he chanted whatever came to mind and the patient was cured. He then began believing in himself and felt that he could really become an *igu*.

Apparently, although ideally shamanism is perceived as a gift of God, a few Idus have achieved the same aim by their sustained interest. It is even reported that one may become an *igu* by assisting powerful *igu*s over a long period of time. However, Idus believe that generally speaking such *igu*s are less powerful and cannot perform all the necessary rituals. Bhattacharjee (1983: 121) reported, "Not anyone can become a shaman even if he tries to be so. He must show some indication of being possessed by spirits and some definite sign of communication and understanding

with the supernatural elements, which dominate the world of the Idus. He should also be well conversant with legends and history of the tribe from the beginning of creation and should name detailed knowledge of various ceremonial rites, otherwise his standing as an *igu* will be held in ridicule".

Igu costume

In most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, priests or shamans wear a special costume by which they are immediately distinguishable from the rest of the community. According to myth, the first *igu*s wanted special ceremonial clothes for ritual performances because they needed to acquire power and adopt different outlooks, which could only be done by wearing different clothes from those of commoners. The Almighty would send down power if they wore a special hairband and other items making up the *igu* costume. Moreover, such a costume would protect an *igu* from evil spirits. It is believed that *igu*s do not remain a common human being while performing rituals. By chanting hymns and tying the tail of a yak to his/her hairband, an *igu* asks God to endow him or her with the power of the mountains where such animals are reared. Moreover, that is the place where the souls of the dead are believed to be taken.

The costume which an *igu* wears during major ritual performances is composed of eleven items collectively known as *amralapoh*. It is the most sacred possession for an *igu* and does not differ according to gender. Of course, some variations are to be noted in the size and shape of the costume's different components. This costume is kept outside the house in a hand-made basket, which is placed on wooden poles or hung near the entrance door, or stored inside the storehouse. On seeing such baskets, one immediately recognises the house as belonging to an *igu*. Sometimes the drum, *gerembo,* beaten during the *igu* dance by his or her assistants, is also kept hanging near the entrance of the house and symbolizes the presence of an *igu* in that house.

Of the eleven components constituting the igu costume, three of them, namely *etobih, etotih* and *athomambra*, are woven with a waist loom. The first and second garments are sleeveless coats. The third one, *athomambra,* is worn like a skirt but is completely different from traditional Idu skirt. Special skills are required to weave it though no ritual is required before or after completion of such special textiles.

Traditionally, *igu*s are not supposed to wear these garments unless an occasion for ritual performance and chanting actually arises, and no one can touch them. This is still considered to be completely taboo by most powerful *igu*s, though a few are not so strict about such taboos with regard to wearing the costume.

When an *igu* dies, such clothing is rarely buried with him or her; it is sometimes sold with other items of the costume. It may be kept within the family in case a possible *igu* may emerge in the future. In fact, many *igus* get such costumes from other *igus.* Before dying, they may decide what is to become of their costumes, and may even decide to donate them to some organizations for their preservation. For instance, Rano Mihu of Mihundo village decided to donate his costume to the *Idu Cultural and Literary Society* which has been set up to promote and preserve the Idu cultural heritage.

Fig. 3 component of i*gu*'s costume hung from neck or *igu*'s garland used during ritual dance (S. Chaudhuri)

Igu's day-to-day life

Traditionally, an *igu* is supposed to undergo various restrictions throughout his/her life. Before performing any major ritual, an *igu* has to restrain from sexual intercourse for a few days. He or she is banned from entering a house where people are engaged in dyeing cloth or yarn. An *igu* is not allowed to drink rice beer prepared by a woman who has her period. In case of symptoms like epilepsy where an *igu* may fall suddenly unconscious during ritual performance, he or she is not supposed to eat chillies, onion, garlic, wash clothes or even sleep with his/her spouse. Similar restrictions over a more or less long period are applicable when performing *broacha, ekularuma reh* or *yah* rituals. To perform *impeh* which is a ritual for sunshine, an *igu* has to avoid drinking cold water and for *aayiih* just a one-day ban is enforced on eating chillies; for *yuh-maru-yh*, i.e. to pray to the god of property and prosperity, a ten-day ban is observed

on washing clothes, eating onion, garlic, fried vegetables, chillies and even sleeping with one's partner.

An *igu* does not enjoy any special privilege in terms of economic activities, as he or she has to manage just like the other Idus. They need to cultivate their own land, *jhum* or irrigated, and join in some other related economic activities such as hunting, gathering, trapping, etc. This is reflected in their day-to-day lifestyle as well as their traditional house structure. However, with modernisation and exposure to broader economic opportunities, a few *igu*s (only four in Dibang Valley district[8]) now work in government jobs.

Yet, ritual performance also has an economic dimension, since after completing a rite an *igu* is supposed to obtain his or her share of sacrificial meat with some other food items as well as money from the house owner. The remuneration depends on many criteria, including the economic situation of the person at whose house the ritual is performed. However, it has undergone some standardisation for the various kinds of rituals.

Igus in former times were much more rigid and whatever they demanded for worship or sacrifice, etc. had to be arranged by the family or individual concerned. Imuno Linggi (85 years), one of the oldest female *igu*, mentioned that she got a big *dao* knife and a pig as remuneration. If she got money she would distribute it among her followers and she would even give away the pig on the spot where the *reh* festival was performed. She had received sums ranging from one paisa to 100 rupees in payment throughout her lifetime. For performing *yah,* she received 50 to 60 rupees out of which she kept 10 to 20 rupees and the other 40 to 50 rupees she distributed to her assistants. During her early life, she could buy enough household articles and food items with one rupee. There was an ongoing stream of people at her home. Even when she was working in fields, villagers would come with her husband to invite her to conduct a ritual. It happened that she had to leave her agricultural work to attend to the ritual. She received a lot of encouragement from her husband.

Regarding the social or economic privileges, she mentioned that she received a lot of help from her family with household tasks though farm work was left to her. She added that she did not receive any special privileges from society or from her family. Though people accepted her as a great *igu*, that did not make her life very different. The government as well as Idu society has not formulated any privileges for *igu*s. Moreover, she does not welcome any interference in their society from outsiders because she feels that the government is only poking its nose in rather

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[8] Their names are Dindru Miri of Upper Dibang Valley and Rembu Linggi of Cheta village, Loda Meto of Mayu and Andro Elapra of Asali village. They work as peons in government offices.

than helping them out. This is the reason why she has never caste her vote during elections. The only privilege that she enjoyed as an *igu* was the remuneration that she received on conducting rituals.

On the other hand, Natu Prawe, a very elderly *igu*, disclosed that by performing *broacha* in bygone days he used to get 300 to 400 rupees but that it has now increased to 3,000 to 4,000 rupees. By performing *amrasey igus* get 1,500 rupees, *yah* — 3,000 to 5,000 rupees and *reh* just one pig.

Idus represent a patriarchal, patrilineal society where polygyny was quite normal practice. Wealthy Idus have remained polygamous. If an *igu* or non-*igu* wishes to marry he can do so as much he likes. *Igu*s, especially famous or powerful ones, are sought-after-grooms because of the high esteem society holds them in and of the spiritual power they possess as a mediator between human beings and the unseen powers. Many male *igu*s had a good number of wives who also earned money for their husband by weaving, collecting *Coptis teeta* (popularly known as Mishmi teeta),[9] rearing animals as well as doing their farm work. For each wife, they used to have a separate room in their traditional long house, a unique feature of their material culture that is fading out rapidly. Indeed, there is a general trend towards forming nuclear families and monogamy is emerging as the rule of the day. With exposure to education and other modern influences there is a new generation, which prefers new economic opportunities rather than their traditional mode of agriculture. And *igu*s are no exception to this.

Life-Cycle and Well-Being Rituals

Birth rituals of a newly born child
According to Idu mythology there was a man on earth called Anome Liwu who married a lady named Asili Mili. None of their issue were still alive, even though they had had many children. The priest advised both of them to arrange a ritual called *ah-tayeh* in which immediately after the baby's birth a name should be given to request that the almighty Nany-Intya-Maselo-Jinu provide protection to the newborn (Linggi and Miso 2000: 29). He asked Anome-Liwu to bring *epoteh* and *ewethreh,* two kinds of grass, and placed them on the wall to symbolize fatherhood. The *ah-tayeh* ritual was performed accordingly and it was found that the child was born normal, healthy and free of all disease. Then the priest advised Anome-Liwu to nurture two cockerels called Etohi and Yu-Awru. At the same time, he prayed to Nanyi-Intaya-Maselo-Jinu, the invincible Supreme Creator, for

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[9] Mishmi teeta is a creeper which generally grows in high-altitude areas surrounding the Mishmi hills and is of high medicinal value. This has remained one of the prime items of trade for the Mishmis. This famous plant is extremely bitter in taste.

the parents and newborn's well-being, then he blessed the child for long life and prosperity.

Nowadays, on the day a child is born, a fresh branch of bamboo leaves is planted at the entrance to the house or at the gate, which signifies that a baby is born at that particular house and generally people do not go to the house unless they are specially invited to the birth ceremony.[10] Then, according to Baruah (1960: 48), "On the day after the birth of the child, the Iu-a-rru ceremony is performed, the priest offers rice-beer and two fowls as sacrifice to the gods, Asa and Asila-amide, who watch over little children, begging them to look after the new-born child, and to ward off the evil spirits coming near it. He then takes the names of the child's dead ancestors, and offers them blood and liquorice beer. He generally recites the following chant:

> Had there been no Gods, the rivers and the hills would not have existed. There are hills and rivers; and men live on the hills. The gods protect mankind. Let them now be pleased and take care of the new-born child and protect him. I am offering them rice-beer and fowls.

The *nuhi* ceremony, which falls on the ninth day is a simple one. The priest invokes the household Gods, Asu and Andra, and prays to them to look after the child.

Rituals for family well-being

Among the great variety of rituals performed on different occasions in order to promote peace, prosperity and good health, *amyase* is very popular. It includes twelve distinct phases, each phase being identified by a specific name as mentioned by Linggi and Miso (2000: 25-27).

The *igu* perfoms the very first phase (*achita wu)* in his own house before moving to the invitee's house. There, he prays to the almighty that no harm is done to invitee's family members. The second phase (*aku-tou*) marks its arrival at the invitee or patient's house where he ensures that the harmless spirits will not be disturbed by the ritual acts. During the third phase (*larwoh-ayuchru*), he narrates the origin of a sacred bamboo shrub called *abratoh*.[11] In the fourth phase (*larwoh mraba*), he tries to drive away evil spirits through an imaginary gate in different directions whereas in the fifth phase (*amrala ayusu*), he narrates the origin lore related to the sacred necklace (*amrala*), one of the significant components of their costume. In the sixth phase (*ayenjo*), he tries to drive away evil

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[10] See Linggi and Miso (2000: 29).

[11] This particular bamboo is carried by the igus whenever they move to different houses for ritual practice. Such bamboo shrubs are found next to the house of the igus. Generally they plant a branch of abratoh at the entrance to the patient's house and they place a few on the top of the roof to drive out evil spirits.

forces that can cause epidemics or other diseases by using spiritual powers. The seventh phase is called *ipishu-lawroche*. Indeed, it is believed that the *igu* may sometimes be unable to drive away evil spirits. In such an event, he tries to hide men's souls away in a place called *iwu loka* and women's souls in a place called *ambi loka* in order to provide full protection. In the eighth phase (*amyase),* the *igu* builds a spiritual house for family members and an imaginary sty for the pigs by chanting. Then, he offers the blood of sacrificed pigs to appease the evil spirits and to bring good health, peace and wealth. In the ninth phase (*alth-bru*), he foresees the fortune of every family member: how long one will survive, how much property he will possess, how many children one lady will give birth to, etc. Then he continues to chant while praying to the god and goddess for protection, prosperity and good health for all the family. The tenth phase is called *amra-nah* where all the members of the family assemble in a particular place. Such a process is known as *agu-toh.* The *igu* chants while dancing and sticks in the hair of each family member a feather from the chicken to be sacrificed. This will provide protection from evil spirits. The eleventh phase is called *ashanji* when the *igu* drives out evil spirits from each room occupied by female members. He then drives back the spirit from the last room of the male members, known as *elonga*, and finally drives it out of the house or village with a warning not to return. In the concluding phase (*akuju*) the *igu* foresees the possibility of a natural or supernatural disaster, which may befall the house or village in question and he/she advises them to remain alert in order to avert it.

Death Stories and Rituals
Tales or legends regarding death are very common among villagers. One goes like this:

> At the beginning of the world there was no death except in a place in *Iniambrume.* In *Iniambrume*, each death caused lamentation, which was followed by an elaborate burial ceremony. Everyone then went to *Iniambrume* when news of the death reached them so that they could offer their help. On returning to their village, they also decided to observe similar rituals. A rat was killed and a loud cry was raised for its death. The people from *Iniambrume*, on hearing the news of the death, came to the village, but only found that a ritual for the death of a rat was being observed. This greatly annoyed them and they left the place in a huff. They cursed them to death. Because of this curse, death followed, but soon after the dead came back to life.

Another story says:

> There was a man who had a wife. After her death the body was buried in a cave. The man again married. One day when he was out his second wife stayed alone in the house. Suddenly his previous wife appeared near the place where

poultry are kept. Though she looked like a living body yet her lips were covered with earthworms. She requested the woman to remove the earthworms so that she could regain the energy, which was in the worms. But the woman was frightened at her reappearance by the prospect of her coming back and thus becoming a rival. She took a stick and drove her away. After being driven out, the deceased women came to a place (*Iphu-Ajoru*) where a long tailed langur used to dwell. The langur told her that he could remove the earthworms from her mouth so that she could regain the strength. But the langur had another plan. Pretending to be her benefactor, he killed her and ate her body. When people returned to the village they heard the news of her disappearance and called all the *igu*s to track her down. The *igu*s went to the langur's den and asked him to produce the woman otherwise they would kill him. Thoroughly scared, the langur made a grunting noise in his throat and a small fly, which was the soul of the woman, came out and escaped. The *igu*s thought that there was no use catching such a small fly and let it go. [That is why till to date the Idus believe a soul never dies even after the death of the person]. To prevent the dead from coming back to life the other woman put a stone and the branch of a particular tree, which never rots, inside the grave. [Indeed, the Idus believe thereby the dead will never come back to life though its spirit travels elsewhere].

Whenever an Idu dies, the bugle (*ajuru*) made from a *mithun* horn sounds along with lengthy shouts, which symbolizes the message of death. In response, villagers start gathering and the *igu* is called, either from the same village or from another one. Depending on his/her availability as well as the distance to be covered, an *igu* generally appears on the same day, but he/she may even come the next day accompanied by his/her companions and with sacred bamboo twigs which the *igu* plants at the entrance before entering the house. After accepting a drink, the *igu* lifts the dead body onto a flattened wooden cot (*epra*) by wrapping it in new clothes. It is customary that whoever receives the message of death must come, and generally people bring new clothes or even some food items.

The final burial ceremony involves a lot of details and some taboos have to be observed while the body is placed inside the tunnel or graveyard. For instance, on such occasions weaving or even collecting firewood is not permitted. Special food is prepared and pork or other meat from sacrificed animals is specially offered to the *igu*.

On the day, on which the dead body is laid in the grave, the *igu* with his/her assistants performs a ritual dance by beating drums, blowing trumpets and smashing cymbals. This continues for at least 2 hours after which he returns to the house of the deceased. The *igu* then again takes up his/her dancing and chanting punctuated with his/her typical body movements for a while before sitting down next to the sacred bamboo structure still chanting. No one can move from that particular place without permission from the shaman who performs certain rituals. Whenever anyone wants to move, he repeats the same rituals.

The *igu* prepares a special structure called *amungo,* whereby two bamboo shoots are placed on either side of the path and split bamboo in the form of a bow is struck across the path to ward off evil spirits. Then he initiates a dialogue with the spirit while narrating in great detail the various journeys taken by the deceased before death to the world of the unknown. The *igu* invites the spirits to tell them which path is to be followed, where steps have been laid, where ladders have been fixed and bridges have been made spanning rivers and streams. In the course of such a dialogue, the *igu* strikes a sword (*ambrebi)* on the *amungo* which symbolizes that the evil spirits are driven out. The other half of the sword, which is visible, symbolizes the family's well-being. Then the *igu* chants continuously requesting the spirits to move towards the grave where utility goods are kept. This continues till morning as he tries to send the soul to the land to where all his/her ancestors have gone peacefully and advises it not to return home again.

After completing this ritual, the *igu* starts standing again in front of *amungo* while others line up behind the *igu* holding brooms. While dancing, the *igu* starts collecting these brooms and then throws them at the *amungo.* Any remaining leaves on the *amungo* are thrown away due to the continuous beating with the broom. This is to keep the dead body away from any contact with various insects. The *igu* holds a cockerel and moves from one corner of the house to another chanting all the time and then places two swords in a crossed position. With a sword in his hand, the *igu* and his/her followers move in different directions stamping the floor with their feet and continuously shouting in a particular tone of voice. There is a simultaneous blowing of trumpets and beating of drums. The *igu* tries to catch imaginary objects with the help of sword and then throws them across the door while blowing over the crossed swords placed near the entrance. No one, even animal, is allowed to enter the room. The women and men of the house gather together and sit while the *igu* swings a cockerel over their heads starting from one end to the other to the beating of drums and the crashing of cymbals. Then again the *igu* starts drawing imaginary objects from different parts of the body with the help of sword. Just like in previous movements, these imaginary objects are blown across the crossed swords placed near the door. The *igu* then sits near a cloth stretched over the floor, which symbolizes a river that needs to be crossed.

It is very interesting to note that villagers sit on either side of this laid cloth and start bartering with an imaginary boatman to cross the span of water with all their articles. As a result, arguments and counter arguments break out along with the cracking of jokes and laughter.

After settling on the fare in the form of leaves and bamboo sticks with the imaginary boatman, the river is crossed. The *igu* then implores the

soul not to appear even in dream, which is considered as a bad omen. The wide span of water is known as *kandemo*, which is not easy to cross. A sinner cannot cross the *kandemo.* To wash off their sins many sacrifices are required. If the *igu* tries to send the soul across the *kandemo* without performing any elaborate rituals, then he will be struck by the wrath of a spirit and consequently death is sure to follow. After crossing the *kandemo*, the soul can rest in any of the places in the vast expanse of territory. In the east such a place is known as *nyomo ashiku*, in the west *nyimy ashiku*, in the north *nyoto ashiku* and in the south *ati ashiku.* After completing the rituals, people are allowed to take food (Bhattacharjee 1983: 132-136). Bhattacharjee adds that after sending the soul safely across the *kandemo* the *igu*'s duty now comes to an end. He prepares to start for home. He is given fresh meat, which has been carefully kept separately. A large cockerel is also handed over as well as freshly-brewed beer in new jugs which have not been touched by others, along with rice, millet, maize, dried rats, fish and birds for the women of his house. The *igu* then starts back to his village while his/her companions help to carry the heavy load of food stuffs usually enough to cover his/her needs for more than a month. Even before arriving in the village, a shaman will again propitiate the spirits. Bamboo twigs are planted on either side of the path and split bamboos, bent like a bow, are stuck in the ground along with a *dao*(knife). A cockerel is then sacrificed, its blood is sprinkled everywhere and its meat is roasted over a fire. Upon reaching the house, all the *igu*'s ceremonial items are kept outside and only foodstuffs are taken inside the house.

Illness and cures

I had the opportunity of seeing an *igu* from the Desali area in action curing a lady suffering from acute back pain along with pain in the abdominal area. I reached the house at night along with some Idu schoolteachers and I stayed there for 3 hours sitting just next to the *igu* while I recorded his chanting for an hour. On entering I found that a good number of young and middle-aged Idu Mishmi males and a few females were sitting in a circle playing cards. And next to them just by the hearth was one Idu lady who was lying fully covered in a blanket. Her daughter, along with some other ladies, was sitting at her head and an *igu* was chanting while beating his sacred instrument (*ripu*) in a rhythmic way. From time to time the *igu* took a plant in his hand. All the while the lady was screaming in pain. She would touch some water kept in a small bowl near the fireplace, then rub her abdomen to bring some relief. After almost 40 minutes of chanting, the *igu* took a break and sipped their local liquor from a mug. Then he started repeating the same kind of chanting.

He did not have an assistant. He did not perform a dance or even wear a typical *igu* costume. But he sat in a particular spot and chanted continuously, taking a break from time to time. He was trying to drive out the evil spirit which had caused such sickness. On one occasion the lady sat up comfortably for a few minutes, then lied down again and took up her previous posture. Some elderly Idus from neighbouring houses called in and sat besides the *igu* for sometime and shared the local liquor. After almost two and half hours I left the house though this scene went on until midnight. Only then did the *igu* leave. It may be mentioned here that in order to treat sickness, some shamans take a course on spiritual healings or even use various ethno-medicines prepared from plants, animals or other components.[12] Even in order to attend to a patient suffering from an acute or serious illness, the igu may need his or her companions for the ritual performance.

**Fig. 3 An *igu* Igu chanting to heal abdominal pain of an Idu woman in Desali area
        (S. Chaudhuri)**

Ethno-medicines and other ritual practices

As mentioned earlier, the Idus are great believers in spirits (*khiynu*), such as, Golo, the spirit of hills and mountains, Ashan, the spirit of the forest

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[12] How the igu exactly performs the ritual and the whole course of events starting from the journey from his/her own house to the patient's house, then returning to his/her own house is narrated by Bhattacharjee (1983: 126-128).

and burial grounds, Apimi Shu, the spirit of land, etc. Any form of illness is perceived as linked to such spirits. However, sickness is not always cured by propitiating and appeasing such a wide range of evil forces by dancing, chanting or sacrificing animals. It also involves the use of a large number of plants and animals available in the surroundings. With the passage of time, some such ethno-medicinal practices are now part of a collective wisdom shared by a good number of Idus. Many such plants and animals are available which are applied in the form of juice, powder, paste, etc. Some fat of animals, birds, and snakes is applied directly to the affected area or else animal bile is taken orally mixed with water.

Diseases are classified into six broad groups, most of which are only curable with the help of the *igus*, though in some cases, commoners may also provide some medicines, which are made from indigenous substances. For instance, *aruru* are airborne or water-borne diseases, which are caught through contact; medicinal treatment is preferred for such cases. *Manu-mara* (skin or eye diseases), *apomo* (itching, swelling of the skin) can be also cured with common medicines known to Idus in general. On the other hand, *khinyu meko,* disease caused by spirits dwelling in houses, only curable through a spiritual healing process done by the *igu* (Mitapo 2000:38).

Rituals and sacrifices are also associated with agriculture as well as with hunting. In the case of agriculture, a fowl is sacrificed in the name of Malo in order to produce a good harvest. Such a sacrifice is done by a shaman or even by the person whose land is to be cultivated. Similarly, before hunting, a cockerel will be offered to the forest deity called Golo and prayers will be said for a successful hunting expedition. However, one of the most significant Idu ceremonies is considered to be *reh*: an elaborate ceremony performed over a four-day period in which the *igu* remains the central figure along with his/her companions. There are different stages in the ceremony and at each stage the *igu* has certain specific roles to perform. No doubt, every Idu dreams of performing such a ceremony at least once in their lifetime to ensure prosperity for the family, a bumper harvest and good health by driving out evil spirits. The *reh* ceremony involves multiple implications in understanding social relationships, clan bonds, kinship ties, the economic situation of the person requesting the celebration and the oratory skill of the shaman performing the ritual dances and chants. Mention may be made here of the variations in the form of *reh*, but it has traditionally remained essentially an individual celebration. However, since 1968 this has been turned into a community festival and performed centrally at Roing circle in Lower Dibang valley district. Since then, ICLS (*Idu Cultural and Literary Society*) has been trying to change this ceremony, especially the rules and regulations regarding sacrifices and expenditure, though its basic form including the

involvement of a shaman and the core of the whole celebration has been maintained. In fact, the *igu*s like dancing and there is sometimes competitive spirit among the *igu*s to show off their dancing and chanting skills. This is gradually becoming the central attraction of the whole central *reh* celebration. This symbolizes their identity in the context of an emerging social reality.

Plight of shamanism

It is evident that the *igu*s play a pivotal role even today when the who le of society is undergoing a transition process. There are multiple factors which operate collectively among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, such as greater post-colonial administrative penetration, the emergence of a modernization process and exposure to wider world views through mass media and interactions across ethnic boundaries. However, it is evident that the number of shamans is on a gradual decline in Idu society. Though it is strongly believed that one can become an *igu* by the gift of god, at the same time some people have become *igu*s by virtue of their association with the great *igu*s as well as because of their strong willpower to learn the chanting. With the introduction of modern education and the availability of wider economic opportunities, up and coming young Idus, both male and female, are not greatly concern about learning the shaman's language and they are even unwilling to work as *igu*'s assistants. Some people express the view that the modernization process and the market economy make people more outward looking, gradually destroying their sense of collective responsibilities. Hence, young Idus are not mentally ready to follow the strict lifestyle, which shamans are supposed to lead.

It is a well-known fact that *igu*s cannot lead a normal daily life as they may be called upon at any time to go to different parts of Idu-inhabited areas. It is true that they traditionally enjoyed great respect from society, but in the changing context they are no longer the preferred groom during marriage negotiations. A few Idus admit that today some shamans do not even follow the strict code of conduct they are supposed to maintain according to their traditional social system and that this itself has led to the critical situation the institution finds itself in. Some add that today people have become extremely corrupt and greedy and that such persons could never become *igu*s. On the other hand some old members declare that the shaman institution will never die even though the number of shamans possessing great spiritual power is dwindling. They strongly believe that in the course of time powerful *igu*s will reappear; at least from the progenies of contemporary as well as past shamans.

To the question concerning the future of shamanism, *igu*s themselves came out with heterogeneous responses. Some of their views are expressed here.

Aprolo Mega from Arneli village commented, "Nowadays I find that igus are fast disappearing. Our children are busy with their studies and no longer want to become an *igu*. I have often dreamt that somebody from my family was going to become an *igu*. My son chants very well. I hope he may become an *igu*".

According to Giba Mow, "Shamanism will never die because since creation, God has always bestowed his blessings on each successive generation and had created *igu*s. Present-day *igu*s are adopting more and more borrowed powers from other tribes. In order to preserve its pure form, we *igu*s have to teach young *igu*s if they want to". He adds, "An organization is needed to help the *igu*s of today's generation improve themselves. *Igu*s should donate their remuneration to poor villagers. Igus who perform yah and rehguh should contribute because they get enough money".

Natu Prawe noted, "There is a vast difference between the *igu*s of the past and present. At present, they are Indianised, self-made *igu*s who do not follow the pure and ancient form of their art. One can become an *igu* by writing down the related processes and by learning them, but that will not make him/her powerful. He has to be blessed by God and a miracle must take place within him. There will forever be *igu*s as long as Idu society continues to exist".

Buchu Tacho declared, "There will forever be *igu*s. But this depends on the will of God. There will be many more *igu*s in the future. After these, many will take the path that his son is taking at present. He is one of the leading *igu*s of today's generation. The situation will never decline or cease as long as society goes on existing". He added, "There is no need for an organization. Since time immemorial *igu*s have lived an independent life. If they are brought together, their ideas and powers may clash".

Conclusion

Various intricate aspects of shamanism reveal how pervasive the role of the *igu*s is in the life of the Idu Mishmis even when their society is undergoing a transition phase. It may be mentioned here that Mishmis in general and Idus in particular are least effected by the Christian faith which has had a huge impact on most Tani tribes, such as the Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, Hill Miri, etc. However, the heterogeneous voice of the Idu people reveals the ongoing dilemma concerning the future of the shaman institution. Many Idu elites who run the *Idu Cultural and Literary Society* (ICLS) are apprehensive about the future of such an institution. They are

consequently planning to textualize the whole genre of oral tradition related to their *igu*s so that they can use these documents to train new *igu*s or at least to set up their *reh* festival or various other ceremonies. In fact, shamans constitute one of the core cultural markers of the Mishmi tribes which include the Idu, Digaru and Miju Mishmis.[13] Of course, ICLS is yet to make a major breakthrough in this respect. However, as a first step they have tried to develop their own script which they like to use for such documentation work. It may be further noted that shamanism is a dominant phenomenon among most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Nevertheless, with the emergence of Christianity as a dominant reality and due to the impact of the modernization process, it is loosing its sacred base amongst tribes in general, although it has not yet been completely wiped out from any of the tribes. It seems that as long as village life exists, shamanism will continue to survive, though it is bound to introduce some modifications in keeping in tune with emerging socio-political transformations in Arunachal Pradesh which may lead to a "Third order reality".[14]

Glossary of main terms

It may be noted here that because of the nasal tones in pronunciation, it is sometimes very difficult to get the exact spelling of Idu words even by the Idu scholars.

Aanyongo: ritual to detect the cause of illness.
Aayiih: ritual to cure sickness.
Ah-tayeh: birth ritual performed by shamans to protect newly-born from evil spirits.
Amrasey: ritual for the protection of entire family members from malevolent spirits and for peace, prosperity and good health.
Ambrebi: a long sword with a metal handle
Amralapoh: the costume which an igu wears during major ritual performances, which is composed of eleven items.

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[13] My recent field work in January 2008 among the Digaru and Miju Mishmis of Lohit district reveals that there are a lot of similarities between the Shamans of the Idus and the Digaru or the Mijus in terms of costume, ritual performance, symbols etc., though their dialects differ greatly. It may be mentioned here that some Idus may call upon shamans from neighbouring Mishmi tribes for healing purposes.
[14] This was used by A.C. Bhagabati (2002:47-50) in order to explain emerging Arunachali societies where one can find a combination of old and new elements of culture.

Amungo: a bamboo structure made from jungle leaves (Eyuna) erected inside the house on the wall. This is supposed to be the boat by which shamans cross rivers to accompany the departed.

Apimi Shu: the spirit of land.

Apomother: a kind of illness, where part of the body swells then starts itching and develops wounds, which is potentially very dangerous.

Apomo: itching, swelling of the skin.

Ashan: the spirit of the forest and burial grounds.

Athomambra: skirt like costume worn by the igu.

Ajuru: horn of a mithun which is blown during the death and amrasey ritual.

Brochah: death ritual conducted for one night to accompany the departed.

Dao: knife

Ekularuma: ritual related to dreaded diseases such as epilepsy, leprosy, etc.

Epoteh: a kind of grass used during the Ah-tayeh ritual.

Epra: a flattened wooden cot

Etotih: sleeveless coats worn by the *igu*.

Ewethreh: a kind of grass used during the Ah-tayeh ritual.

Golo: the spirit of hills and mountains.

Impeh: a ritual to bring sunshine.

Khinu / khyinyu : both benevolent and malevolent spirits.

Khyinyu/Khinu meko: spirit dwelling at home.

Kandemo: a place with a wide stretch of water across which the soul accompanied by the *igu.*

Manu-mara: skin or eye diseases.

Meshala: ritual performed in the case of murder or disputes where a heavy fine is imposed.

Iniambrume: a place where there was no incidence of death.

Reh: festival for a good harvest, peace, prosperity, good health.

Rehguh: shamans employed for their ritual performance in reh festival.

Sha: mithun (Bos frontalis).

Yah: death ritual conducted for two nights to accompany the departed.

Yu-maru-yh or Yu-meu-ru: rituals to ward off the ill effects of spirits.

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The Kinship Terminology of the Rongmei Nagas

Pascal Bouchery & Kiudamliu Gangmei

Since the pioneering works of Hutton (1921a, 1921b, 1922a), Mills (1922, 1926, 1937) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1969), the study of Naga kinship systems has been hampered by the lack of good terminological descriptions. This is especially true of the Nagas of Manipur, whose kinship systems remain largely unknown to date. A tentative discussion of Rongmei kinship system will be opened here in the hope of contributing to fill this void.

Rongmei is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by some 70,000 people[1] living in the northwestern part of Manipur, mainly in Tamenglong District, although scattered communities are also found in the Imphal Valley (especially Imphal East, Jiribam subdivision), in Senapati and Churachandpur Districts to a lesser extent, as well as in adjacent areas of Assam and Nagaland. As a language, Rongmei retains a complete set of indigenous kinship terms. Only those living in the Imphal Valley, who also call themselves Kabuis, have borrowed a few words from the Meitei (Meithei) language. The Rongmeis call the Kabuis living in the Imphal Valley *Taijang-mei* [*tai* from *Taimei*, the Meiteis; *jang* (or *jeang*), plain; *mei*, people]. Reciprocally the Kabuis settled in the Imphal Valley call the other Rongmeis *Chingmei*, literally "hill people". In Manipur State both groups are officially labelled "Kabui", which seems to be of foreign, yet undetermined origin.

Some 35 years ago, in an article entitled "Marriage and kinship among the Kabui Nagas of Manipur",[2] R. K. Das provided a first description of the kinship terminology of this group. The fact that his work contains a few loanwords from the Meitei language suggests that his informants primarily spoke some dialect from the Imphal Valley. With translations of the main kinship terms from a Rongmei-English-Rongmei dictionary,[3] it constitutes our unique source of written information.

The Rongmei language has been classified in the "Southern" (or "Zeliangrong", or "Zeme") group of Naga languages, along with Zeme,

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[1] Official figures must be taken with caution: the (provisional) 2001 Census of India gives the number Kabuis living in Manipur as 62,216 which indicates practically no change from the previous Census of 1991 (62,487).

[2] Das, R. K. 1972. "Marriage and kinship among the Kabui Nagas of Manipur". *Man in India* 52(3) Jul.-Sept. 1972: 228-234, reprinted under the same title in R. K. Das 1985. *Manipur Tribal Scene. Studies in Society and Change*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications: 35-44.

[3] Francis 1992.

Liangmai, Koirao and Maram. The present description pertains to the Rongmeis living around Tamenglong town and speaking the dialect that has become the standard language, although other dialects exist. Missionaries have provided a written form of this language and devised a standard orthography in order to translate the Bible. It is this orthography that is widely used today, and most published works use Tamenglong Rongmei as the standard spelling.[4] Thus the issue of orthography appears to have been settled through usage.

This paper is primarily based upon elicitations with Rongmei-speaking informants.[5] The authors are especially thankful to Ringamlung Panmei and Gaikhamdim Marangmei for their useful information and comments. We are also deeply indebted to Mr. Meiripou Gangmei who has giving us the benefits of his own work on this language and has gone through the paper carefully. Nothing could have been achieved without his help.

Note on the transcription
The consonants b, d, g, h, k, l, m, n, p, s, t have their English values. Aspirated sounds are represented by ph, th, kh. c stands for /tch/, r more or less for the rolled English /r/, and ng for the velar /n/, i.e. for the sound of ng in English *sing*. As a common convention among the Naga languages h is the transcription of the syllable-final stop, which is pronounced in Rongmei with a heavy glottal sound.[6] The vowels a, e, i, o, u have the so-called "Italian" values. Long or doubled sounds are represented by doubling the letters. Diphthongs are represented by groups of vowels, e.g. ai, au, ei, ua (except for /ao/ which is noted ow) and should be pronounced with the Italian value of each letter. Following the general use in Rongmei, as well as the orthography adopted in Fr. Francis' dictionary (1992), ei is used here with almost the English value of y in *my*.

Rongmei kinship terminology

1. **Pou**: GF, GrGF (with suffix *-dai*), MB, FZH, MBS, WF, WFB, WMB, HF, HB, HFB, ZH, FBDH, FZDH+, MBDH, MZDH
2. **Pei**: GM, GrGM (with suffix *-dai*)
3. **Pu**: F, FeB (with suffix *-thau*), FyB (with suffix *-lau*), MeZH (with suffix -thau), MyZH (with suffix -lau), HMB

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[4] It is not known to what extent Biblical translations have contributed to the formation of a standard colloquial speech.
[5] Manipur State still being closed to foreign research, this study is based entirely on conversations and personal correspondence with various Rongmei informants.
[6] See for example Burling and Phom 1999, French 1983 or Marrison 1967.

4.   **Pui**: M, MeZ (with suffix -*thau*), MyZ (with suffix -*lau*), FeBW (with suffix -*thau*), FyBW (with suffix -*lau*), MBD (with suffix -*lau*), MBSW (with suffix –*lau*, if belonging to Ego's clan), FZSW+ (with suffix -*lau*), HFZ
5.   **Nei**: FZ, MBW, WM, WFZ, WMZ, HM, HMZ, MBSW
6.   **Cai**: eB (with suffix -*bung*), eZ (with suffix -*lu*), FBS+ (with suffix -*bung*), FBD+ (with suffix -lu), MZS+ (with suffix -bung), MZD+ (with suffix -*lu*), WBW+, HZH+, SWF+, DHF+
7.   **Kainah**: yB, yZ, FBS-, FBD-, MZS-, MZD-, FZDH, WZCh, HZCh, WBW-, HZH¬, SWF-, DHF-
8.   **Cana**: B, all male members of Ego's lineage or clan (m. sp., ref. only)
9.   **Tanpui**: Z, all female members of Ego's lineage or clan (m. sp., ref. only)
10. **Tanpu**: B, all male members of Ego's lineage or clan (f. sp., ref. only)
11. **Suanrei**: Z, all female members of Ego's lineage or clan (f. sp., ref. only)
12. **Puning**: B (f.sp., ref. only)
13. **Nah**: Ch, S (with suffix –*mpou*, ref. only), D (with suffix –*aluh*, ref. only), BCh, HBCh
14. **Tou**: GCh, GS (with suffix -*mpou*), GD (with suffix -aluh), ZCh, FBGCh, FZGCh, MBGCh, MZGCh, WBCh, FZCh
15. **Tak**: GrGCh
16. **Thang**: direct descendants of the 4th generation
17. **Ru**: direct descendants of the 5th generation
18. **Pai**: direct descendants of the 6th generation
19. **Now**: W (ref. only)
20. **Gaan**: H (ref. only)
21. **Mek**: WB
22. **Puinau**: eBW (m. sp.), FBSW (m. sp.), MZSW (m. sp.), DHM (m. sp.)
23. **Ning**: HZ, BW (f. sp.), FBSW (f. sp.), MZSW (f. sp.), DHM (f. sp.)
24. **Miau**[7]: SW (ref.), FBSW (ref.)
25. **Lu-gaan**: DH (ref.), all husbands of women born into Ego's lineage/clan

General remarks

When a kinship term is used as an appellative, it will normally take *a*, "my", for address, or *ka*, "his, her, their", for mention; as a general term, or for purposes of reference, the prefix is omitted and only the root is used. Thus *pui* means "a mother", or "mother" in general, but *a-pui* meaning "my mother" is the appropriate term of address. *Pu* and *pui*, meaning father and mother respectively, are also used as suffixes to indicate semantic gender in terms such as *tanpu* ("brothers") and *tanpui* ("sisters"), as is commonly seen in languages of the Tibeto-Burman family.[8]

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[7] The standard orthography for this word is *meau*, in which the letter e has the value of the Italian or French /i/. We have changed it here in order to avoid possible confusion.

[8] Benedict 1972: 96.

Kinship terms are most frequently used in addressing persons of ascending generations or of the same generation but older. As a general rule, a family member senior to oneself in generation or in age is never addressed by name as a sign of respect, whereas it is quite acceptable that those junior to oneself in generation or in age may be addressed by name.

1. Description

a) Consanguines

    Ego's own generation

        * Siblings and parallel cousins:

Siblings address each other according to their relative age, and use the same pair of kin terms for both male and female speakers: *(a)cai* for elder brother or sister and *(a)kainah* for a younger sibling. Gender can be specified for elder brother and sister only, by adding the suffixes *-bung* and *-lu* respectively, thus *caibung* for elder brother and *cailu* for elder sister. *Kainah* is always neutral in address as well as in reference. Although the use of proper kin terms is expected between brothers and sisters, it is not a taboo to call even an elder sibling by name, and in daily speech many Rongmeis address their brothers and sisters by using a contracted form of the full name, for eg. *dam* in place of *Kiudamliu.*

In a referential context only, in a conversation with someone who does not know one's own siblings, a male can use general terms such as *a-cana* or *a-cana-pu* ["my brother(s)"] or *a-tanpui* ["my sister(s)"], and similarly a female can use *a-tanpu* or *a-puning* ["my brother(s)"] and *a-suanrei* ["my sister(s)"]. In a restricted sense those terms refer to real siblings or patrilateral parallel first cousins. Thus everybody may refer to their own siblings using *tanpu-tanpui,* and female speakers in particular may use *suanrei* to refer to their own sisters. However, in practice they apply to second or third patrilateral parallel cousins as well, and even to members of one's own clan who may not be true consanguines, for example, today people sharing the same patronym. They can also be used to refer to people belonging to the same phratry but having different clan names in order to express the closeness of the relationship. That is to say that all descendants from the males of the patrilineal group of the same generation are regarded as "brothers" and "sisters". It is theoretically forbidden for them to marry each other as long as they belong to the same patrilineal group and/or have the same clan/phratry name.

All parallel cousins are equated with siblings, both in address and in reference, and as such differentiated by their relative age to Ego; that is *cai* if older (to which the suffix *-bung* for males and *-lu* for females is added), and *kainah* if younger. If one has to ask whether the person referred to as *kainah* is a male or a female, one usually says *kainah-ganmei* or *kainah-*

intumei (*ganmei:* boy; *intumei:* girl)*.* The same rules apply to both male and female speakers.
     * Cross-cousins

A distinction is made between patrilateral and matrilateral cross cousins, although not by a specific term. Mother's brother's son and daughter are regarded respectively as "mother's brother" (*pou*) and "younger/little/junior mother" (*puilau*), whereas father's sister's children are classified along with grandchildren (*tou*)*.* Differentiation by age only applies to parallel cousins. When considering cousins in general, no distinction is made between parents' siblings whatever the age difference with their father or mother. To specify, one has to use a descriptive form, for example, *pui-caibung-nah-pou* (MeBS)*.*

    First ascending generation from Ego
       *Uncles and aunts

In the same way as differentiation by age only applies to parallel cousins at G0, in the parental generation it only applies to parents' parallel siblings. Parents' siblings of the same sex are classified with parents since they all are identified by derivative kinship terms using "father" and "mother". They are also differentiated according to their relative age to Ego's parent. Moreover, the way these compounds are formed is identical for paternal and maternal sides. Thus father's elder brother is *puthau* (elder/senior father), while mother's elder sister is *puithau* (elder/senior mother). Similarly father's younger brother is *pulau* (younger/junior father) or *pu kainah*, whereas mother's younger sister is *puilau* (younger/junior mother).

    Puthau, puithau, *pulau and puilau* are used in a direct address. To differentiate between lineal and colineal lines, Ego's real father is addressed or referred to simply as *apu* with no name or other words attached. In a referential context, parents' siblings are often identified by using *(a)pou/(a)pui* followed by their own name, or through teknonymy in the form: *(a)pu/(a)pui* + child's name + *pu/pui*. Neither form takes into account the relative difference in age. Mother's sisters too can be addressed or referred to as *pui-suanrei*, which is the general term not conveying the relative difference in age.

    Parents' siblings of the opposite sex are each identified by a unique term (FZ: *nei*; MB: *pou*), and age within the generation relative to Ego's parent is not expressed. If pressed to be specific, people will indicate the exact relationship by the use of descriptive expressions such as *pui caibung* (MeB), *pui kainah* (MyB), and so on. The mother's brother is classified along with his son (MBS) and also with the grandfather (FF, MF). No differentiation is made between the mother's brothers on the basis of their relative age to the mother, but on the basis of their birth rank.

Where the mother has three brothers for example, the eldest will be referred to as *pou-ganthau-mei* (*ganthau,* eldest), the second as *pou-cung-mei* (*cung,* middle) and the third as *pou-alau-mei* (*alau,* younger/youngest).

Second and third ascending generation from Ego
Grandfather is usually addressed or referred to as *(a)pou* only, and grandmother as *(a)pei,* for both paternal and maternal lines. If needed, descriptive terms such as *apu-pu* (my father's father), *apui-pu* (my mother's father), *apu-pui* (my father's mother) or *apui-pui* (my mother's mother) can be used to differentiate them. Kin terms for great-grandfather and great-grandmother are formed, as in English, by adding to the elementary term used for parents of second ascending generation a suffix meaning "great", in the sense of "older" (*-dai*), thus *pou-dai* and *pei-dai* respectively for great-grandfather and great-grandmother (referentially and vocatively). Grandparents' siblings are either addressed as grandparents (*apou/apei*) or by the appropriate kin terms used by the parental generation. For example, a male Ego can, like his father, call his paternal grandfather's sister anei since she is also his father's paternal aunt.

First descending generation from Ego
In daily speech children and siblings' children are either called by their first names or pet names, or by using the general terms for offspring *alu* (for a girl) and *abung* (for a boy). *Nah* is the term for child in general when the speaker is merely making reference, and this can be broken into *nah-mpou* (son) and *nah-aluh* (daughter). In Rongmei, there is no specific term to designate "nephew" or "niece". A male speaker will refer to his brother's children as his own children (*nah mpou/nah aluh*) whereas a female speaker will call her own brother's children her younger siblings (*kainah*). Sister's children will be referred to as grandchildren (*tou*) by male speakers but as own children (*nah mpou/nah aluh*) by female speakers. There is no specific term either for referring to his/her cousins' children, all of whom are classified along with grandchildren (*tou*).

Second and third descending generation from Ego
Grandchildren and great-grandchildren, as children, are also commonly addressed by their names or by general appellations such as *abung* (males) and *alu* (females). The term of reference is *tou* for grandchildren and *tak* for great-grandchildren. If necessary, gender can be differentiated by adding appropriate suffixes, *ganmei* for males and *intumei* for females. Later generations are identified as *thang* (4th descending), *ru* (5th) and *pai* (6th).

b) Affines

Only six elementary terms are used that exclusively denote affinal ties: *gaan* (H), *now* (W), *miau* (SW), *ning* (HZ, BW/f. sp), *mek* (WB), *puinau* (eBW/m. sp.), and among them only the last three are used vocatively. As a general rule affines are not ranked by their own ages but adopt the ranks of their spouses (FeBW, FyBW, MeZH, MyZH, eBW). Also as a rule, Rongmeis never use the same terms as their spouses do in addressing kin-related people. The only exception is when calling grandparents (*apou/apei*), with the equations:

$$GF = WGF = HGF$$
$$GM = WGM = HGM$$

* Spouses

Husband and wife are reciprocally addressed through teknonymy, by using the name of the eldest child followed by *-pu* (father's) for husband or *-pui* (mother's) for wife. The practice of identifying a spouse through his/her child is the norm although it is not taboo to call someone by name. Husband and wife may also use *ka-pui* and *ka-pu* respectively. These are general terms for father and mother, in which the prefix *ka-* seems to function as a kind of third person possessive (*ka-mei*, he/she; *ka-niu*, they) as is the case in several other Tibeto-Burman languages.[9] Terms of reference for husband and wife are *gaan* and *now* respectively.

* Spouses of uncles and aunts

As already noted, uncles' spouses (MBW, FeBW, FyBW) are treated as aunts (FZ, MeZ, MyZ respectively) and aunts' spouses (FZH, MeZH, MyZH) as uncles (MB, FeB, FyB respectively).

* Siblings' spouses

A male speaker addresses or refers to the wife of an elder brother by using a specific term, *(a)puinau*. But Ego's younger brother's wife is simply addressed by her name, and in a referential context only the descriptive term *(a)kainah-now* is employed. If Ego is female, all brothers' wives are called *(a)ning* (sister-in law) both vocatively and referentially. Sister's husbands are classified along with the grandfather (*pou*) by both male and female speakers, irrespective of the sister's relative age to Ego.

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[9] As for example, the prefix b- in Kokborok (Jacquesson, 2003).

* Spouses' siblings

Wife's brothers are denoted by a specific term, *mek*, both in address and in reference, and differentiated on the basis of the relative age to the wife: *mek ganthau-mei* for WeB and *mek lau-mei* for WyB. There is no kin term for wife's sister. In conversation with his children, a man will usually refer to his wife's sisters as *nang-pui-thau* (*nang*, you, your; *pui*, mother; *thau*, elder/senior) and *nang-pui-lau* (*nang*, you, your; *pui*, mother, *lau*, younger/junior). *Now kainah-intumei* is another possibility to refer to WyZ. In a direct address, however, teknonymy is the rule, by adjunction of the suffix -*pui* (mother) to wife's sister child. Normally a male cannot call his wife's elder sister directly by her name, especially if she is older than him. Where the WeZ has no child, she will be addressed as Ego's own child's maternal aunt, i.e. by adding -*puithau* (MeZ) to Ego's own child's name.

A female speaker calls her husband's brothers *apou* (GF, MB) and her husband's sisters *aning*, a term which is also used for her brother's wives. It is to be noted that only female speakers apply a unique term to all their brothers-in-law (*apou*, ZH, HB) as well as their sisters-in-law (*aning*, BW, HZ).

* Cousins' spouses:

All husbands of female cousins are treated as sister's husbands (*pou*), both vocatively and referentially, except the father's sister's daughter's husband. Spouses of parallel cousins are equated with eBW (*puinau*) by males speakers, but with HZ (*ning*) by female speakers. Differentiation is made according to clan affiliation in the case of MBSW, FZSW and FZDH. For MBSW, the general term of address a well as reference is *(a)nei*, but where the bride belongs to or is related to Ego's clan she is called *(a)puilau* ("little/junior mother"), a term also used for MBD and MyZ. FZSW and FZDH older than Ego are addressed as *apuilau* and *apou* respectively, but *acai* (elder sibling) if they belong to Ego's clan, or even *(a)nei* (FZ) and *(a)pulau* (FyB) if of Ego's parental generation. The corresponding terms of reference are *puilau* and *pou* respectively.

* Children' spouses

Sons and daughters-in-law are addressed by their names. In a referential context only the daughter-in-law is denoted by a specific term, *miau*, the son-in-law being designated by the term, *lu-gaan* (*lu* for daughter; *gaan* for husband). Some people call their sons-in-law *atou*, although *lu-gaan* is more specific. *Lu-gaan* also has a broader meaning and can be applied to all husbands of women born into Ego's patrilineage, or even to men having married women from Ego's clan, i.e. today women sharing the same surname.

* Parents-in-law

Parents-in law and their siblings are all denoted by using terms of consanguinity: *pou* (FF, MB) for father-in-law, and *nei* (FZ) for mother-in-law, by both male and female speakers. Considering the siblings of his parents-in-law, a male speaker will not differentiate between paternal and maternal sides. Both his wife's paternal and maternal uncles are addressed and referred to as maternal uncles/grandfathers (*pou*), and similarly both wife's paternal and maternal aunts as own father's sisters (*nei*). But female speakers only partially emulate their husbands here: they call their husband's father's brother and husband's mother's sister *pou* and *nei* respectively, but they address and refer to their husband's maternal uncle and paternal aunt as "father" (*pu*) and "mother" (*pui*) respectively.

Variations in speech of Rongmeis living in the Imphal Valley

The dialect(s) spoken by Rongmeis/Kabuis settled in the Valley reveal(s) significant differences from the description presented above. To give one example of those variations, below are a few kin terms which are representative of the dialect spoken in Chingkham Kabui and the neighbouring villages:

Pou: FF, MF, FFF, FMF, MFF, MMF, MB (with suffix *-bung*), FZH, MBS, HF,HeB, WF, eZH, WFF, WMF, HFF, HMF, HFB, FZS, WeB, WeZH, WFB, WMB

Pei: FM, MM, FFM, FMM, MFM, MMM, WFM, WMM, HFZ, HFM, HMM

Pa: F, FeB (with suffix *-dai*), FyB (with suffix *-ton*), MeZH (with suffix *-dai*), MyZH (with suffix *-ton*), HMB

Ma: M, MeZ (with suffix *-dai*), MyZ (with suffix *-ton*), FeBW (with suffix *-dai*),
FyBW (with suffix *-ton*), WFZ

Nei: FeZ, FyZ (with suffix *-ton*) MBW, WM, WMZ, HM, HMZ

Bung: eB, FBS, MZS, HeZH

Kaina: yB, yZ

Pi: eZ, FBD, MZD, FZD (with suffix *-rao*), MBD (with suff. *-rao*), WeBW, HeBW

Gaamei: S

Tumei: D

Tou: GCh

Tak: GrGCh

Now: W

Gaan: H

Mau: SW

Lu-gaan: DH

Cai: eBW, WeZ
Ning: FZD (f. speaking), MBD (f. speaking), HeZ, eBW (f. speaking)[10]

The differences appear to be due firstly to Meitei influence:

- *Apa* and *ama*, which are used by Rongmei people living in the Imphal Valley to address their parents, are direct borrowings from Meitei (*pa*, father, *ma*, mother). Similarly many Rongmeis of that area call their FyB and MyB just as the Meiteis do, *apa-ton* and *ama-ton* respectively. *-Ton* apparently conveys the same meaning in Meitei as the Rongmei suffix *-lau*, so that *apa-ton/ama-ton* can be viewed as mere literal translations of the corresponding Rongmei terms *apu-lau/apui-lau.* FeB and MeZ are addressed as *apa-dai* and *ama-dai,* that is in both cases by adding a Rongmei suffix (*-dai,* big/senior) to a Meitei root-word, thus creating a compound word which is neither purely Rongmei nor purely Meitei.

- *Api* for elder sister*,* or *achaipi* as reported by Das, is another example of this kind of blend. *Achaipi* is a contracted form of *achai-api,* in which *achai* is a Rongmei word and *api* a loanword from Meitei. *Achai* is the root-word of *achai-lu,* the correct designation for elder sister in Tamenglong speech. *Api* comes from *pi*, which first means "grandmother" in Meitei but is frequently used as a feminine nominalizer, as for example in *nupi* (girl).[11]

Other differences are due to phonological variations. *Api-rao*, which denotes MBD, seems to be nothing but a corruption of the Rongmei word *Apui-lau.* The phonological system of Kabui speech of the Imphal Valley lacks an /r/, as is also the case in Meitei, therefore /l/ tends to take the place of /r/ in many words, such as in *Laguang* instead of *Raguang* (God).

The main differences between standard Rongmei and Plain Kabui are listed below. We have also added the vocabulary given by Das (1972) as "Kabui" which seems to hold an intermediate position between the two speeches. As Das does not indicate where his data has been collected, the possibility that the two have been mixed cannot be ruled out.

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[10] The following kin-related people are addressed by their names only:
By male speakers: WyB, WyZ, WyBW, WBCh, WZCh
By female speakers: HyB, HyZ, HyZH, , HBCh, HZCh
By both male and female speakers: Bch, Zch, yBW, yZH
[11] Chelliah, 2004: 363.

	Standard Rongmei	Imphal Valley speech	Kabui unspecified (Das 1972)
F/M	*pu/pui*	*pa/ma, po/puai*	*pu/pui*
FB	*pu-thau/pulau*	*pa-dai/pa-ton*	*pu-thao/pu-lao*
MZ	*pui-thau/puilau*	*ma-dai/ma-ton*	*pui-thao/pui-lao*
eZ	*cailu*	*pi/chaipi/chaimao*	*pi*
S/D	*nahmpou/nahlu*	*gamei/tumei*	*napu/nalu*
FZS+	*tou/pou*	*pou*	*poumak*
FZS–	*tou/pou*	*pou*	*poutou/ nuchanu*
FZD+	*tou/puilau*	*pi-rao*	*puilao/older anuchanu/younger*
MBS+	*Pou*	*pou*	*poumak*
MBS–	*Pou*	*pou*	*poutou*
MBD+	*Puilau*	*pi-rao*	*pu-lao*
MBD–	*Puilau*	*pi-rao*	*nou-chanu*
SW	*Miau*	*mao*	*mau*
HeZ	*Ning*	*ning*	*aninu*
HyZ	*Ning*	*ning*	*amimi*

A few terms collected by Das and never heard of by our informants may have been mistakenly recorded by him. Some of the differences listed above do not modify the terminological structure, but others clearly do, as for example those related to the terms encompassing the category "cousins" in English. So it cannot be simply said that Kabui speakers adapt and reinterpret these loans from the Meitei language to fit their own sociolinguistic context. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the structural implications of such modifications. For the sake of simplicity here, we will only focus on the analysis of the standard Rongmei terminology.

2. Analysis

Rongmei terminology, along with the majority of Naga kinship terminologies that have been documented so far, represents a variant of a "bifurcate merging' system which is widespread throughout India's North-eastern region, by virtue of the terminological equations

$$F = FB \neq MB \qquad M = MZ \neq FZ$$

The way of distinguishing between lineal and colineal line in the parental generation by adding suffixes meaning either "big" (or "senior") and "little" (or "junior") according to the relative age of parents' siblings to the parent of the same sex is also shared by most Naga groups, as well

as many other ethnic groups of this area. More specifically, it also exhibits the main characteristics of a true Iroquois system: whereas parents' parallel siblings are equated with parents, siblings of the opposite sex in the parental generation tend to be counted as relatives by marriage; both sexes refer to father-in-law as "mother's brother" (*pou*), and to mother-in-law as "father's sister" (*nei*). Similarly at Ego's generation, parallel cousins are classified as "brothers" and "sisters" and therefore the question of having a marital relationship with them does not arise at all, while cross-cousins are denoted by specific terms and become, at least theoretically, marriageable. While the merging of parents' parallel siblings with parents and consequently of parallel cousins with Ego's siblings seems to be a common feature of all Naga systems, the assimilation of parents' cross-siblings to parents-in-law is restricted to a few groups only: Tangkhul (including Somra group of Myanmar), Liangmai, Sema, Ao, Chang, Konyak, Wancho, Nocte (Doidam dialect) and possibly a few others.[12] Further South, Iroquois systems are widespread among representatives of the Kuki-Chin family.

In addition, Rongmei kin terminology exhibits perfect symmetry in the classification of the kin-related people that would fall into the English categories "uncle" and "aunt", with the equivalences

FB = MZH (*pu*)
FZ = MBW (*nei*)
MB = FZH (*pou*)
MZ = FBW (*pui*)

This is a common feature of nomenclatures of the Zeliangrong group (Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei) but not of Nagas in general, and among the Naga populations of India it is reported only for the Chang group.[13] Among Kuki-Chins it is found in particular among the Mizos and the Maras.[14]

Terms expressing consanguineal ties predominate over those expressing affinity. Consanguineous and affinals often share a term, as well as lineals and colineals or lineals and ablineals (for example, FF and MB, B and FBS, etc.). With regard to collaterality, bifurcation and gender, the terminology exhibits a sharp contrast between the "central" generational levels (G+1, G0, G-1), and the other levels:

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[12] Sema: Hutton, 1922b: 122-129; Ao: Mills, 1926: 164-165; Chang: Hutton, 1922a: 410-411; Konyak: Fürer-Haimendorf, 1969: appendix; Wancho: Boruah, 1977: 21-22; Nocte: Dutta, 1978: 101-104. Confirmed or completed for Tangkhul and Liangmai with our own data.
[13] Hutton, 1922a: 411.
[14] Lorrain, 1940: 365-366; Parry, 1932: 241.

	Collaterality	Bifurcation	Gender
G+3	–	–	+
G+2	–	–	+
G+1	+	+	+
G 0	+	+	+
G-1	+	+	+
G-2	–	–	–
G-3	–	–	–

Clear differentiations within the lineal kin appear in Ego's generation and Ego's parental generation, with distinction of sex and relative age. Distinction based on relative age is relevant only for siblings (real and classificatory) and parents' siblings. Collaterality is recognized only to distinguish siblings of the opposite sex in the parental generation (F≠ FZ, M≠ MB), cross-cousins from siblings (B ≠ MBS, FZS; Z ≠ MBD, FZD) and children from sister's children (Ch ≠ ZCh). Bifurcation is recognized to distinguish between parents siblings, brothers' and sisters' children, as well as patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousins. Several kinship terms reflect an emphasis on relationship within the father's lineage. For example there is a specific term for husband's sister that a female is expected to use, which is somewhat honorific and denotes seniority in the sense that a female speaker will also apply it to her grandfather and maternal uncle. But there is no kin term for a male speaker to address or refer to his wife's sister, and where she is older than him recourse is made to teknonymy in a direct address instead of a specific kin term.

Relation between kinship terminology and the marriage system
Rongmei society is patrilineal and segmented. Patrilineal descent is important in determining the social identity of a person, his/her rights to inherit and the people whom he or she can marry. The society as a whole is divided into a number of clans whose members reckon their presumed kinship and common ancestry through the paternal line only, and today individuals use their clan name as patronyms in administrative documents.

Clan exogamy seems to be the basic rule everywhere. The Rongmeis will readily assert that they cannot marry within their own clan (*kaikhuang*), whereas they are free to seek their spouse outside it. Sexual or marital union between people belonging to the "same clan" (*kaikhuang chammei*) is incestuous since they are considered as classificatory siblings (*tanpui-tanpu*), and any violation of this rule may lead to public banishment.[15]

It is, however, difficult to figure out the exact number of clans as information varies from one source to another, although it is generally assumed that today the Rongmeis have 4 major clans, namely Kamei, Gonmei (Golmei), Gangmei and Longmei.[16] They are all divided into several sub-units which are nevertheless called "clans" (*kaikhuang*), although the Gangmei clan is sometimes reported to stand undivided.[17] Such units are invariably denoted by using suffixes *-kai* such as *Malangmei-kai*, in which *–kai* is a contracted form of *kaikhuang*. The Kamei clan, for instance, is said to be divided into seven sections, namely Kamei (proper), Phaomei, Malangmei (Marangmei), Kamson,[18] Pamei, Shanganmei and Maringmei. Similarly the Gonmei clan comprises several sections including Gondaimei, Dongmei (Dhangmei), Panmei, Riamei (Remmei)[19] according to most informants. The problem arises from the fact that the number of clans, their names, and also their grouping seem to vary to some extent from place to place, to vary over time, and to depend on the degree to which sub-clan identifiers are assumed to be separate clans.

The fact that Rongmei clans are totemic provides an additional criterion for identification. The rule of exogamy primarily applies to people having the same totem and hence sharing the same food taboo (*gai*) since the animal clan-emblem is considered to be intimately related to members of that clan. For example, the seven sections that constitute

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[15] At a lower level of social segmentation people belonging to the same lineage or kindred are referred to as "*Mpoulang*" -or *Impoulang* as noted by Francis (1992)- which conveys the meaning of "sons of".

[16] Traditionally, in hilly areas only the Kamei, Gonmei and Gangmei are represented, whereas representatives of the Longmei clan and its subdivisions, which are said to have originally branched off from Gonmei, are mainly found in the Valley. The Dhangmei, Phaomei, Maringmei, Remmei and Thaimei clans are also widely spread in the Imphal Valley.

[17] This major clan comprises at least four subdivisions, three of them however still bear the orginal clan name "Gangmei". They are: Kamang ("tiger") Gangmei, Asanpuina Gangmei, Zainu Gangmei and Khangchaing.

[18] Kamson is said to have originated from Kamei and the name is used mainly in the Imphal Valley instead of Kamei.

[19] The word Riamei is used in most areas, except for a few places in the Valley where Remmei is used instead.

the Kamei clan are bound together by the same ban on the meat of the Green-winged Dove (*Chalcophaps indica*) which they call *roi* (or *inruai*) *ahuina* and consider as their clan's emblem. Similarly, sections of the Gonmei clan, including the Gondaimei and Dongmei, abstain from consuming the meat of the Black bulbul (*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*) which is called *dau*.[20] Therefore there is apparently a clear parallel between animals that can and cannot be eaten, and persons one can and cannot marry. But here again, various statements appear to be somewhat contradictory. Members of the Panmei clan abstain from eating the meat of an unidentified bird species (*roi ngou*, literally "white bird"), which they regard as their clan-emblem, although they are generally considered as part of the Gonmei group whose emblem and therefore tabooed animal is the Black bulbul. The closeness between the two clans and the consequent ban on intermarriage was first reported by Bower (1939-1946). Marriage between members of two clans belonging to the same group or phratry is theoretically forbidden, and this rule may well have been strictly followed in the past. But today, although the society as a whole still tries to prevent them, such unions can and do take place provided that no blood relationship can be proven between the two partners.

Interrelations between the various Rongmei clans are reflected in the use of kin terms for addressing unrelated people, although some of them are assigned according to age difference only.[21] Thus kids addressing adults, as well as adults addressing each other, will often make a distinction on the basis of clan affiliation. Kids of both sexes address adults of the parental generation as they would their own parents (*apu/apui*) if they belong to their father's clan or any clan of the same exogamous phratry, whereas they call them either maternal uncle (*apou*) or paternal aunt (*anei*) if they belong to the mother's brother clan or phratry. For example, since the Pamei and Kamson are considered to be two subclans of the major Kamei clan/phratry, a boy whose mother originally belongs to the Pamei clan will normally address a male adult of the Kamson clan by *apou* (MB), but *apu* (F) if he is himself a member of the Pamei clan. Following the same logic he will call a female adult either *anei* (FZ) or *apui* (M). Non kin-related adults of both sexes normally call each other by

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[20] Or *indau* according to Francis (1992).

[21] For example, as a general rule, male adults and elderly persons address children by "*abung*" (for boys) and "*alu*" (for girls) irrespective of the generational difference. Reciprocally children most commonly address any elderly person by *apou* (grandfather) or *apei* (grandmother). Elderly people usually address each other through teknonymy, by using the name of the eldest child/grandchild followed by *–pu/-pui/-pou/-pei/*, or even by suffixing the name of a brother's son by *-nei* (paternal aunt).

name, but can also use *cai* (eB), *kainah* (yB), *cana* (B, m. sp.) or *suanrei* (Z, f. sp.) if they belong to the same clan or group of clans bound by the same food and marriage restrictions.

Traditionally in Rongmei society, a man is encouraged to marry his actual or classificatory matrilateral cross-cousin. It is a point of unanimous agreement among various authors, and Bose (1980) notes that "the marriage with the mother's brother's daughter is still the rule in all villages".[22] According to our informants, it is also favoured with a classificatory cross-cousin such as FMBSD.[23] Marrying MBSD is also considered a good union provided the bride and Ego belong to the same age group. By contrast, there is a strict ban on marrying one's patrilateral cross-cousin: "The most tabooed form of marriage is called *tankhi*, which includes marriage of a boy with his father's sister's daughter Forced separation is the inevitable consequence of such a marriage".[24] Das further indicates that marriage preference goes to a younger matrilateral cross-cousin only. This is consistent with the terminology he provides, in which MBD is denoted by a specific term (*nou-chanu*) if younger than Ego, but called "junior mother" (*puilao*) and classified along with MyZ if elder. However this distinction was unknown to our informants from Tamenglong District, so that it may refer to the language(s)/dialect(s) spoken in the Imphal Valley only. *–Chanu* is reminiscent of "*ichanu*" meaning "child" in Meitei, and might have been borrowed from that language.

It is unclear whether this prescriptive marriage rule results in the establishment of a generalized exchange. Bose (1980), who conducted investigations in villages of Bishnupur District not far from Imphal, is the only author to mention such a cyclic system, operating in some cases with a tripartite division, each comprising a number of clans. But the author also notes that "the marriage regulation is undergoing considerable modification and it is hard to get at the regulation in its original purity". He further adds that the composition of each section varies from village to village. The example provided by Bose is nevertheless interesting: in Thaninkhun village, the following traditional marriage regulation is

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[22] Cf. Das (1972): "Marrying Mo Br Da is considered to be the most preferred union. Clearly, the Kabui patrilineal clans are linked with matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. It is almost obligatory on the part of a man to serve his mother's brother, and the best way he can do so is by marrying his daughter. It also reinforces the tie between the brother's family and sister's family." Such a marriage is popularly known *as Kanei-pi-kadoimei*, at least in the Imphal Valley.

[23] But opinions differ regarding unions with MBSD where the bride belongs to the same generation as Ego.

[24] Das (1972: 37). Marriage with the matrilateral parallel cousin (MZD) is also strictly forbidden according to our informants.

reported to unite the 3 clans which are represented, namely Kamei ("*Ka-makai*"), Thaimei ("*Tha-makai*") and Longmei ("*Long-makai*"). In former times a Kamei man could only marry a Thaimei girl, a Thaimei man had to marry a Longmei girl and a man from Longmei had to seek his spouse in the Kamei clan (1996 [1980]: 127). It is not known whether such a matrilateral connubium, or "marriage in a circle", is to be found anywhere else among the Rongmeis.[25] But the preference for marrying the mother's brother's daughter is well attested, at least in the recent past. Moreover, the following equations

FZH = HF (*pou*)
MB = WF (*pou*)
MBW = WM (*nei*)
FZ = HM (*nei*)
MB = MBS (*pou*)
MZ = MBD (*puilau*)
HMB = F (*pu*)

are all suggestive of marriage preference with the mother's brother's daughter, as shown in the diagram below:
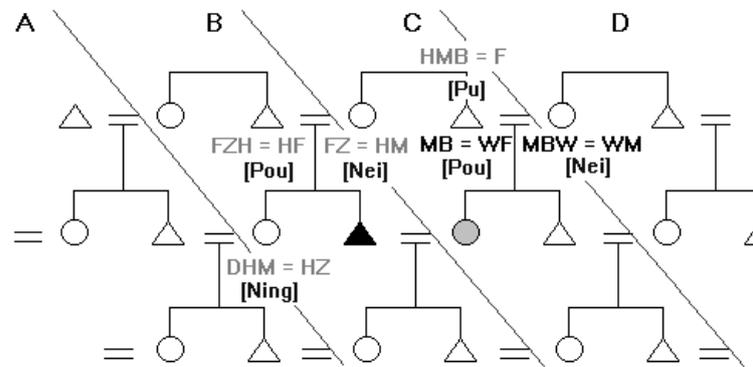
in black: relationship considered from a male point of view

in grey: relationship considered from a female point of view

A,B,C,D: patrilineages

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[25] One must also remember that the empirical evidence of this connubium among the Purums, first noted by Needham, was contested later by some authors. See in particular Ackerman (1964).

This is particularly evident in the use of the term "*apu*" (father) used by a married woman to address her husband's maternal uncle, whereas the husband simply calls his WMB "mother's brother" (*apou*) as he would his own MB. This is the sole instance where male and female speakers use different kin terms to denote in-laws. But the distinction becomes relevant in the context of a man marrying his real MBD, for in such a case the husband's maternal uncle would be the bride's real father.

Prescribed marital alliance with the mother's brother's lineage is also reflected in the terminology by the way MBD is considered a "junior mother" (*puilau*), since in this context a male Ego simply replicates the alliance contracted earlier by his father with the patrilineage of Ego's mother. It is also interesting to note that among cross-cousins, matrilateral cross-cousins are denoted by terms referring to ascending generations (*pou*, GF, MB; *puilau*, MZ) whereas patrilateral cross cousins are denoted by a term applying to the second descending generation (*tou*, grandchildren). As Fox (1967) has stated for the Purums of Manipur who too prescribe matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, this senior/junior relationship reflects status inequalities between wife's givers and wife's takers, the former being superior to the latter.[26]

The matrilateral cross-cousin marriage preference is also apparent in the use of a term of reference used collectively for the wife-taking lineage or clan, *lu-gaan*, which first denotes DH but is also more widely used to encompass all husbands of any woman born in Ego's clan.[27] One can also observe that MBW and MBSW are denoted by the same kin term, as is the case in the languages of neighbouring groups among which the generalized exchange pattern is well attested such as the Karbis (formerly Mikirs), Mizos (formerly Lusheis) and Maras (formerly Lakhers).[28] This indicates a permanent relationship between one's own lineage and the maternal uncle's lineage/clan, from which wives have been taken down through generations.

But interestingly here, there are in fact two possibilities for denoting MBSW depending on whether the bride is or not from Ego's clan. In the first case, she will be called a "junior mother" (*puilau*), as are MyZ and MBD, and in the second case (which is presented by informants as the most common one) as father's sister (*nei*). The fact that, in the particular context of preferential marriage with the mother's brother family, the kinship terminology refers to the possibility for the MBS to marry

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[26] Fox (1967: 250).
[27] See also Francis (1992: 276).
[28] For Mizos and Maras, Goswami (1996a: 140). Information on Karbis from our own data.

someone from Ego's clan suggests at least one case of the reversal of kinship alliance. Similarly, the fact that FZSW+ and FZDH+ are treated as siblings if they belong to the father's clan (instead of being called *puilau* and *apou*) is another indication of at least two additional possibilities of alliance reversal. Such instances of the differentiation of kin terms according to clan affiliation are uncommon among the Nagas, although they constitute the most salient feature of Ao and Lhota terminologies as pointed out by Lévi-Strauss (1949). They have been interpreted by him in this context as a clue indicating the practice of restricted exchange pattern and bilateral cross-cousin marriage.[29] Indeed, equations such as:

M = HFZ
FZ = WM = MBW
WBW = Z
HZH = B
HF = MB
MB = WF = FZH
Z = WBW
B = HZH

are truly suggestive of bilateral cross-cousin marriage. This becomes clearer with the following diagram:
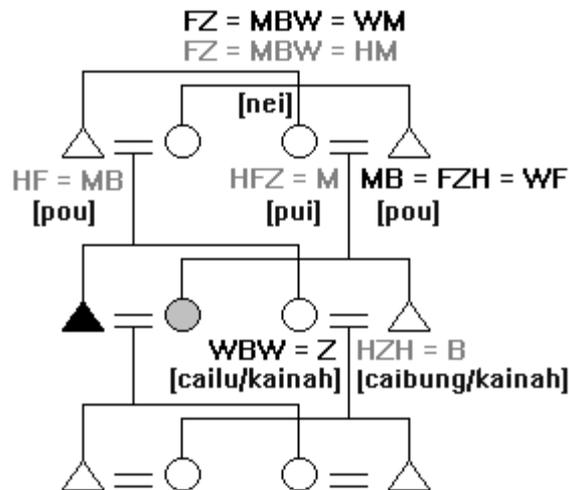
in black: relationship considered from a male point of view

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[29] That is, for a man, to marry his ZHZ.

in grey: relationship considered from a female point of view

However, the operational kinship system may be different from the picture one obtains after analysing kinship terminology. Here our information becomes less certain as statements from various informants differ to some extent and appear to be somewhat contradictory. Everyone seems to agree that both a true sister-exchange as represented above,[30] as well as two brothers marrying two sisters, is considered to be an inauspicious union; some of our informants add that, even though they are not strictly forbidden by tradition, they are believed to bring bad luck to the couple. But opinions differ largely regarding the possibility of marriage between second cousins (grandchildren of siblings) not belonging to one's own clan (MMZSD, MMZDD, FMZSD, FMZDD, FFBDD, FFZSD, FFZDD). They are regarded as too close and hence strictly forbidden by some informants, but permissible by others. Only marriage with FMBSD, i.e. a woman representative of the father's maternal uncle lineal line is considered by everyone to be a good union. Some of our informants also stressed that, when considering the question of a marital relationship with a distant cousin from the father's side, there should be no proven relationship between the partners within the last four generations.

Conclusion

Rongmei kin terminology fits in with what was considered by Lévi-Strauss (1949) as a typical feature of all Naga kinship systems: a peculiar blend of generalized exchange and restricted exchange patterns.[31] Several equations in the terminology clearly point to cross-cousin marriage of the matrilateral type, whereas others suggest a symmetric pattern of the sister-exchange type, none of them proving conclusive however. The pattern of asymmetrical exchange by marrying the real or classificatory MBD has been reported by most authors, whereas symmetrical exchange has yet to be confirmed empirically and even seems to be prohibited by customary law according to some informants.

But certainly the most striking feature of the Rongmei kinship terminology is that it possesses all the structural characteristics of the

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[30] Marriage of a man with his BWZ.

[31] "Il nous reste à examiner un ensemble de groupes septentrionaux (...) chez lesquels l'échange généralisé, tout en restant conforme à sa formule simple, n'apparaît plus pur, mais mélangé avec une formule d'échange restreint" (1949: 317).

"Northern and Central Chin" terminological systems, in so far as it may be presented as a 6-point model:

1. A bifurcate merging terminology: Ego's father and paternal uncle share the same elementary kin term, as do Ego's mother and Ego's mother's sister, although the colineal line is distinguished from the lineal line by the adjunction of appropriate suffixes.

2. A variant on the Iroquois type, the only difference from the true type being that parents' siblings are distinguished between elder and younger ones on the basis of their relative age to Ego's parents.

3. A unique pair of elementary terms to denote siblings of both sexes (Rongmei: *cai/kainah*; Mizo, Zou: *u/nau*; Tarao: *ute/kanao*; Thado: *he-u/nao*; Hmar: *u/sang*, etc.),[32] to which gender suffixes are possibly but not necessarily added.

4. A unique elementary term to denote FF, MB, MBS and WF (Rongmei*: pou*; Mizo, Hmar, Paite, Aimol, Chiru, Chothe (Purum), Tarao: *pu*; Thado: *hepu*; Mara: *papu*)[33] and a consequent honorific use of this term indicating seniority.

5. Patrilateral cross cousins, when denoted by a specific term, equated with sister's children (Hmar) or grandchildren (Rongmei, Mizo), in any case always treated as generational "juniors".

6. The mother's brother's daughter, when denoted by a specific term, called or referred to either as "mother" (Paite: *nu*), "little/junior mother" (Rongmei: *puilau*, Hmar: *nu-te*; Thado: *henunga*) [34] or "mother" followed by personal name or nickname (Zou), indicating the reduplication of marital alliance with the mother's lineage at each generation.

All these traits are typical of the majority of Kuki-Chin systems, especially those of the northern and central language groups such as Hmar, Mara, Mizo, Paite, Thado, Vaiphei and Zou, some of them also being immediate neighbours. In particular the structures of the kin terminologies of the Mizos and the Hmars appear to be closest to the Rongmei nomenclature, the latter living both in Tamenglong and North Cachar Hills and their villages often being interspersed with Rongmei

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[32] Tarao: Mukherjee & Sing (1996: 164); Mizo: Lorrain (1940: 325, 532); Mara (Lakher): Parry (1932: 293-294); Thado: Hutton (1922b: 417); Hmar, Paite and Zou: our own data.

[33] In Tarao however, according to Mukherjee & Singh (1996: 164), the term for MBS is *thur* or *neng*, depending on relative age to Ego.

[34] In such a case MBD and MyZ are referred to by the same kin term.

villages. All these systems are furthermore associated with marriage rules prescribing the union of a man with his mother's brother's daughter. Most of them exhibit the same affinal dissymmetry between wife's givers and wife's takers expressed in the terminology by using the senior/junior generation terms (Rongmei: *pou/tak*; most Kuki-Chin languages of Manipur and Mizoram: *pu/tu*).[35]

Interestingly, this model also applies to the majority of Nagas living in Manipur, namely Zeme, Liangmai, Mao (Ememei), Poumai and Maram groups.[36] But it departs significantly from the structures of kin terminologies of all other Naga communities from Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, with the sole exception of the Khezhas established along the Nagaland-Manipur border. As a matter of fact, of the 6 features mentioned above only the first one is common to all Naga groups of India, at least those on which some basic information is available. That is to say that the majority of Nagas of Manipur, with regard to their way of classifying kin categories, share many more similarities with the Kuki-Chins in general than with any other Naga group. Thus, in the same way Naga languages do not constitute a distinct sub-family with clear-cut boundaries but are split by linguists into two branches (each comprising both Naga and non-Naga languages),[37] it does not seem possible to delimit a set of specific characters that would isolate the Nagas from their neighbours on the basis of their kinship systems.

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[35] Mizo: Lorrain (1940: 366, 518); Mara: Goswami (1996a: 141); Parry (1932: 244). Purum: Fox (1967: 250). Hmar, Paite, Zou: our own data.

[36] Tangkhul excepted. Our own data.

[37] Linguists have generally classified the northernmost Naga languages into a Jingphaw-Konyak-Bodo (or Bodo-Garo, or Barish, or Sal) branch, and grouped languages of the central and southern groups into a Kuki-Chin-Naga (or Kukish) branch (Benedict, 1972; Bradley, 1997; Shafer, 1966-1974).

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APPENDIX

	Kinship relation	Term of address	Term of reference	Descriptive term
1	GrGF	(a)pou	pou	pou dai
2	GrGM	(a)pei	pei	pei dai
3	GF	(a)pou	pou	pou
4	GM	(a)pei	pei	pei
5	FF	(a)pou	pou	pu-pu
6	FM	(a)pou	pou	pu-pui
7	MF	(a)pou	pou	pui-pu
8	MM	(a)pou	pou	pui-pui
9	F	(a)pu	pu	pu
10	M	(a)pui	pui	pui
11	FeB	(a)puthau/ (a)pu daimei	puthau	pu cai bung/ pu cana
12	FyB	(a)pulau	pulau	pu kainah/ pu cana
13	FZ	(a)nei	nei	pu cai lu / pu kainah/ pu tanpui
14	MB	(a)pou	pou	pui cai bung

15	MeZ	(a)puithau / (a)pui daimei	puithau	pui thau / pui cai lu/ pui suanrei
16	MyZ	(a)puilau	puilau	pui kainah / pui lau/ pui suanrei
17	eB	(a)caibung	caibung	cai
18	yB	(a)kainah	kainah	kainah
19	eZ	(a)cailu	cailu	cailu
20	yZ	(a)kainah	kainah	kainah
21	FeBS	older: (a)caibung younger: (a)kainah	caibung (older) /kainah (younger)	pu kacai nah mpou/ pu cana nah mpou
22	FyBS	older: (a)caibung younger: kainah	caibung (older) /kainah (younger)	pu kainah nah pou
23	FBD	older: (a)cailu younger: (a)kainah	cailu /kainah	pu kainah aluh/ pu cana nah aluh
24	FZS	(a)tou (general term), OR : older: (a)pou younger: NAME	tou	pu caipui nah mpou/ pu tanpui nah mpou
25	FZD	(a)tou (general term), OR : older: (a)puilau younger: NAME	tou	pu caipui nah aluh/ pu tanpui nah aluh
26	MBS	(a)pou	pou	pui caibung/kainah nah mpou OR pui tanpu nah mpou

27	MBD	(a)puilau	puilau	pui caibung/kainah nah aluh OR pui tanpu nah aluh
28	MZS	older: (a)caibung younger: (a)kainah	caibung /kainah	pui cailu/kaina nah mpou OR pui suanrei nah mpou
29	MZD	older: (a)cailu younger: kainah	cailu /kainah	pui cailu/kainah OR nah aluh/ pui kainah nah lu
30	S	NAME or (a)bung	nah mpou	nah mpou
31	D	NAME or (a)lu	nah aluh	nah aluh
32	GCh	NAME or (a)bung/(a)lu	tou	tou
33	GrGCh	NAME or (a)bung/(a)lu	tak	tak
34	BS	NAME or (a)bung	m. sp.: nah mpou f. sp.: kainah	cai bung /kainah nah mpou
35	BD	NAME or (a)lu	m. sp.: nah aluh f. sp.: kainah	cai bung/kainah nah aluh
36	ZS	NAME/ (a)bung	m. sp.: tou f. sp.: nah mpou	cai lu/kainah nah mpou
37	ZD	NAME/ (a)lu	m. sp.: tou f. sp.: nah aluh	cai lu/kainah nah aluh
38	FBSS/FBDS	NAME/ (a)bung	tou	pu cana - tou gaanmei OR pu caibung/kainah tou gaanmei
39	FBSD/FBDD	NAME/ (a)lu	tou	pu cana tou aluh OR pu caibung/kainah tou intumei

40	FZSS/FZDS	NAME/ (a)bung	tou	pu tanpui tou, nei tou.(gaanmei)
41	FZSD/FZDD	NAME/ (a)lu	tou	pu tanpui tou, nei tou (aluh / intumei)
42	MBSS/MBDS	(a)tou	tou	pui tanpu/cai/kain ah tou
43	MBSD/MBDD	(a)tou	tou	pui tanpu/cai/kain ah tou
44	MZSS/MZDS	(a)tou	tou	pui suanrei tou gaanmei
46	MZSD/MZDD	(a)tou	tou	pui suanrei tou aluh
47	W	teknonymy (name of eldest son + -pui, or name of eldest girl + pui if the eldest child is a girl), or kapui, "mother'	now	now
48	H	teknonymy (name of eldest son + -pui, or name of eldest girl + pui if the eldest child is a girl), or kapu, "father'	gaan	gaan

49	WeB	(a)mek	mek-ganthau-mei	now cai bung
50	WyB	(a)mek	mek-lau-mei	now kainah
51	WeZ	older: teknonymy (name of WeZ's child + -pui, or name of Ego's child + puithau) younger: NAME	teknonymy, or *puithau*, *now cailu*	now cailu
52	WyZ	older: teknonymy (name of WyZ's child + -pui, or name of Ego's child + puilau) younger: NAME	teknonymy (name of child + *puilau*, or now-kainah-intumei)	now kainah intumei
53	HeB	(a)pou	pou	gaan caibung
54	HyB	(a)pou	pou	gaan kainah
55	HeZ	(a)ning	ning	gaan cailu
56	HyZ	(a)ning	ning	gaan kainah aluh
57	eBW	m. sp.: (a)puinau f. sp.: (a)ning	puinau/ ning	caibung now
58	yBW	m. sp.: NAME f. sp.: (a) ning	puinau/ ning	kainah now

59	eZH	(a)pou	pou	cailu gaan
60	yZH	(a)pou	pou	kainah gaan
61	WF	(a)pou	pou	now pu
62	WM	(a)nei	nei	now pui
63	HF	(a)pou	pou	gaan pu
64	HM	(a)nei	nei	gaan pui
65	WFB	(a)pou	pou	now pu cana OR now pu caibung/kainah
66	WFZ	(a)nei	nei	now pu tanpui OR now pu cailu/kainah
67	WMB	(a)pou	pou	now pui puning OR now pui caibung/kainah
68	WMZ	(a)nei	nei	now pui suanrei OR now pui cailu/kainah
69	HFB	(a)pou	pou	gaan pu cana OR gaan pu caibung/kainah
70	HFZ	(a)pui	pui	gaan pu tanpui OR gaan pu cailu/kainah
71	HMB	(a)pu	pu	gaan pui puning OR gaan pui caibung/kainah
72	HMZ	(a)nei	nei	gaan pui suanrei OR gaan pui cailu/kainah
73	FeBW	(a)puithau	puithau	pu cana now OR pu caibung now
74	FyBW	(a)puilau	puilau	pu cana now OR pu kainah now
75	FZH	(a)pou	pou	pu tanpui gaan or pui cailu/kainah gaan

76	MBW	(a)nei	nei	Pui tanpu now OR pui caibung/kainah now
77	MeZH	(a)puthau	puthau	pui suanrei gaan OR pui cailu gaan
78	MyZH	(a)pulau	pulau	pui suanrei gaan OR pui kainah gaan
79	FBSW	m. sp.: (a)pui nau f.sp.: (a)ning	puinau / miau	pu cana nah now OR pu caibung/kainah nah now
80	FBDH	(a)pou	pou	pu cana nah gaan OR pu caibung/kainah nah gaan
81	FZSW	older, belonging or affiliated to Ego's clan: (a)cai, (a)nei (if of Ego's parental generation); otherwise: puilau younger: NAME or (a)kainah	puilau	nei nah now, pu tanpui nah gaanmei now

82	FZDH	older, belonging or affiliated to Ego's clan: (a)cai, (a)pu-lau (if of Ego's parental generation); otherwise (a)pou younger: NAME or (a)kainah	pou/ kainah	nei nah gaan, pu tanpui nah-aluh/intumei gaan
83	MBSW	not member of Ego's clan: (a)nei member of Ego's clan: puilau	nei/puilau	pui tanpu nah now OR pui cai/kainah nah now
84	MBDH	(a)pou	pou	pui tanpu nah gaan OR pui cai/kainah nah gaan
85	MZSW	m. sp.: (a)pui nau f.sp.: (a)ning	puinau/ ning	pui suanrei nah now OR pui cailu/kainah nah now
86	MZDH	(a)pou	pou	pui suanrei nah gaan OR pui cailu/kainah nah gaan
87	WBS	tou	tou	now puning nah (gaanmei) OR now caibung/kainah nah mpou
88	WBD	tou	tou	now puning nah (aluh/intumei) OR now caibung/kainah nah aluh.

89	WZS	(a)kainah	kainah	now suanrei nah mpou OR now cailu/kainah nah mpou
90	WZD	(a)kainah	kainah	now suanrei nah aluh OR now cailu/kainah nah aluh
91	HBS	(a)nah	nah	gaan cana nah mpou OR gaan caibung/kainah nah mpou
92	HBD	(a)nah	nah	gaan cana nah aluh OR gaan caibung/kainah nah aluh
93	HZS	(a)kainah	kainah	gaan tanpui nah mpou OR gaan cailu/kainah nah mpou
94	HZD	(a)kainah	kainah	gaan tanpui nah aluh OR gaan cailu/kainah nah aluh
95	WBW	older: (a)cai younger: (a)kainah	cai / kainah	now-puning/tanpu now OR now caibung/kainah now
96	HZH	older: (a)cai younger: (a)kainah	cai / kainah	gaan-tanpui-gaan or gaan cailu/kainah gaan
97	SW	NAME	miau	nah mpou now
98	DH	NAME	lu-gaan	nah aluh gaan
99	SWF	older: (a)cai younger: (a)kainah	cai / kainah	miau pu OR nah mpou now pu

100	SWM	m. sp.: (a)puinau f. sp.: (a)ning	m. sp.: puinau f. sp.: ning	miau pui OR nah mpou now pui
101	DHF	older: (a)cai younger: (a)kainah	cai / kainah	nah aluh gaan pu
102	DHM	m. sp.: (a)puinau f. sp.: (a)ning	m. sp.: puinau f. sp.: ning	nah aluh gaan pu

General use of kinship terms for unrelated people

Adults addressing children	
male adults to young boys	*abung*
male adults to young girls	*alu*
female adults to young boys	*abung*
female adults to young girls	*alu*
elderly males to young boys (of the grandchildren's generation)	*abung*
elderly males to young girls (of the grandchildren's generation)	*alu*
elderly females to young boys (of the grandchildren's generation)	*abung*
elderly female to young girls (of the grandchildren's generation)	*alu*
Children addressing adults	
young boys to male adults (of the parental generation)	belonging to the same clan/phratry as the boy's father: *apu* belonging to the same clan/phratry as the boy's mother: *apou*
young boys to female adults (of the parental generation)	belonging to the same clan/phratry as the boy's father: *apui* belonging to the same clan/phratry as the boy's mother: *anei*
young girls to male adults (of the parental generation)	belonging to the same clan/phratry as the girls's father: *apu* belonging to the same clan/phratry as the girls's mother: *apou*
young girls to female adults (of the parental generation)	belonging to the same clan/phratry as the girls's father: *apui* belonging to the same clan/phratry as the girls's mother: *anei*

young boys to elderly males (of the grandparents' generation)	*apou*
young boys to elderly females (of the grandparents' generation)	in general: *apei* considered by the boy's father as his paternal aunt: *anei*
young girls to elderly males (of the grandparents' generation)	*apou*
young girls to elderly females (of the grandparents' generation)	in general: *apei* considered by the girl's father as her paternal aunt: *anei*
Adults addressing adults	
male to male adults (of the same generation)	members of the same clan/phratry: *cana* otherwise: NAME
male to female adults (of the same generation)	NAME
female adult to a male adult of the same generation	members of the same clan/phratry: *cai/kainah* otherwise: NAME
female to female adults (of the same generation)	members of the same clan/phratry: *suanrei* otherwise: NAME
elderly males to other elderly males	teknonymy (child/grandchild name followed by *–pu/-pou*)
elderly males to elderly females	teknonymy (child/brother's child/grandchild name followed by *pui/nei/pei*), or NAME
elderly females to elderly males	teknonymy (child/grandchild name followed by *–pu/-pou*)
elderly females to other elderly females	teknonymy (child/brother's child/grandchild name followed by *pui/nei/pei*), or NAME

Tourism Development in Northeast India:
Changing Recreational Demand, Developmental Challenges and Issues associated with Sustainability

Prasanta Bhattacharya

Northeastern part of India comprising the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura possesses great physical and human diversities to project it as one of the most potential areas of the country in respect of tourism promotion. Landscape constituents of the region viz. hills (60%), plateaux (12 %) and plains (28 %) along with river systems contribute substantially in enriching its scenic component. As a zone of convergence of diverse ethnic stocks, the region is undoubtedly a showcase of cultural diversity. Proper campaigning of the region's wide variety of physical and cultural products (the hidden substances for developing tourism) can bring a dramatic change to the present socio-economic situation of the region. With the potentials as it has, the region should go ahead with the development of tourism industry without farther delay. Considering the significance of the tourism sector as a catalyst for regional development, an attempt has been made in this article to visualize the trend of the sector in Northeastern region and focus on the need for adoption of a sustainable tourism development strategy.

Tourism in Northeast India

In the context of a globally growing sector like tourism, Northeast India with both physical and human diversities is one of the most promising regions of the country in respect of tourism promotion. Among the Northeastern states, Assam took the pioneering step to recognize tourism as a sector of economy in as back as 1958. When the British declared Kaziranga a game reserve in 1916 and wildlife sanctuary in 1950, Assam was projected as an attractive destination for tourists, particularly those who are interested in nature and wildlife observation. In Kaziranga, provision for elephant safari was started for tourists in 1938 at the initiative of forest department (Dept. of Forest 1969). Apart from it, Shillong, the administrative headquarter of the Assam province during the British period witnessed an environment of outdoor recreation initiated by the colonial ruler. In response to this at least some people from inside and outside the state started visiting Kaziranga, Shillong and also the Kamakhya temple (Guwahati) in the later part of 1930s which may be considered to be the humble beginning of modern tourism in the region. Since then significant changes have taken place in the region's

tourism sector because of the efforts made by the central and the respective state government in this direction. However, tourism as an industry is of recent origin in Northeast India and despite a long history of hosting both international and domestic tourists, tourism sector of this region is still in infancy, witnessing merely 0.9% and 0.2% of the domestic and foreign tourist arrivals respectively of the country (table1).

Changing recreational demand and challenges of development

Naturally the question arises about the poor performance of tourism sector in the Northeastern region of India. Why the region failed to take the advantage of its regional, national and international linkages developed so far in the tourism front? The slow pace of progress in tourism in this region is the result of a lack of experience in planning, developing and managing the sector. In fact, the perception of planners, policy-makers and common people towards tourism guides the process of a healthy development (Bhattacharya 2005). From industrial point of view, tourism promotion should follow a marketing-oriented approach, so that it can stand as a productive sector amidst the competitive tourism market environment. While visualizing the unprofessional tourism development scenario in South Asian countries, Vaidya (1996) rightly stated that "for tourism industry to flourish and contribute to our national development we should learn to cater to the demands of incoming tourists. The mere existence of almighty Himalaya, beautiful blue seas with their magnificent beaches, the grand palaces and forts left as heritage by our forefathers, the varied wild life, archaeological heritage of 5000 years civilization is not going to make foreigners with cash in their purse beg to be allowed to enter our country" (Hall and Page 2001). In Northeast India too, for decades, we are advocating for the development of tourism sector very casually without fixing our strategies, goals and priorities and in most cases without any authentic action plan. But, systematic exploitation of touristic potentiality of the region requires a band of trained manpower having better understanding of different facets of the industry. Moreover, there is necessity of critical judgment regarding the local tourism products prior to their marketing, so that tourism ventures can sustain in local socio-economic situation and contribute meaningfully in the areas concerned. Unfortunately tourism planners of the northeastern region of India often forget these basic issues and try to visualize the industry in such a way that it emerges, performs and brings fruit to the region and concerned destinations in an isolated manner, irrespective of its local socio-economic, cultural, institutional and environmental contexts.

State	2001		2002		2003		Share of the States, in% (2001)	
	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign	Domestic	Foreign
Arunachal Pradesh	6349	323	4347	187	2195	123	0.00	0.00
Assam	1010651	6171	1953915	6409	2156675	6610	0.69	0.09
Manipur	76527	183	89633	221	92923	257	0.03	0.00
Meghalaya	178697	2390	268609	3146	371953	6304	0.12	0.09
Mizoram	28771	152	29417	259	35129	279	0.01	0.00
Nagaland	9948	920	14263	657	5605	743	0.00	0.01
Tripura	254912	1512	260586	2602	257331	3196	0.08	0.05
total	1565855	11660	2620795	13481	2921881	17512	0.98	0.24

Table 1: Tourist arrivals in Northeastern States of India (2001-03)

source: Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of India, 2001

Apart from it there is an urgent need to know the expectation and demand of tourists to develop the industry as per the present international, national and regional demand. Recreational demand of tourists witnessed quite interesting change over the years. At a point of time tourist's main aim was to see the places of regional importance. But at present the traditional holidaying being changed to a new trend that can be termed as "activity holidays", where tourist prefers to take part in different recreational actively while visiting a new region. Now tourist are more physically and intellectually active than previously. More and more tourists wish to participate in recreation, sports, adventure and learn about the history, culture, natural environment and wildlife of the areas they visit. The growing diversity of tourism market is well witnessed through the recreational demand (demand of BTPs-background tourism products or tourist attractions) of tourists visiting northeastern part of India too (fig. 1). Interestingly more tourists want to pursue their special interest and hobbies that leads to the growth of "special interest tourism" based on aspects of nature, history, culture, economic and professional activity, academic interest, etc. For a segment of tourists "nostalgia" becomes the pulling factor. In the newly emerged form like "nostalgic tourism", tourists used to visit their ancestral homes or the places where they or their countries had previous associations (interestingly 6-7% of the foreign tourists from Britain and Australia to the Northeast region are driven by such nostalgia, fig.5). In "religious tourism", people visit places sacred to their religion and preference for this segment stands at 53% and 18% of domestic and foreign tourists respectively. It has also been seen that over the years tourists are becoming more experienced and sophisticated in their travel habits and prefer quality attractions, facilities and services to have "good value for money" in their travel expenditure. They are also environmentally and socially sensitive and seek better designed, less polluted destinations, bypassing badly managed destinations that have environmental and social problems.
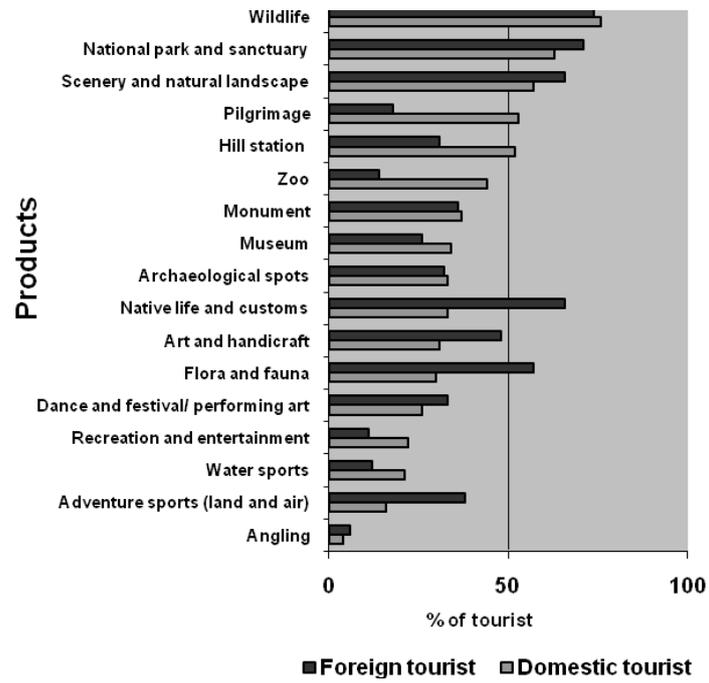
Fig. 1 Demands of BTP in Assam (source: Bhattacharya, 2004)

Considerations for developing sustainable tourism in the Northeast

The rapid change in the nature of tourists, tourism industry and its inter-relationship with natural and cultural environment necessitates new paradigms to mange tourism development. Development of tourism, especially during the last quarter of the twentieth century has also rightly evoked concerns about socio-cultural and environment impacts of tourism at macro, meso and micro level. Could there be a way to develop alliance between different target groups like tourists, tourism developers, tourism service providers and host community? Spirit behind such development should be most humanizing. Wight (1993) argues that sustainable tourism involves a spectrum of experiences, supply characteristics, and market demands. Better understanding of the niche markets and of the consumer has important research and market implications and is critical to the development of suitable services. Appropriate services lead to more value-added products and higher positive economic impact. In the words of Hawkes and Williams "the concept of sustainable tourism embodies a challenge to develop the world's tourism capacity and quality of its products without adversely affecting the environment that maintains and nurtures them" (Kamra 2002). The very idea speaks that the needs of today's visitors should not be met at the expanse of future generation. In total, sustainable tourism development (STD) advocates for proper exploitation and explanation of touristic resources and the direction of development should be as per the need but not only of the present but also of the future.

For the formulation of a sustainable tourism strategy in the Northeast region, tourism planners may need to concentrate on some key areas like (i) conservation and neo interpretation of natural, archaeological/ historical and cultural tourism products, (ii) seasonality aspects of tourism operation, (iii) enhancement of tourist facilities and services (transportation, accommodation, etc), (iv) public health and safety, (v) promotion of tourism infrastructure, (vi) focus on community involvement, (vii) allocating/ zoning spaces for recreational land use, (viii) extending efforts on need based tourism education and training, (ix) tourism financing, (x) prioritization of domestic tourism sector and (xi) evolving strategies for better management of the sector.

Conservation and interpretation of natural tourism products: being a part of global bio-diversity hot spot, natural environment of northeastern region of India offers many attractions and has potential for developing products for the expansion of tourism industry (fig.1). Hence conservation of natural environment is not only important for the development of riverine tourism, nature-based tourism in parks and sanctuaries but also

for other reasons including conservation of biodiversity assets and protection of water bodies. But destruction of natural assets and deforestation for the expansion of agrarian land use is at an alarming state in the entire northeastern region. For example in Assam, due to encroachment, the area under notified forest has gone down to 16% of the total geographical area of the state (in terms of closed forest, 2000), which is well below the norms of 33% recommended in the National Forest Policy. Interestingly, the state has a small area under the protected area scheme accounting for merely about 3.63% (2851.76 sq km) of the total geographical area and possesses 5 national parks and 16 wildlife sanctuaries. However, the important fact is that, out of the 21 such potential nature tourist destinations only 5 are (23.8%) adequately protected. It is the result of lack of awareness regarding the significance and benefit of conservation which led people to exploit such resources as an easy alternative for economic gain and sustenance. On the other hand, conservation agencies are required to work with little fund and practically lack of support from local people in concerned areas. As there is no alternative than to depend on forest resources, threat and pressure will continue to mount in near future. In such situation, remedy lies in ecotourism venture, especially in national parks and sanctuaries for advocating the message of environment awareness, long-term conservation measures and economic benefit for local people through job opportunities. Apart from Assam, rests of the hilly states of the region may provide ample scope for nature as well as land and water based adventure tourism activities, where traditional expertise of trekking, hiking and jungle exploration of native people may be well accommodated as alternative source of earning. Interestingly, there also exists the tradition of preserving forest assets in many parts of the northeastern region. For example, the tribal people of Meghalaya preserve sacred groves around their settlements for millennia. Though such preservation practice is guided by religious motives, it presents an excellent example of traditional conservation ethics of biodiversity (Upadhyaya 2003). Such ethical components of the society can be nurtured to face the challenge of nature-based tourism product conservation in present day context.

Preservation and interpretation of archaeological/ historical and cultural heritage: the northeastern region has a legacy of archaeological and historical monuments, though not yet properly focused at the national level. It has sites of archaeological remains and monuments, dating back from 7th to 18th centuries A.D., which can play an important role in attracting tourists to the region in near future. Among the northeastern states of India, the first and the oldest specimen of sculpture or iconoplastic art of Assam have been found in the stone door-frame of a temple at Da-Parvatia near Tezpur town in the district of Sonitpur. This

iconograph represents the Gupta-School of Art of the fifth and sixth centuries AD. An early rock inscription considered to be the work of the fifth century AD was found near Kamakhya temple (Guwahati) and known as Umachal rock inscription. The entire state is dotted with about 260 ruin and monument sites belonging to the period from seventh century AD to the eighteenth century AD (Chaudhury 1964). Among these archaeological treasures, it has 12 major ruin sites and 25 major monument sites. Apart from Assam some other states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Tripura poses a few archaeological sites and states like Manipur and Tripura have the legacy of monumental palaces built during early part of 20th century. Interestingly some parts of Meghalaya and Assam retain prehistoric sites of megaliths. Unfortunately, preservation of such rich archaeological heritage has not yet been a priority of the concerned states. Some of the monuments are preserved at the cost of their historic flavour and most of them are at a neglected state, witnessing harsh wounds of time.

Cultural products for tourism in the region include the visual and performing arts, crafts, traditional ceremonies and costumes, fairs and festivals, oral literature, life and lifestyle, dietary habit, etc. In terms of all these components the northeastern region is rich enough with greater spatial diversity. However, gradual intrusion of market economy, even to the interior parts of the region distorts such uniqueness. Adaptation of a "supply oriented approach" in cultural tourism expansion strategy may go a long way in reevaluating and preserving its unique cultural components with necessary value addition as cultural tourism starts with commodification of culture.

Seasonality of tourism venture: seasonality has an important role to play in the pattern of use of the available tourist product base of an area. It is more important in the case of northeast region of India, as almost all the tourist products of the region are meant for out-door tourism activity. Cultural fronts too, ceremonies and festivals are closely associated with the climatic calendar of the essentially agrarian society of the region. A considerably long tourist season is generally treated as an asset, which provides the scope for expanding tourism activity for a long period, while short tourist season with a considerably long off-season has limitation in this regard. Interestingly, around 69% of foreign and 77% of domestic tourist generally visits the region within six-month span of autumn and winter season (Bhattacharya 2004). So, amidst a basically agrarian economic situation, tourism industry should be seen and designed as complementary seasonal economic activity to agriculture. Otherwise in many parts of the region such activities will not prove to be economically viable at this point of time. Study in this regard presents a model for tourism promotion in hill districts of Assam, which may go a long way in

making tourism a sustainable activity in the N.E. region (Bhagabati and Bhattacharya 2005). This model attempts to focus on alternate seasonal priorities for the yearlong alternative activities with active participation of local community through "small-scale" tourism venture. As the main tourist season for the region extends for six months, from September to February, this period may be organized as the intensive tourism phase, emphasizing on: (i) marketing of local tourism products through small scale tourism ventures managed by local community, (ii) prioritize non-fixed roof accommodation unlike traditional focus on fixed-roof accommodation like hotel, guest house, tourist lodge, etc and (iii) adopt local knowledge base, introduction and reevaluation of locally available food/dietary habit, etc. The region also experiences a brief phase of tourism activity for two months, viz. August and March that may be treated as preparatory / retreating tourism phase. August can prove to be the best time for intensive campaigning of local tourism products and services in front of regional and global audience while the month of March, the retreating phase, may be devoted to evaluate the achievements of the tourist season. The pre-monsoon and monsoon season in the region is characterized by comparatively high temperature and heavy downpour that results in a very feeble flow of tourists. This is the season of wet paddy and Jhum cultivation, may be termed as phase of agricultural activity. Apart from the traditional practice of paddy cultivation this phase can also be fruitfully designed for indoor activities like craft promotion, both decorative and utilitarian to meet the need of local and tourism market for forthcoming coming tourism phase.

Enhancement of tourist facilities and services: facilities and services are one of the important components of the whole gamut of tangible and intangible tourism products. Facilities and services encompass all the economic activities that are related to the tourism industry and produced primarily for tourists, generally designed with an aim of direct economic return (Jafari 1982). Study regarding consumers' perception on some of such service products, i.e. accommodation, quality of food and beverage, transport facilities and behaviour of the staff of tourism organizations reveals a quite interesting picture (Fig. 2 and 3). It shows the need of immediate renovation in tourist transport component, apart from strategy building for optimizing performances of other components too. Till 2002, the region possessed merely 21 classified hotel unites against 1541 units in its Indian counterparts. Similarly in the sphere of centrally recognized tour operators and agencies too, the picture is quite disappointing. Interestingly, quality of facilities and services for tourists are polarized in couple of pockets of the region, restricting horizontal expansion of tourism industry (Bhattacharya 2005).

Perception of Consumers on Room service at Stay Places in NE India
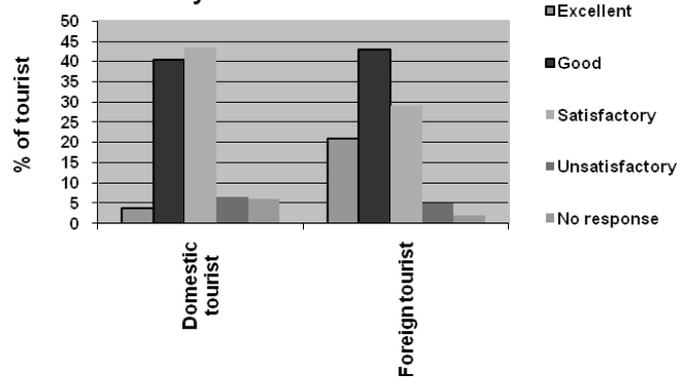
Perception of Consumers on Food and Beverage Service in NE Region
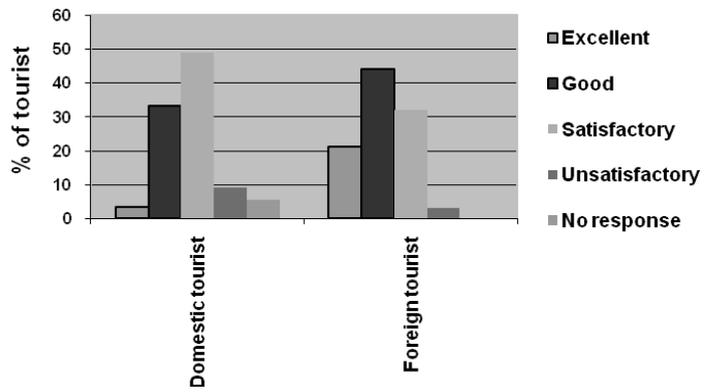
Fig. 2 (Source: Bhattacharya 2004)

Perception of Consumers on Staff Behaviour in NE Region
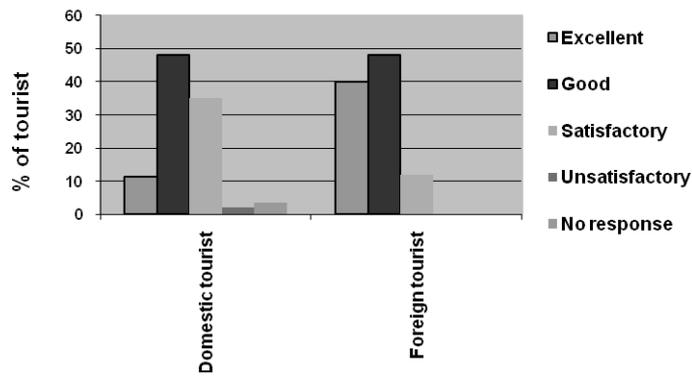
Perception of Consumers on Transport Service in NE Region
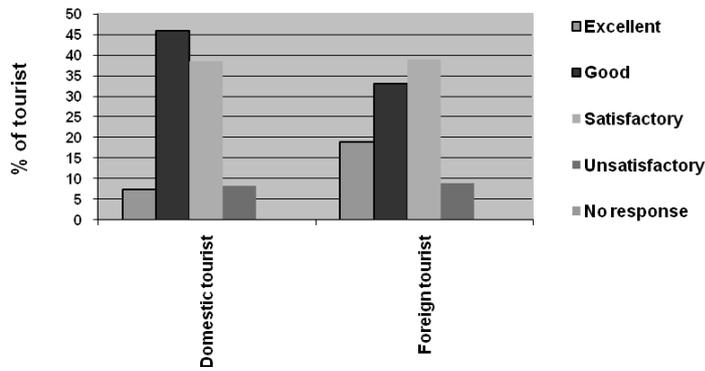
Fig. 3 (Source: Bhattacharya 2004)

Public health and safety: generally the Northeastern part of India is environmentally hygienic but its urban islands are gradually suffering from increasing stress and strain in this regard. Such problems are well

experienced by town and city dwellers of the region. It is also badly experienced by tourists to the region as the urban centers are the major pockets of facility providers to tourism sector (fig.4). So, there is an urgent need to give priority to these areas by maintaining at least a standard for health and sanitation and public facilities, not only for tourists but also for residents. Crime against tourists is not yet a problem in Northeast India, though the region is a sufferer of negative media propaganda both at national and international level. Even a sizable number of tourists appreciated the friendliness of locals while visiting this part of the region (fig. 5).

Negative RTPs of Foreign Tourist in NE Region
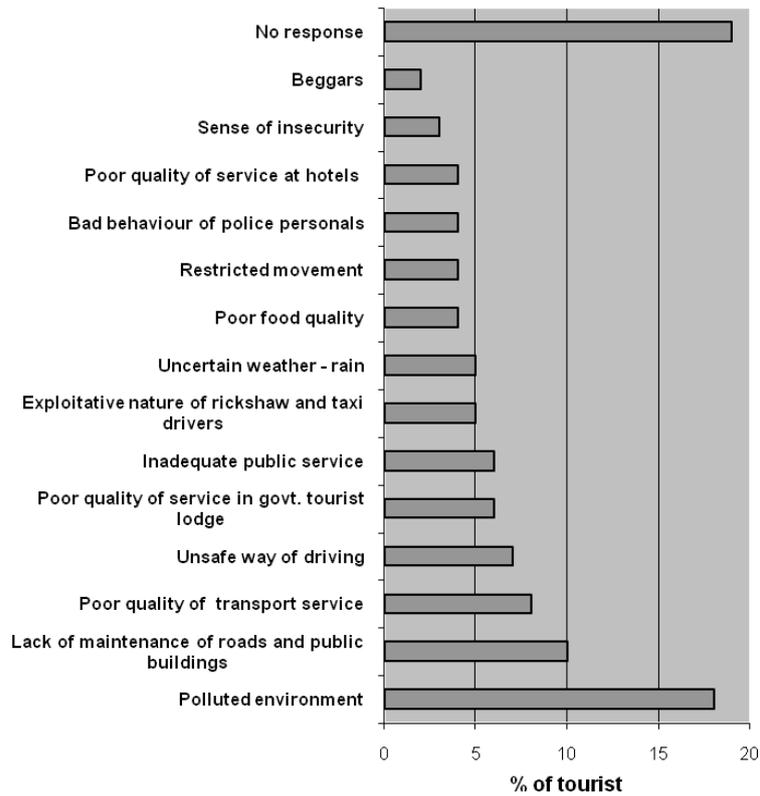
Fig. 4 (RTP: retrievable tourism product/ experience sold to tourists)

Positive RTPs of Foreign Tourist in NE Region
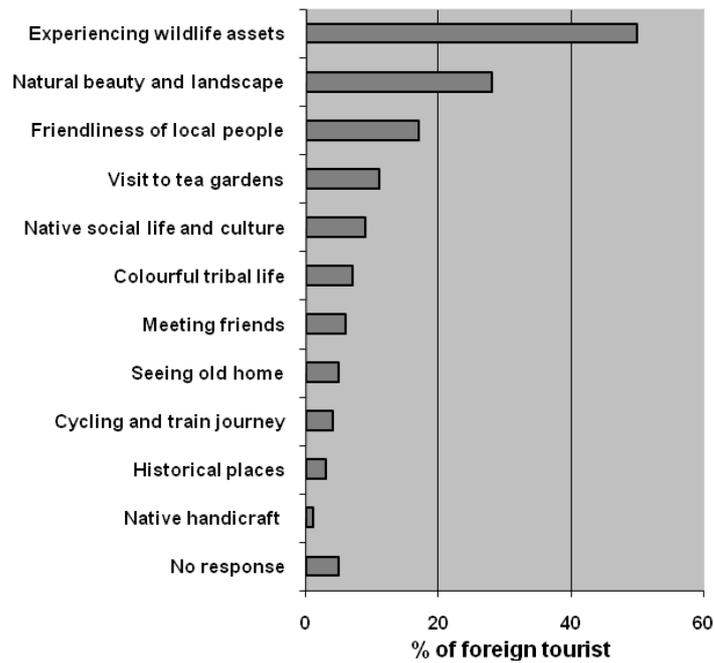
Fig. 5 (Source: Bhattacharya 2005)

Promotion of tourism infrastructure: over the years attempt has been made by concerned state and central tourism organizations in the Northeastern region for improving tourism infrastructure in the areas of transport, communication, power, water supply, etc. but quantum is quite limited. Such infrastructural improvement generally polarized in pockets of the region which were explored and campaigned under conventional "circuit specific strategy" of tourism planning adopted by govt. of India and subsequently by the concerned states of the region. Strategy of such nature, minimizes the possible "spin-off effect" of tourism development in lesser known potential pockets, which are not projected by such "tourist-circuits specific" promotion. For example, till mid 1990s, tourism development thrust of the region was confined to Guwahati-Kaziranga-Shillong circuits, which minimize development possibilities of Mayang-

Pabitar area, located only about 60 km from Guwahati. Mayang continues to be rich in terms of native life and culture, while Pabitara wildlife sanctuary possesses more rhino density than that of Kaziranga national park. Interestingly more than 66% of potential tourist destinations of Assam lie in the countryside and accessibility continues to be a major problem for some of them (Bhattacharya 2004). On the other hand, in urban pockets of the northeastern region, traffic congestion, waste disposal, air and noise pollution etc are some of the growing problem yet to be properly addressed.

Community involvement in tourism: community involvement is one of the key areas for attaining sustainability in tourism operation. In this regard WTO's STD policy says the bottom-up approach to development must be combined with top-down approach of central government. Community involvement is particularly important in towns, villages and rural areas in order to bring benefits of tourism to local residents and gain their understanding and support for this sector (WTO 1999). But traditionally, in India, tourism development policy adopted a top-down approach. As tourism is a state concern, different state tourism administrations of the northeastern region too, follow the same approach till today, converting tourism to an "enclave type" of development, where in many tourist destinations locals in general by and large are mere spectator of a strange phenomenon called "tourism". Even in a popular destination like Kaziranga, hardly around 3% of the park fringe dwellers are able to associate themselves with tourism activity in one way or the other. Hence, structural flexibility of tourism administration is an urgent need to make tourism "people-friendly" and "participatory" in nature. In the areas of accommodation development, organization of village tourism ventures, development of craft promotion and arrangement of "small-scale tourism" facilities at the initiative of local community is a must and inevitable in the context of Northeastern region. Such development will certainly provide interesting and enlightening experiences for both the guest and host community.

Availability of land for tourism: land for tourism development must be made available when needed. Concerned state governments of Northeast region should earmark areas available for tourism promotion. Land inventories for different sites should be made available for public and private tourism investors. Department of tourism, Govt. of Assam has already developed a prospective invest plan in 1995 to inform investors about tourism potentiality and land availability in some selected sites of the state. However, due to dearth of professionalism and a touristic environment, the state is not yet able to motivate private investors in tourism sector. The land areas of the region are under possession of separate government departments and in the case of states like Arunachal

and Meghalaya system of community ownership prevails. Hence, interdepartmental as well as government-community cooperation is needed in this regard. Apart from it zoning technique may be adopted in land use planning strategy to reserved suitable land for tourism promotion along river banks, peripheries of protected areas and urban pockets, for the present and future recreational use.

Tourism education and training: in northeast India tourism education and training is an area of prime importance as there is dearth of trained manpower in both managerial and technical levels. At present the region requires education and training of people to work in tourism sector at all levels, including operational, managerial and personal. At community level too, there is the need for training, so that local people gather appropriate knowledge base to work for the tourism industry. In true sense, general public education and awareness programmes, fruitful utilization of local media, active co-operation of government decision makers and technical personal are yet some of the grey areas in the context of northeast India. At present, under the patronage of central government two hotel management institutions are offering a three-year diploma progremme in the region. At university level, Tezpur University is offering a one-year post-graduate diploma course in tourism management and a three-year vocational tourism management course is being introduced in the undergraduate level of Gauhati University. In Dibrugarh University tourism is being taught by introducing a paper amalgamated with the subject history. Similarly two other university affiliated private institutions of Guwahati, viz. NERIM and AIM are also engaged in expanding tourism management education. However, how local issues are addressed and incorporated in such course curriculum is an area of great concern. Along with it, there is a need for judicious blending of both knowledge base and narrow-skills in such curriculum design. Similarly, at government level too, policy formulation is an urgent need to create a job market for those who trained in the area of tourism to streamline the affairs of the sector.

Tourism financing: up to 1980s financial constraint had been an important problem for different state departments of tourism in northeastern region. Financial allocation to tourism sector was quite minimal in the northeastern states. But after mid 1990s central finance to different state owned projects became a major source of assistance. Even at present, northeastern states of India are getting 10% of total national financial allocation earmarked for tourism sector (Rs 500 million in annual plan outlay of Ministry of Tourism, GOI during 2004-05 for Northeast region including Sikkim). Now, the problem is not so much of finance but of the dearth of technical know-how for productive utilization of resource and management of the industry. Gradually, other financial and banking

sectors too, have started opening their door for tourism entrepreneurs. Even very recently, Assam government also initiated schemes to finance entrepreneurs in small projects associated with tourism. But the strategy seems to be not so organized to meet the requirement of the sector in true sense of the term. Apart from it the presence of a well organized private sector is not yet being felt amidst tourism landscape of the entire northeast region of India.

Prioritizing domestic tourist segment: it is estimated that the domestic tourists constitute 80-85 % of the of the world's total tourists. For instance, 94% of travel by Americans is within their own country. Though Germany has one of the largest shares in international tourists, it also subscribes to domestic tourism significantly (Chib 1989). In recent time, the ratio between Indian domestic and outbound tourists stands at 58:1 (2001). Thus, domestic tourism has been playing an important role in tourism development of the country. Domestic tourism can bring economic benefits to the local area without the concern for handling foreign tourist from different cultural and language background. Apart from economic benefit, domestic tourism helps to promote regional understanding within a country. After independence, with the rising standard of living and emergence of a leisure-seeking middle class, domestic tourism has become increasingly important. However, not much attention has been given so far, to the rapidly expanding domestic market of tourism in India. Annual plan outlay of 2002-03 shows that under central sector scheme for 10th plan (90 crore), merely 6.6% (6 crore) is allocated for domestic tourism promotion and publicity including hospitality, whereas, 37.7% (34 crores) has been allocated for overseas promotion, publicity including market development assistance (Market Research Division, Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of India 2001). In the northeastern region too, promotion of domestic tourism segment is still a neglected sphere. Study in this regard shows that role of both the government and private sector as domestic tourist motivators is found to be minimal (table 2). However, lack of participation of tourists from the region itself and a lesser degree of interstate tourist interaction among the north -eastern states make the region dependent on the comparatively affluent Indian counterpart for domestic market too. The poor economic development scenario of the entire northeastern region, dearth of the culture of leisure related travel, as well as inadequate publicity of tourism products are some of the factors responsible for such a situation.

Table 2: Tourists to the Northeast region and their sources of information
(Source: Bhattacharya 2001)

Source of information	Domestic tourist		Foreign tourist	
	No. of tourist	%	No. of tourist	%
Tourist information bureau	118	36.31	26	26
Travel Agencies	3	0.92	27	27
Friend and relatives	152	46.77	41	41
Own experience, any other	85	26.15	37	37
	14	4.31	21	21

Managing tourism sector: management of tourism is more important in regions like northeast India, where in true sense, the sector is not well understood and private sector is yet to develop. For example, the lack of proper orientation and management has been responsible for widening the gap between income and expenditure of the tourism administration at local government level, the major player of tourism sector in the region. Though some of such tourism development ventures should be seen in the light of "social marketing", one cannot ignore the economic condition of the region. The available data in this regard indicates that the annual expenditure of the state tourism organization of Assam is about eight times more than revenue it earns, which is quite alarming for an economically backward state (Bhattacharya 2004). So, a reorganization and adjustment of the existing state tourism organizational structure of northeastern region of India is the immediate need to handle the sector in an organized way. Respective state tourism organizations may be reorganized by incorporating four structural components, viz. (a) planning and development, with a task of formulating need based policy and planning; coordination of development, implementation and control on facility and service standard, (b) statistics and research for generating touristic database, conducting periodic studies on product status and consumer behaviour and to operate the tourism information system, (c) marketing service-entrusted with market planning and development; operation of regional and local tourist office and information centers; overseas marketing through government of India's overseas office and developing tie-ups with other possible channels and (d) education and training, for manpower planning and development; raising the standard

of training; operation of training programme; encouraging institutions, groups activities engaged in generating manpower for tourism sector.

Conclusion

Despite having a comparatively long history of tourism most of the tourism authorities in Northeast India have not yet gained much experience in planning, developing and managing tourism sector. Consequently, in most cases their efforts in tourism promotion are misdirect and waste valuable resources of the region. Amidst political quarters, local tourism promoters and managers in some parts of the region, image of tourism development is attraction centric rather than based on a sound and organized developmental perspective. As a result, the region is not yet in a position to offer better experience to tourists. Successful development and operation of tourism sector in this region requires better management at the local government level to guide, facilitate and coordinate the process, so that tourism ventures can sustain in local socio-economic situation and contribute meaningfully in the areas concerned. Creation of a band of promoters and policy-makers is also the need of the hour. It can be done by extending need-based tourism education and short and long-term tourism manpower development strategies which will help in emerging an organized tourism sector in the region capable of giving the fruit of tourism to the tourists as also the locals. Hence, adoption of a sustainable tourism strategy is an urgent need to utilize the tourism potential of the northeastern region of India.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös by Peter J. Marczell Vol.1. *Csoma Kőrösi's Planet*. 302 pp.; *Vol. 2. British-Indian Source Documents.* 593 pp. Kolkata: Asiatic Society Monograph Series. No. XLV. 2007.

Reviewed by John Bray, President of the International Association for Ladakh Studies.

The Hungarian linguist Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (Kőrösi Csoma Sándor, 1784-1842) is well known to Himalayan scholars for his pioneering *Essay Towards a Dictionary, Tibetan and English* and his *Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, both of which were published in Calcutta in 1834. This two-volume study is the culmination of years of study by the Hungarian expatriate scholar Peter Marczell in archives scattered across Europe and India. Its purpose is to make Csoma's life better known and, by reproducing an extensive set of source documents, to provide a secure foundation for further research.

Marczell first became interested in Buddhism — and ultimately in Csoma de Kőrös — in the course of a visit to Sri Lanka in the late 1980s. In the years that followed, he set out from his base in Geneva to make research visits to Göttingen, where Csoma had studied; to Zangskar where he began work on his Tibetan dictionary; to Calcutta where he had served as Librarian of the Asiatic Society of Bengal; and to archives in London, Oxford, Vienna and Budapest which contain material related to Csoma and his contemporaries. Sadly, Marczell passed away in late 2007: this study is an important part of his legacy.

The first volume, entitled *Csoma Kőrösi's Planet* begins with a short overview of Csoma's life and achievements, and then presents 12 papers on different aspects of his life and career, together with an appendix on three Tibetan manuscripts which had belonged to Csoma and are now at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Five of these papers had been presented at conferences organised by the International Association of Ladakh Studies (IALS), and are now partly re-written; five had previously been published in Hungarian, and appear in English for the first time; one had previously been published in India; and one is totally new. Because they come from a variety of different sources, the chapters in the first volume represent a somewhat disparate anthology rather than a connected narrative. However, the anthology contains many gems.

The first two chapters discuss Csoma's relationship with William Moorcroft (1770-1825), the East India Company servant and explorer. Csoma's encounter with Moorcroft in Ladakh in 1822 set the course of the rest of his life. Having travelled across Asia by foot from his native

Hungary, Csoma had sought to continue from Ladakh across the Karakoram to Chinese Turkestan in the hope of fulfilling his original mission of finding information on the origins of the Hungarian race. However, he was prevented from travelling beyond Leh and, when he met Moorcroft, was pondering his next move. Impressed by Csoma's scholarly aptitude, Moorcroft encouraged him to take up the study of Tibetan with a view to preparing a Tibetan dictionary. Marczell reviews Moorcroft's correspondence describing these events, including a pioneering memorandum on the Tibetan language and script which Moorcroft wrote in 1823 — probably with Csoma's assistance — but which was not reported to the Asiatic Society until 1825. Marczell suggests that H.H. Wilson, the secretary of the Asiatic Society, deliberately neglected Moorcroft's findings.

Marczell's third chapter is on "Csoma Kőrösi's Zanskari Guides in Tibetan Learning": it discusses Csoma's three teachers - Sangye Phuntsog, Kunga Choleg Dorje and Tsultrim Gyatso — and the texts that they prepared to assist his studies. Marczell supplements archival sources with oral information gathered on a visit to Zanskar.

Subsequent chapters discuss: Csoma's relationship with Dr James Gerard, the military doctor based at the East India Company's Sabathu cantonment; his involvement in debates between the contemporary scholars Brian Hodgson and George Turnour; his early training in Göttingen and its possible influence on his work as Asiatic Society Librarian; his choice of a pseudonym (Moorcroft had first introduced him by letter to his colleagues in Calcutta as "Mr Alexander Csoma or Sekundur Begh"). The last three chapters discuss aspects of Csoma historiography or, as Marczell would put it: "hagiography". He pays due tribute to Dr Theodore Duka, whose pioneering *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös* was published in London as early as 1885. However, he is critical of what he regards as historical misinterpretations by more recent devotees of "Csoma's cult".

In the second, much longer volume Csoma and the key protagonists in his story speak for themselves. Marczell explains that early in his own research he became aware of the need to cross-check the original sources. His objective here is to facilitate the work of future researchers by presenting transcripts of both major and minor texts.

The volume is divided into three sections: the "Handwritten sources" are mainly from archives in India and the India Office collection in the British Library. The "Printed Sources" are culled from contemporary publications such as the Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Finally, the "Lists of Sources" arrange the main archival references by date and source. In reproducing the documents, Marczell is following the tradition of Duka (1885) who himself quotes lengthy extracts from

Csoma's own correspondence, as well as from the British officials Dr James Gerard and Dr Archibald Campbell. Marczell's volume is of course much more comprehensive, and notes the textual variations between the originals and the earlier published versions. As Marczell explains in the introduction, he has not included texts related to Csoma's childhood, or the correspondence in Latin between Csoma and his Hungarian supporters. He also notes that further manuscript sources may yet be found, but the overwhelming bulk of the available sources for Csoma's adult life are to be found in this volume.

Csoma's personal qualities — as well as his fears — shine through the correspondence. His relationships with the British authorities were at times uncertain. In 1825 he arrived from Zanskar at the British garrison of Sabathu with a letter of recommendation from Moorcroft. However, he was at first detained — apparently on the suspicion that he might be a spy — while the commanding officer sought instructions from Calcutta. This episode remained a lasting source of offence. At the same time, he was determined to complete his dictionary and thus to fulfil what he regarded as a binding promise to Moorcroft. While working on the dictionary in Zanskar and Kanam, he subsisted on a small subsidy initially from Moorcroft and then from the British authorities in Calcutta, but regularly failed to spend — and even refused — much of the money that he was offered. However, he rightly saw his pioneering linguistic work as the key to a literature of which European scholars were scarcely aware, and this was a source of enthusiasm and justifiable pride. All this and much more is discussed in detail in the correspondence that we can now read.

The two volumes have been published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and this is historically appropriate in the light of Csoma's personal association with the Society. However, Marczell — and Csoma — could have been better served by the editors responsible for the final layout and presentation of the book. For example, the line-spacing is wider than necessary. One letter from a British official (H. Newton) is printed twice without explanation, and some of the section headings have been misspelt. The greatest omission is the limited number of cross references. Most of the papers in the first volume have previously been published elsewhere but — with the exception of Chapter 3 — the original places of publication are rarely given in the papers themselves. However, in several cases the endnotes of one paper refer to one of the others, citing the original place of publication, but not the fact that it has been republished in the same volume. Similarly, the papers in the first volume cite important source documents, without mentioning that these same documents have been reproduced in full in the second volume. There is an obvious need for thorough indexing, but the index that we are offered is very far from being comprehensive.

Overall, the task of finding one's way round the two books is a little like working out the structure of a confusing but very rich archive. In the course of exploring it, one encounters many unexpected obstacles but these are more than balanced by pleasing discoveries. Perhaps best of all, after reading through the correspondence, one is left with an engaging sense of personal acquaintance with Csoma de Kőrös himself.

Marczell was often scathing of other writers who — out of an excess of admiration, personal ambition or ignorance — distorted Csoma's memory with implausible legends. His own writing is well sourced and carefully argued. At the same time, while he always claimed a critical detachment, it is obvious that he felt a special affinity with a subject who — like himself — had been a wandering expatriate Hungarian, and had been sustained by high ideals. We must be thankful to him for communicating his findings to the rest of us with such enthusiasm and care.

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