Historical Sites, Legends, and Cultural India
A Palimpsest from Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The territory of Arunachal Pradesh, which has evolved as a state of Indian Union, was known as *terra incognito* during first half of 20th century. But archaeological sites at Bhismaknagar, Nakasa Parvat, Malinithan, Bhalukpong, Itanagar, and pilgrim centres of Parashuram Kund, Akasi Ganga, having historical and epic importance connect it to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and to the idea of India of that time and at present also. Though connection of the territory with India's tradition proclaims historicity of a long past, the connection of people, however, could be traced back to Ahom period. In addition, oral tradition links it to China occupied Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar from where all the communities belonging to Mongoloid stock, about 25 major and 100 minor or sub-communities, migrated to their present settlements in the territory.

An insight into folklore studies across the communities in our country reveals its crucial role of connecting, familiarising and syncretising different cultural traditions in the formation of pluralistic India. Folklores are found linking historical sites and pilgrim centres with local communities. It is evident in Arunachal Pradesh also where historical sites and pilgrim centres connect some Arunachalee communities through folklores thereby expressing the idea of pluralistic culture in a social space. With this backdrop of empirical and theoretical postulates, the present paper explores the legends which connect the sites with the communities of Arunachal Pradesh and thereby with pan-Indian tradition as well.

Keywords: Historical Sites, Inclusive Mind, Categorisation and Western Thought, We Feelings

1.0 Introduction

Present paper argues that communities in India co-existed and interacted, even under monarchy, but got categorised and distanced afters colonial intervention. Sense of earlier co-existence has got buried under the weight of categorisation and individualistic outlook. However, folklores stand proof of mutuality and independence of Indian communities, including those categorised as tribes by the colonial administration. It may be argued that instances of co-existence with and appreciation to differences are reflections of 'inclusive mind', the inherent mental ability to assimilate, adapt and recognise differences. It is the

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capability of including likes and dislikes in the worldview. Inclusive mind as a theoretical postulate I have tried to explore the connection between tribes and Hindu traditions with reference to folklores associated with historical sites in Arunachal Pradesh.

1.1 Inclusive Mind

The premise of the paper is that human mind is inclusive; it has the potentiality of absorption. When and where it is disowned, defunct or distorted, individualistic characteristics emerge. Its binary opposite, i.e., exclusionary mind promotes mental categorisation and its translation into practice. Perception of 'I' and 'You' that expresses in 'self' and 'other' dichotomy in contrast to 'We', or 'I' and also 'You' feelings rules the roost of our contemporary society. 'We' feeling is natural instinct of human mind. Social organisations like family, lineage, clan, community; acceptance to new ideas, objects; adjustment in new environments either readily or very slowly underlie potentiality of the inclusive mind. The 'we' feeling, or mutual recognition of 'I' and 'You' is underlying cause of survival of Indian civilisation since ancient times. Dominance of 'I' and 'You' feelings in human mind gives rise to exclusive thought and defines relations. Taking advantage of differences exclusionary ideas unleash forces of confliction, confrontation, exploitation, subordination, enmity, and create categories in society and replace 'we' feelings in human mind with individualistic outlook. As human mind is naturally inclusive this situation does not last long. Often a leader takes birth to annihilate 'I' and 'you' feelings; resolve the crisis and restore natural instinct of human mind. Perhaps this process along with 'we' feelings underlies the concepts of incarnation and *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is one family).

Categorisation was there in India in the form of caste divisions, but it was not devoid of 'we' feelings as embedded in Indian philosophical tradition of origin, cosmology, ethics, etc. A simple example will be useful to throw light on how inclusive mind operates in India. J. N. Phukan cites a Brahmanical account linking ancestry of Ahom kings with God Indra (Phukan2016:67). It became distinct and exclusionary with predominance of western ideology since colonial period which was instigated by creating Aryan racial superiority over the Dravidian race (see Caldwell 1881:75). It is a known fact that Western philosophy provides 'self' and 'other' dichotomy; and the mind reflects in creation of categories. Racial theory, superiority and inferiority complex, etc. are products of western mind which had roots in the writings of Darwin (1871), Risley (1891, 1891a) and many others. Western mind took for granted that a native, including tribe, was 'insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values' (Fanon 2001:32) and proclaimed that 'humanity in them is an unknown virtue' (Darwin 1871:91). With this ideology of 'self' and 'other' based on superior-inferior dichotomy they controlled Indian mind; it is crucial because it creates a 'state of mind' (see Nandy 1983:2) conducive to perpetuation and promotion of colonial ideology, a process that colonises body and mind (Sah and Kumary (2021). The western outlook when noticed a sense of belongingness among individual tribes, they wrongly interpreted it in terms of 'exclusiveness' and categorised them as 'ethnocentric' groups.

There is a popular saying by Sigmund Freud which reads: 'We are what we are because we have been what we have been…'. If the sense applies to individual persons, it will read: 'I am what I am because the other is not what I am'. The logic is either… or…, not a sense of togetherness. The apparent exclusive logic disappears when 'we' is formed even in western mode; the 'we' is an enlargement of the European notion of the 'self' with an exclusionary other. (*see* Mpofu and Melissa 2021). Inclusiveness in such minds has positive

inclination for the 'likes' and negative reaction for 'unlikes'. This negative image became reason of including 'others', of course for selfish interests, into western modernity adopting different means; the visible one being the civilising mission. Inclusive mind is a natural human instinct; any exception is an aberration. Inclusive mind not only knows the self, but it also knows the others and together builds up the worldview. The category 'maanav', for example has its 'other' counterpart as 'daanav'; both categories form an inclusive sphere of defining 'virtues' and 'vices'. The earlier name of a section of present Nyishi tribe (of Arunachal Pradesh) is Bangni (meaning 'man', the 'self'). The 'other' is Bangro (all non-Bangnis, meaning 'not-man'). Together they form the notion of two categories and   the sphere of interaction in Bangni worldview.

Had it been the human nature, then assimilation, adaptation, acculturation, etc. would not have happened in the process of history. Process of fusion and fission in identity formation would not have occurred. Present trend of tribal solidarity in India is an example of natural human instinct of inclusion. However, what dominates the thought is the important driving force with regard to what the mind thinks to include at a particular moment.

While in western thought, 'I' is not important in organic formation of 'we', it is there very much in non-western societies, and more prominent among tribes, as has been seen in Bangni case. A tribe person is a community person; 'I am' merges with 'we are'; and thus arises an unbroken chain of socio-spatial bonding. For a tribe, 'I am what I am because I am what we are'. This worldview is nicely depicted in Ubuntu philosophy. A Ubuntu man thinks 'I am, because   we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1969:108-109).Though this is tribe universal, it is popularised as Ubuntu philosophy (ibid.)

Unfortunately, exclusive thought following Western logic influences our thoughts and actions to a greater extent. We see ourselves as categories and reduce the thought of humanity to the confinement of our interest in the 'self'. We are confused and suspicious. Nevertheless, folklores depict our sense of 'we' feelings, the spheres of interaction, and extent of absorption of idea and ideologies between communities. Indian civilisation when looked through the lens of folklores, the western imposition of categorisation crumbles, and a pluralistic cultural entity of India comes to the fore despite predominance of the latter. The folklores may relate to a greater community, but small scale communities often find a connection corresponding to their respective worldviews.

Taking this theoretical position, as outlined above, I have tried to explore connection between Hindu and tribal worldviews in legends around historical sites located in Arunachal Pradesh.

1.2   Plural Culture and Folklore

Folklore in its conventional definition and scope is community or sub-community specific, the cultural heritage of a people or group, and belongs to oral tradition. When folklore exists across communities it implies that the communities were one in some ancient time, or have been interacting quite for a long period in history. This similarity is theorised by Stuart Blackburn (2007) as horizontal borrowings by communities or vertical fission of a community. Horizontal borrowings happen when communities interact, people do not nourish fundamental outlook and are cautious of independent cultural identity, and have inclusive mind. This is what is observed in India; similarity in differences in the field of faith and beliefs, language, a familiarity with geography and a sense of bonding (even if notional)

beyond the community. The legend of Lord Shiva across the length and breadth of the country, presence of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata stories in folklore of tribes and in other cultures, places identified with characters of these texts, equivalence of tribal Supreme deity with Lord Shiva and other Hindu gods and goddesses undoubtedly suggest to pluralistic tradition of Indian civilisation.

Folklore has played a crucial role to explain similarity in differences because it spreads due to interaction. An insight into Indian history and scriptures reveals that socio-cultural, political, religious and economic factors underlie the process of interaction in Indian subcontinent. Religious teachers and seers like Agastya, Buddha, Shankar, and many others in different periods travelled in different regions. Migration, trade, conquest, the institution of pilgrimage, etc. are factors of people to people contact and interaction and responsible for emergence of a pan-Indian cultural tradition across different communities. Folklore has two way connections; first shaping pan-Indian tradition, and second, presenting it as such. Understandably, folklore has cross-cultural spread effect and is a medium of understanding India's unity in diversity. When individualistic ideas proliferate, and strike at the very root of the concept of pluralistic India, critical cross community folklore studies have crucial role to play in reviving the sense of togetherness. This sense has general and specific contexts. The folklore not only has all India dimension like the legends evolved around the Ramayana, for example, it has also regional context. Legend of Mansha puja, though has Bengal origin, has its existence in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and even in some areas of Assam. Legend of Tapoi in Odisha has a parallel version in Assam, the legend of Tejimola. Legends are there to connect a small scale community with a larger tradition, like Bondo women's dearth of clothes to Sita's curse, or with neighbouring community, like Oraon's legend of Asur women becoming deities and introduction of the practice of sacrifice. Legends also bind two or more cultures to a place or event as is the case of Lord Jagannatha for Saura tribe and Odia communities, or Itkhori in Jharkhand where the famous Bhadrakali temple of 9th century conflates Hindu, Jain and Buddhist deities. In Indian context, it can be safely argued that folklore underlies building up of a pan-Indian cultural tradition and at the same time gives a perception of its inclusive character. The discussion in this paper draws on the theoretical position that folklore has cross-cultural spread and reflects inclusive, not exclusionary sense between communities.

1.3   The context

The paper selects historical sites and a pilgrim centre of Arunachal Pradesh for discussion. The territory of Arunachal Pradesh, which has evolved as a state of Indian Union, was known as *terra incognito* during first half of 20th century. But archaeological sites at Bhismaknagar, Nakasa Parvat, Malinithan, Bhalukpong, Itanagar, and pilgrim centres of Parashuram Kund, Akasi Ganga, having historical and epic importance connect it to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and to the idea of India of that time and at present also. Though connection of the territory with India's tradition proclaims historicity of a long past, the connection of people, however, could be traced back historically to Ahom period. But, oral tradition links it to China occupied Tibet, Bhutan, and Myanmar from where all the communities belonging to Mongoloid stock, about 25 major and 100 minor or sub-communities, migrated to their present settlements in the territory.

1.4   Historical sites

Malinithan, Bhismaknagar, Itafort, Bhalukpong and the pilgrim centre Prashuram Kund have been selected for enquiry. Among these sites the first four are archaeological sites. Parashuram Kund, however, is not an archaeological site; it is rather connected to the legend of Parashuram, whose mention is found in various Hindu texts like Devi Bhagavat Puran, Vishnu Puran, Vayu Puran, Mahabharat, Kalika Puran, and Yoginitantra. Parashuram Kund as a *naditeerth* is mentioned in Kalika Puran and Yogini Tantra, both written in Assam. Though the dates of these texts are debated, Kalika Puran dates back to 7th century and Yogini Tantra to 11th century. The former is the first text so far to mention about Parashuram Kund. Reference of it is also made in a copper plate inscription of king Indrapala, the ruler of Kamarupa from 1040-1065 A.D. Further, Deodhai Assam Buranji mentions a tradition of exchanging water from Parashuram Kund with that of the river Ganga during 13th century between the king of Bengal and his counterpart, king Ratnadhvaja of Chutiya dynasty. The legend of Parashuram's expiation of sin at the place of reference may not have historical authenticity, but mention of this cite in Kalika Puran of 7th century and historical documents from 11th century gives it a historicity so as to place it in historical site category.

1.4.1   Malinithan

Malinithan (located on 94° 41' 25" north latitude and 28° 38' 34" east longitude), a meeting ground between the hills and plains, is situated on a hillock of about 21 meters height at the foot hills of   Likabali Sub-division in Lower Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh bordering the state of Assam, at a distance of one kilometre from the Silapathar-Alo (Along) road. The mighty river Brahmaputra is flowing about five kilometres away from the sacred complex.

Malinithan, the *pitha* (shrine) of Malini, is not a single shrine or temple. It is associated with some other sacred shrines like Rukinithan and Akashiganga. The historicity of Malinithan is yet to be ascertained. But archaeological relics that belong to the Orissan school as well as the Pala school of Bengal and Bihar puts it in the period from 4th century A. D. to 7th century A. D. Data used for discussion in this paper is based on my field study and works of   Chakravorty (1975) and Behera and Borah (2008).

Though folklore has its own importance in linking the place with a tribe and Lord Krishna, historical evidences also link this place with cultural heritage of great Indian tradition. As has been said, architecture belongs to Odisha, Bengal and Bihar schools. The excavation has unearthed the remains of a Brahmanical temple and numerous Brahmanical images. Over one hundred carved images of various gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheons, *yakhsas, dwarapalas*, figurines, sculptured panels, animal motifs, and geometrical and floral designs of stone have come to lime light. Iron clamps or dowels used as the binding material in lieu of mortar have been found. Other notable findings of Malinithan include magnificent granite image of a bull, Ganapati, Surya, Kartikeya and Indra besides some erotic sculptures.

1.4.2   Bhismaknagar

The ruins of Bhismaknagar (coridnates:$28^0$02'48.2"N and $96^0$0'20.7"E), 24 kms to the east of Roing, in Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh, consist of a fortress with an elongated semi-circular shape, extending over an area of about 10 sq. kms. It has also an earthen rampart which runs about 5 km long, broken in between. At the centre of the complex

are the ruins of brick-built palace. The building faces the east and is enclosed by a rectangular stone wall. The fortress has two magnificent brick-built gateways in west and east directions. The western one is larger than the eastern one; the former having two rooms attached to it while only one room attached to the latter. The fortress is believed to have been built by Chutiya king during 8th century. Interestingly, an archaeological site is found in Chidu and Chimri villages located to the north of Roing. Brick ruins are called *Rukmini Nati*, bricks of Rukmini, by the local Idus.

There is an epigraphic evidence of existence of a kingdom presently named as Bhismaknagar. A copper plate inscription of Idrapala, who ruled Kamrupa between 1940 A. D. and 1065 A.D., states that his father Purandrapala had matrimonial alliances with the royal family 'reigning over the extensive territory reclaimed by the arms of Parasuram'.

Discussion on Bhismaknagar is based on the works of Raikar (1970),   Malik (2002) and Raikar and Chatterjee (1980).

1.4.3   Itafort

The name Itanagar, capital of Arunachal Pradesh, is derived from the Itafort (coordinates: 27.092^0N93.632^0E) located on a hillock near the valley of the Pachin river in the present Papum-Pare district.   Ruins are still found on a hill top adjacent to Governor's house.   The discussion on Itafort is based on the works of Bora (1996 & 2003), Chakravarty (1973), Raikar(1978), and Raikar&Chatterje (1980).

1.4.4   Bhalukpong

Bhalukpong (coordinates:27.011^0 N and 92.464^0E) is a small town and circle headquarters of Bombila Subdivision in West Kameng district, 52 kms from Tezpur on the main road leading to Bomdila and Seppa. It is the gateway to West Kameng, East Kameng, and Tawang districts of the state. The archaeological site, i.e., Bhalukpong fort, covering an area of about three sq. kms on the right bank of Kameng river (in Assamese it is known as Bharali river), is two kms. away from the town. The ruins, dated to 10th-12th century A.D., visible even in early 1970s on way to Bomdila have been damaged due to road construction and floods. However, archaeology department has protected this area and preserved whatever is available now. Information on Bhalukpong used in this paper is based on my field study and the works of Chakravarty (1973) and Raikar (1978 &1969).

1.4.5   Parashuram Kund

Parashuram Kund (coridnates:$27^0$52'39"N and $96^0$21'33"E) is a *nadi teertha* in the Lohit river where it enters plains and is 21 kms. upstream from Tezu, the district headquarters of Lohit district. Every year, on the day of *Makar Samkranti* in the month of Magha (usually 14 January) pilgrims in thousands from all parts of India and Nepal visit the place for a holy dip. The discussion on Parashuram Kund is based on the work of Behera (1998).

1.5   Legends

Places selected for discussion have connection with Hindu texts or/and kings. This suggests Hindu influence in the region, but not on people as they are not 'Hindus' (a few working in army declare in early census as Hindus) or 'Hinduised'. What is important is their connection

with tribes living in the state. It is to be mentioned that traditional India is a cultural space; regions are linked with *puranic* events displaying a sense of familiarity across territorial dimension and a sense of belonging, even if vaguely, to a tradition. Renuka, mother of Parasuram, for example, has temples in different names in different states of India, such as Tamilnadu, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In several places she is equated with Goddess Parvati and Shakti. Since earlier time, people across India believed in Renuka, though the places were in different kingdoms. Cultural India was the superstructure of political divisions. This is the underlying spirit that links distinct communities in folklores even if they belong to different ethnic groups. The point of argument is that they belong to the cultural space of India perceived over centuries.

1.5.1 *Malinithan*

Malinithan is one of the examples of the spirit of plural India. It is traditionally believed that the site is one of the *pithasthanas*, holy shrines/places mentioned in the Kalika Puran (composed in 7th century A.D.). As per Kalika Puran, the neck portion of Sati fell in this place while Lord Vishnu cut her dead body resting on Lord Shiva's shoulder. Therefore, Malinithan is one of the Shaktipithas of India attributed to the episode of Shati.

The site is associated with a legend of Sri Krishna's marriage with Rukmini. There are different versions. The popular legend is presented here. Shri Krishna while eloping with Rukmini, the daughter of king Bhismaka, took rest at this place on their way to Dwaraka. The spot at the hill top where they actually rested is known as Rukminithan and a temple is recently built there. In the morning of the following day, Sri Krishna and Rukmini had to take bath. So it is believed, Sri Krishna conducted heavenly Ganga down to the earth which appeared as a waterfall and presently popular as Akashiganga; it is located in hills about five kilometres far from Malinithan to the left of the Silapathar-Aalo road. Since then people visit this place to take purificatory bath on the day of Maker Samkranti. Malinithan fair (*mela*) is also organised on the occasion of Makar Samkranti like Parashuram Kund fair.

During that period, Shiva and Parvati were in meditation. Goddess Parvati (Durga), who came to know about Sri Krishna and Rukmini, greeted them with garlands of choicest flowers. Sri Krishna reciprocated the gesture by addressing her Malini (mistress of the garden/garland lady) as a compliment. From then on, as the tradition goes, the place came to be known as Malinithan or Malinisthan–the seat of Malini.

As the legend goes, Bhismak is the king of Idu Mishmis or Chulikata Mishims who inhabit present Dibang valley districts not very far from Malinithan. It is a custom among the Idu men to chop their hair around the ears. This fashion is attributed to Sri Krishan's punishment to Rukma, the brother of Rukmini who was against the marriage and who fought with him. There was a fierce battle between the two. Sri Krishna defeated Rukma but left him humiliated by chopping his hair around the ears. Since then, as the legend goes, the Idus cut their hair in a similar fashion.

The myths state the belief system of a Brahmanical tradition with no relation with the present tribal population of Arunachal Pradesh except the practice of elopement as a way of obtaining a bride for a wife. But Malinithan heritage is respected by the people who do not show hostility simply because it does not belong to their culture. A large section of Idu population organise play on different occasions on the theme of Rukmini's elopement. The

heritage that is explicit is universal in nature as it is based on the idea of respecting and appreciating others and the differences. The legend is also criticised by a section of intellectuals and NGO activists, both from outside and a few from inside, as an alleged attempt to distort tribal history. The allegation though apparently looks correct; it underlies an ideological protest, oblivious of the fact that legend has no objective of reconstructing Idu history. It is simply a reflection of Indian inclusive tradition aiming to promote a sense of familiarity and co-existence of distinct communities within a cultural space. The legend does not teach Idus to hate their own culture or convert to Hinduism; rather it provides a space for cultural exchange like economic exchange between two communities.

1.5.2   Bhismaknagar

The story of Bhismaka and his daughter, Rukmini's marriage with Sri Krishna, is found in the Bhagavata, the Mahabharata, and the Vishnupuran, and later in the Rukmini-haran play of Assam's Sankardev. Idu Mishmis also stage plays on the theme. Bhismak is known as the ruler of Vidarbha with his kingdom at Kundina, also the earlier name of Bhismaknagar, located on the Kundil river. The Kundil River, once flowed through Sadiya region nearby the Bhismaknagar, could not be traced after 1950 earthquake. The popular tradition of Assam links Bhismaknagar to this place due to the river named Kundil.

1.5.3   Itafort

The legend of Itafort has at least three versions - Ahom, Nyishi (a tribe of Arunachal Pradesh) and Khamti (a section of Khamti tribe who was deported to Assam from present Lohit district and Sadiya in 1839 following murder of Col.White). This section settled in Narayanpur area, not very far from Itafort. One version of legend comes from this Khamti group. The legend does not depict Itafort in isolation. It makes mention of Ganga Lake (Gykar Sinyi in Nyishi language), six kms away from Itafort to the northwest; Harmoti (named after the queen and is situated in Assam at a distance of 30 kms.) and Buroi river near Gohpur. This version is briefly retold following the accounts in the works of Pandey (1970: 15-18) and Bhattacharjee (2003:36-39).   However,   three versions of the legend have slight variations and introduced characters from their respective cultures.

There is a legend of Arimatta, son of King Ramachandra, which is associated with Itanagar. As the legend goes, Itanagar, earlier known as Eitayapa (in Nyishi language), was the capital of a powerful king called Polo Duli. This is perhaps the Nyishi name of Chutiya king Ramachandra (a historical figure) who had taken refuge in hills. Near his capital there was a big pond (present Ganga Lake) in which lived a Naga King. Polo Duli,   for the safety of his kingdom and people, entered into a treaty with the Naga King and gave his wife Harmoti in marriage as per the conditions laid down in the treaty. The parents of the Naga King did not approve of the marriage and ordered his son to return Harmoti to the king of Itanagar. But Harmoti did not agree to return to the former husband. So, the Naga King built a palace in the plains near Itanagar for her (Harmoti in Assam) and visited her time to time. In course of time, queen Harmoti gave birth to a male child who was named Arimatta as he was as slippery as *Ari*-fish. Another version of legend identifies the boy as Narribo.

Arimatta grew up, and while playing entered into the palace of the king of Eitayapa and killed him. He did not know that he killed his father. He committed the sin of patricide. He asked Brahmins if he could get rid of the sin. When Brahmins replied in negative he killed Brahmins one by one. A clever Brahmin to avenge Arimatta suggested him a ritual for

expiation of sin. As required in the ritual, Arimatta was wrapped in ghee-drenched thatch (*buroi*). He set fire to the thatch and jumped into the river for penance as suggested by the Brahmin. He died. In fact he fell into Brahmin's trap! Due to this incident the river became known as Buroi. The Buroi river follows near Gohpur of Assam and Arunachal Boundary. Itafort and Ganga Lake (Gakersinni) are not very far from the Buroi river.

1.5.4 *Bhalukpong*

The tradition has it that Bhaluk, the grandson of Bana, had established his capital at the place known as Bhalukpong at present. According to the Vishnu Puran and the Kalika Puran, King Bana of Sonitpur, a place identified with present Tezpur in Sonitpur district of Assam, was contemporary of Naraka, the king of Pragjyotish or ancient Kamrupa. The Aka, a tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, at one time claimed their descent from the legendary Bhaluka, but now they do not claim so, though they trace Protapgarh (a historical rampart) in Assam as their ancestral homeland. As per the legend they lived in Protapgarh on the banks of the Giladhari river, north of Biswanth and were ousted from there by Krishna and Boloram. (Nimachow 2011:4). There also another Aka legend which R.S. Kennedy recorded in 1914. As the legend goes, the Akas first settled near Bhalukpong, where on the right banks of river Bharali (known as Kameng river in Arunachal Pradesh), their two chiefs, Natapura and Bayu built their respective capitals. Natapura had a beautiful wife whom Bayu demanded as a tribute. He made several adventures to get her. Finally, the lady with a newly born child came to the court of Bayu. The child Arima, who later became a great warrior, killed his own father by mistake. Overcome with remorse he migrated to the present habitation of the Akas. It is from his children that the present Akas are descended. (ibid). It is to be mentioned that Aka is a generic name of distinct groups, namely Hrusso and Koro (ibid.). In Ahom literature and subsequently in colonial writings mention is made of Kutsun and Kuvatsun groups of the Aka (ibid.:9). But they are not Hrusso and Koro divisions. Though it is difficult to ascertain the group or clan, but Palizi village Akas believe their earlier settlement in Protapgarh. Similarly, a section of Aka claims their descent from Arimatta (or Arima) (Bora 2003:33).

No doubt, folklore has cross cultural adaptability and by its existence as a spread it suggests interaction between communities.

1.5.5 *Parashuram Kund*

Parashuram Kund is associated with two types of legends, one linked with the scripture and other with the oral tradition of the tribes. As the legend goes, Parashuram killed his mother, Renuka, with his axe at the instructions of his father named Jamadagni. As the result of the sin he committed, his axe clung to his hand. So, he moved from place to place to expiate the sin. During his expiatory pilgrimage he came to the present Parashuram Kund. He took a bath in a mountain locked pond. The water of Brahma Kund, a water body at the top of the hill, was draining into that pond. When he took bath, the axe fell off his hand. Realising the holy significance of water in the pond he was filled with the sense of welfare of larger humanity. So, he opened a passage for the water to flow in the plains and redeem the people of their sins. The place where Parashuram took his bath is known as Parashuram Kund, now a spot in the left river bank of the Lohit river. The Brahma Kund which earlier was pouring out to the spot got dried up after the great earth quake of 1950. The hill region is also famous as *Prabhu Kuthar*.

The Brahma Kund also has a myth of its own. According to Kalika Puran, Brahma enraptured with the celestial beauty of *rishi* Santanu's wife Amogha, wanted to embrace her during the absence of her husband. She sensed her design and was about to curse Brahma when the latter out of fear ran away. Semen drops ejaculated out of excited libido in him. On return, Amogha narrated the incident to *rishi* Santanu, who knowing the welfare design for the world behind Brahma's intention ordered her wife to drink the semen drops. Amogha drank the semen drops and in due course gave birth to a son who was known as Brahmaputra. The baby Brahmaputra appeared to be very powerful and full of divine grace. So, the rishi placed the child in the cavity of the mountain; the north of which is Kailash, Gandhneda to the south, Sambark to the east and Jarudhi to the West. The child started growing fast and as a result the cavity turned into a big lake and the child lived in it. In course of time this lake came to be known as Brahma Kund.

1.5.5.1 Mishmis

Mishmis know the legend of Parashuram through their contact with *sadhus*. However, in Taraon (a branch of the Mishmi tribe) version he is known as Parashuram Karingma. Taraon Mishims believe that the present Parashuram Kund was the eighth, and of course last place of Parashuram's expiatory journey to atone his sin. Both Taraons and Kamans believe that Parashuram Karingma/Parshuram stayed at the place, became a god and transformed himself into formless. A few Kamans believe that his soul is united with Burumai/ Buruynoyna, the presiding deity of the place who, in their worldview, protects the Mishmis from onslaught of incoming evils like epidemics, diseases, etc. from the plains and from preventing all good things going down the hills to the plains. For them, *Tailung Shatti* i.e. the Parashuram Kund is a *tangrul* (in Taraon dialect it is *Takhru*), the check gate; and the water here is holy. So before sacrificing an animal the priest purifies them by sprinkling water which they consider to be the water from *Tailung Shatti*.

The Mishmis have another legend around Parashuram whose hero is not Parashuram, but Drapka (in Kaman dialect) who came from south with a big *satiate* (hammer) and went on levelling the mountains and created plains. Three birds, namely *Tna, Siri,* and *Chambri*(local names) had their nests under big stones near present Parashuram Kund. Being afraid of losing their nests they lied Drapkap about the death of his father to which he was indifferent. He also did not have any reaction to the news of the death of his wife and son. But when Siri lied him about the death of his mother he was so shocked that he threw his hammer there, which made a pool and left for home not to return again. His efforts of making plains came to an end; so, the hill ranges beyond Parashuram Kund remained intact. The big stone in the river near the *kund* is believed to be that hammer.

Before 1950 earthquake, Brahma Kunda at hill top was pouring into the Kund. This water was hotter than the water of the Lohit river which has its source in snowy hills. Mishmis believe the spot as the confluence of Tapei (cold stream in Taraon dialect), the goddesses and Talah (hot stream in the same dialect), the god. After exposure to Hindu tradition, a section of Mishmis consider the confluence as the union of Shiva (Talah) and Shakti (Tapei). It needs mention that Mishims do not make any sacrifice to their Supreme deity (Matai (of Kaman) or Jamulu (of Taraon)), but sacrifice is an integral part of rituals. Interestingly, they equate sacrifice with Shakti cult and no sacrifice with Shiva cult.

Mishmis have respect for the place. So, fishing in the Kund or hunting in the forests around the place is a taboo for them.

1.5.5.2 Khamtis

Khamtis, who live in Congkham and Namsai area and whose king had the rights to collect tax from pilgrims, have a legend about Parashuram Kund. They profess *theraveda* cult of Buddhism, but believe in the sacredness of the place. They consider water of the Kund holy (*namphi*) because of its link with one of the incarnations of Lord Buddha. As the story goes, Siddharth took 550 births in the form of animals, birds, etc. before he attained enlightenment in his 551st birth. His last ten births were in dragon family called Naga in Pali. In his 445th birth i.e. the fifth birth in Naga family, Siddharth was known as Chau Pulikta and had meditated on the spot which is presently famous as Parashuram Kund.

1.5.5.3 Deories

Deori is a Hinduised tribe, though Hindu practices are hardly found in their belief system except worship of the nature in *prakrit* and *purush* duality. The only visible part is equalisation of supreme deity of two groups, Baliababa of Tengapania and Kundi-Mama of Dibangiya, with Lord Shiva. The supreme deity of the third group, known as Borgonya, is Pichachidema (also called Kechaikaiti or Tamreshwari) of Sadiya region who is believed to be a form of *Shakti*.

Deories have both historical and legendary past. They appear on early records as the priestly class of the Chutiyas (Gait1963:43). Khamti tribe has a legend about them. As the legend goes they had appointed a Deori priest to fetch water from the river, which later became Tengapani, to settle the dispute between Khamti and Singpho over the question of territorial ownership. A legend also says that the messenger sent to Lord Krishna by Rukmini belonged to Deori community. Appointment of a Deori priest by Parashuram to perform expiatory ritual is a popular legend in this part of the country. However, younger Deoris are found not knowing this legend, though they have a legend of Parashuram. It goes as follows:

A Brahmin, who had a clash with his wife, ordered his seven sons to kill their mother. None except the youngest one, named Parashuram, obeyed his father and axed down his mother. But the handle of the axe clung to his hand. Considering it as a punishment for his sin, he thought of penance and moved from place to place.

In course of his journey, one night, he took shelter in a Brhamin's house. The Brahmin had a cow and a calf. At night Parashuram overheard the cow saying to the calf about wickedness of the owner. He also heard her planning to kill the Brahmin the following day in the field during ploughing. Out of curiosity, in the morning, Parashuram followed the Brahmin with the cow and the calf to the field. He saw the cow hitting the owner which instantly killed him. Parashuram ran towards the cow to catch her. But the cow with her calf ran across the fields, over the mountains and through the forests till she reached a Kund surrounded by hills. They jumped into it and disappeared. Following them, Parashuram reached the Kund and by chance his hand with the axe touched the water. To his surprise, his hand was set free. He made a passage to allow the water of the Kund to flow down. But after sometime when the water did not stop, he went on throwing the water in the opposite direction. This became the upstream of the river, which is presently called Lohit. Parashuram in anger went on throwing the water for a long time and to a long distance. That is why the source of Lohit could not be traced.

The history of Parashuram Kund may be a subject of debate, but its historicity is the proof of a link of this region with other parts of the country. The tribes are found linking them with it through legends and myths. Obviously, the cultural heritage which the people carry on is a sense of interaction with pride and respect to other cultures as expressed in two ways of interaction between tribes and others who visit Parashuram Kund.

1.6   Conclusion

In our contemporary time, there are different forces at religious, intellectual, and political levels involved in activating a denial mode to Indian cultural tradition. But Indian cultural tradition forms the bedrock of our activities. On Makar Samkranti respective district administrations organise fairs at Malinithan and Parashurmakun. Understandably, faith based legend and legend based celebrations are not outside the system of governance. Such celebrations have economic implications also. In fact tradition based places and activities, for example in religious centres, make significant contributions to our economy.

In India, lack of cultural understanding of a plural unity; proliferation of individual outlook; celebration of social, religious and other categories and of the like are understandably emerging realities. Consequences are intolerance, communal disharmony, communalism, and emergence of several such problems. The essence of plural culture, i.e. independence, co-existence, appreciation and respect to differences, healthy exchange of ideas, etc. has become weak as reflects in our thought and action. We are oblivious of the fact that we survive as an ancient civilisation because of the strength of pluralistic understanding. Unfortunately, we have discarded holistic understanding and become susceptible to reductionist and manipulated ideas, with which we judge our past and get confused about the link with our individual, community, and national goals.

In this context, folklores would be useful as positive reinforcement against the evils inherent in reductionist thinking and in the practice of categorisation. They will develop a sense of familiarity with pluralistic tradition; and familiarity with good social environment is a reinforcement catalyst of the sense of appreciation, acceptance to differences and negotiation for mutuality.

Legends linked with historical sites of Arunachal Pradesh reveal coexistence of different communities. History has its own story, but legend has a history of a cultural space from the time when it pervaded across communities. Legend may not be a source of the discipline of history, but history of a legend may play a crucial role in cross-cultural understanding in a country like India with diversity.

Legends discussed here do not suggest any effort of assimilation of small scale communities; rather they reflect a sense of recognition to the existence of these communities. Presence of similar legend in unrelated communities is a proof of some sorts of contact or interaction without any deliberate efforts of subordination. It also proves that human mind is naturally inclusive, meaning that it appreciates differences and exchange of ideas, and thereby underlies a pluralistic culture.

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