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গবেষণা-পত্ৰ

শংকৰদেৱৰ সমাজ দৰ্শনৰ এক ব্যতিক্ৰমী মূল্যায়ন
(‘হৰমোহনৰ সামাজিক উৎস’ শীৰ্ষক প্ৰবন্ধৰ আলমত)

ড° জাহ্নবী দেৱী

সংক্ষিপ্তসাৰ

সমালোচনাৰ উদ্দেশ্য হৈছে সত্য উদ্ঘাটন। সমালোচকে মৌলিক ৰচনাৰ ব্যাখ্যা আৰু সেই ৰচনাৰ ওপৰত মন্তব্য কৰে। সেই মন্তব্যকো পুনঃ পৰীক্ষণৰ বাবে পথ খোলা থাকে। প্ৰাচীন লেখকৰ ৰচনা সমালোচনা কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত আকৌ কিছু সীমাবদ্ধতাও থাকে। বহু সময়ত প্ৰাচীন লেখকে প্ৰয়োগ কৰা শব্দ, পদ আদিৰ সহায়ত তেওঁলোকৰ অভিজ্ঞতাৰ স্বৰূপ উপলব্ধি কৰা টান হৈ পৰে। প্ৰাচীন লেখকৰ ৰচনাত তেওঁৰ সমকালীন সামাজিক আদৰ্শৰ প্ৰভাৱ ইতিহাসৰ জলঙাৰে নিৰীক্ষণ কৰা হয় যদিও তাক নিৰ্ভুল বুলি দাবী কৰিব নোৱাৰি।

অসমৰ বৌদ্ধিক জগতত সমাজ সচেতন সাম্যবাদী চিন্তাবিদ ৰূপে পুৰোধা ব্যক্তি ড° হীৰেন গোহাঁইৰ ১৮ টি প্ৰবন্ধৰ সংকলন ‘সাহিত্য আৰু চেতনা’ (১৯৭৬) গ্ৰন্থৰ অন্তিম প্ৰবন্ধটি আছিল “বাণীকান্ত কাকতি, নাৰী আৰু প্ৰেম” শীৰ্ষক। এই প্ৰবন্ধত ড° গোহাঁইয়ে বাণীকান্ত কাকতিয়ে ৰচনা কৰা ‘Mother Goddess Kamakhya’ শীৰ্ষক পুথিখনৰ সমালোচনা আগ বঢ়াইছিল। আলোচনাৰ সামৰণিৰ ফালে ড° গোহাঁইয়ে প্ৰসঙ্গক্ৰমে মন্তব্য কৰিছিল যে— ‘শংকৰদেৱৰ মতামত জাতিভেদৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত পৰিষ্কাৰ নহয়।... তেওঁৰ ৰচনাতে অসমৰ বিভিন্ন অনাৰ্য

জাতিসমূহৰ প্ৰতি অৱহেলা নাইবা কৰুণাৰ ভাব ফুটি উঠিছে— সেইবোৰ জাতিৰ আচাৰ আৰু বিশ্বাসক তেওঁ নীচ বা হীন বুলি ভাবিছে।...।’ উদাহৰণৰূপে তেওঁ শংকৰদেৱৰ কীৰ্ত্তনৰ অন্তৰ্গত ‘হৰমোহন’ লৈ আঙুলিয়াই কৈছিল— ‘নাৰীৰ দেহ সৌন্দৰ্যত উদ্বাউল হোৱা অসমৰ আদিম জাতিসমূহৰ উপাস্য দেৱ শিৱক ‘হৰমোহন’ত উপহাস কৰা হৈছে।।’

হীৰেন গোহাঁইৰ মন্তব্যৰ সৈতে একমত নহৈ সমালোচক ৰঞ্জিত কুমাৰ দেৱ গোস্বামীয়ে তাৰ প্ৰত্যুত্তৰত ‘হৰমোহনৰ সামাজিক উৎস’ শীৰ্ষক প্ৰবন্ধটি ৰচনা কৰিছিল। উক্ত দুয়োটি প্ৰবন্ধ দুয়োগৰাকী দিগ্গজ লেখকৰ ব্যাখ্যা, বিশ্লেষণ, যুক্তি আধাৰিত। কিন্তু দুয়োটি আলোচনা মনোযোগেৰে অধ্যয়ন কৰাৰ পিছত ৰঞ্জিত কুমাৰ দেৱ গোস্বামীৰ সমালোচনা অধিক পতিয়নযোগ্য বুলি বুজিব পাৰি। এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰত ৰঞ্জিত কুমাৰ দেৱ গোস্বামীৰ মত কিয় সমৰ্থনযোগ্য তাৰ ব্যাখ্যা আগ বঢ়াবলৈ প্ৰয়াস কৰা হৈছে।

সূচক শব্দ : শংকৰদেৱ, ড° হীৰেন গোহাঁই, হৰমোহন, শিৱ, সমাজ, ৰঞ্জিত কুমাৰ দেৱ গোস্বামী, সমালোচক, সমালোচনা।

Abstract

A critic analyses original texts and arrives at a reasonable conclusion, although such conclusion may not be free from all loopholes of criticism. Particularly while studying the texts and digestions of literary compositions like ‘Haramohan’ of Sankardeva ; number of hindrances appear in the way of understanding the erstwhile population composition, economy, culture and social behavior.

Dr. Hiren Gohain a critic of repute in an article ‘Banikanta Kakati, Nari aru prem’ remarked that Sankardeva intentionally underminded Siva, the prime God of the erstwhile tribal societies of Assam and depicted an insulting image of Siva in his Haramohan’ a chapter of the ‘Kirtan Ghosha’.

Contrary to that Ranjit Kr. Dev Goswami refutes Hiren Gohain’s argument in his article entitled ‘Haramohanar Samajik Utsa’. Here Dev Goswami gives his convincing argument that Sankardeva was quite aware of the importance and influence of Siva among both the tribal and non

tribal societies. Hence he showed equal honor and respect towards both the heavenly persona of Hari and Hara. In support of his argument Deva Goswami quotes a number of verses from the literary works of Sankardeva.

After a careful reading of the two aforesaid digestions, the present author attempts a peep into the Sankardeva’s attitudes towards his contemporary societies both tribal and non-tribal and his probable intention of portraying Siva’s character with partially popular description. It appears that Hiren Gohain’s observation is one sided and mostly a theoretic approach while Ranjit Kr. Dev Goswami’s one is more believable with detailed analysis of the erstwhile society and the role of Sankardeva, from the historical and sociological point of view.

Key words : Sankardeva, Dr. Hiren Gohain, Haramohan, Siva, Ranjit Kr. Deva Goswami, Criticism, critic.



The Misings are the second largest tribal group in Assam, only next to the Bodos with a population of 6,80,424 individuals (Census Report 2011). Linguistically Tibeto-Burman they belong to the Mongoloid stock and at present inhabit the nine districts of Upper Assam viz; Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, and Majuli District. They have settled along the banks of the rivers Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Simen, Burusuti, Gunasuti, Tongani, Jiadhol, Boginodi, Ranganodi, Dikrong, Pichola, Burai and the Jiabharali river of Majuli. In the South, the Misings reside along the banks of the rivers Dibru, lower part of Dihing, Dishang, Dikhow and Dhansiri.

THEORETICAL METHODOLOGY

No culture can claim to have remained isolated throughout history. Although historical contexts are specific to each community, experiences of cross-cultural contacts in different cultures can offer useful insights to understand acculturation in Mising society from a wider perspective. During the mid-twentieth century studies of acculturation and cultural patterning replaced diffusionism as the focus of anthropological research. The emphasis was on understanding the ways in which dominant cultural forms are 'imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed'. In spite of the fact that diffusion has its roots in anthropology, archaeology, and cultural geography, modern research involving the process of diffusion has shifted from these areas to the disciplines of History, Political Science, and Sociology among others. J.W. Powell wrote of the 'force of acculturation' which was about 'changing indigenous traditions under the influence of civilized people'. W.J. McGee¹ used the term 'piratical acculturation' by which he meant 'cultural interchange under advantageous condition'. The works of M.J. Herskovitz² examines culture transmission with subsequent change in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups in contact. According to The Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology, 'acculturation is the process of acquiring culture traits as a result of contact between two or more autonomous cultural systems'. Acculturation is highly variable and there are many factors which influence acculturation and this includes language, religion, education, food, media, clothing etc.' As Robert H. Winthrop⁴ puts it: thus: ".... Individuals of a foreign or minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of a standard or dominant culture by this process." Since the early part of the 20th century A.D., scholars such as K.P. Chattopadhyaya,⁵ D.N. Majumdar⁶ and G.S. Ghurye⁷ began to use the terms 'cultural change' and 'social change' in studies relating to cultural contact among tribal communities in India. A.L. Kroeber⁸ explained that acculturation is gradual rather than abrupt. He connected the process of diffusion with the process of acculturation by considering that diffusion contributes to acculturation and that acculturation necessarily involves diffusion. He attempted to separate the two processes by stating that diffusion is a matter of what happens to the elements of a culture; whereas acculturation is a process of what happens to a whole culture. Acculturation contrasts with diffusion of culture traits in that it is a process of systematic cultural transformation of individuals in a society due to the presence on an alien, politically dominant society.⁹ It is crucial to note that although the process of acculturation leads to changes in the traditional culture, the indigenous culture is not always replaced in entirety. Thus, Dennis O'Neil¹⁰ explained that there often is a syncretism or an amalgamation of traditional and introduced traits and that the new traits may be blended with or worked into the indigenous culture to make them more acceptable.

AREA OF STUDY

The study area of research is Majuli, a river island of the Brahmaputra river in Assam and located within the



latitudes 26°45'N- 27°12'N and longitudes 93°39' E- 94°35' E. Majuli district is surrounded by three rivers viz; Brahmaputra in the south, and Subansiri and Kherkotia in the north, making the island very fertile and suitable for agricultural economy. The island is divided into two blocks viz; Ujani or Upper Majuli Development Block and Namoni or Lower Majuli Development Block. The coming of the Misings to Majuli is traced to the 19th century A.D. when they are said to have crossed the Kherkatia Suti river and gradually settled in different parts of Majuli island. The population is concentrated mainly in Upper Majuli, and they constitute the largest group in the island numbering 61, 902 individuals out of total population of 1,67,334 individuals i.e 43% of the total population, as per the Census of India: 2011. The Misings are found in 108 out of 243 villages in the island.¹¹ This study focuses on four villages of Majuli, two from Ujoni Majuli Block and two from Namoni Majuli Block. Four Mising dominated villages viz; Bor Pamua, Serepai, Malapinda and Borgayan have been selected based on purposive-random sampling. The other communities living in the island include Gossains, Yogis, Koches, Kalitas, Keots, Ahoms, Nepalis, Bengali and Muslims.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research follows an analytical method of investigation within the framework of historical methodology. It also attempts to incorporate sociological and anthropological approaches to understand the subject from a wider perspective. The study is conducted using combined methods (qualitative and quantitative) of Social Sciences - their integration in appropriate methods of data collection keeping in mind the scope of the study.

- Field-based study is crucial in collecting data. Personal interviews have been conducted which form an important data base for the research. The information gathered from questionnaire will supplement the study. Oral traditions such as myths, legends, folktales, folksongs etc. have also enriched the present work.
- Both primary and secondary sources have been used in the research work. Primary sources include relevant materials from the Archives, Government Proceedings, Census Reports, Gazetteers, Statistical Handbook, Journals etc. Secondary sources include books, articles in magazines, newspapers etc. related to the study. E-resources such as e-books have also been consulted for the study.

CHRISTIANITY IN MAJULI

The coming of Christianity to Majuli is comparatively recent and conversions to the new faith have taken place mainly in the Mising inhabited villages of Majuli, Sadiya, Telam, Silapathar, Akarjan and Tarajan. The Christian Baptist¹² missionaries came to Assam in the 19th century A.D.; missionary works having started at Sadiya in 1836 A.D. with the help of Major Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam. But the work at Sadiya could not continue due to protests by the Khamtis after which they left for Nam Sang in Nagaland. In the year 1840 A.D. some missionaries like Messrs Brown, Cutter, Bronson etc. started their work at Sibsagar. The first Assamese convert was Nidhi Levi who was baptized at Jaipur by Bronson.¹³ Three Baptist churches were established in 1845 A.D. in Sibsagar, Nowgong and Guwahati.¹⁴ The work of Christian missionaries continued in North Lakhimpur (1894 A.D.) and subsequently in Pthalipam in the following year.¹⁵ The first church established in Ujani Majuli block was in the year 1989 A.D and since then there are twenty-three churches which are functioning at present.¹⁶ The churches are playing an active role in the spread of Christianity among the local populace. In the new changes taking place on account of the influence of the new faith, churches replaced the traditional Murong Okum (dormitory) while pastors replaced the Miboos (traditional priests).

Baptist in Majuli: The Baptist is the first Christian faith who set their branch in Majuli. Kamleswari Doley, Vindra Doley and Late Purdoi Doley, who were the first to get baptized in Baptist Mission, Tezpur in the year of 1971. They are nurse by profession and it is said that all of them were funded by the Missionaries. Kamaleswari Doley has opined that they were attracted towards Christianity for its simplicity of rituals and humanity

service.¹⁷ However, the real activity in Majuli has started in the arrival of Larson Sangma as the first missionary in 1981. He was assisted by some other local people such as Bilash Pegu, Dhan Doley, and Biddha Pegu etc. They are spreading the faith through the establishment of Baptist Good News centre at Jengraimukh and they are operated from Nagaland. In 1982 they set up the first Baptist Church named as Bata Baptist Church in Jangraimukh.¹⁸ At present, they have constructed 14 Churches and around 700 members in Majuli. They have been influencing among the Misings through the several development humanity service or schemes in Majuli. Recently they have constructed one residential English medium school Namani Cherpai.¹⁹ The list of Church and its pastor are listed below....

Table No. 1.1 Baptist Church and the name of the Pastor in Majuli

Sl. no	Place of the church	Name of the Pastor
1	Baghmara	Dipok Mili
2	Bethal	Jatindranath Doley
3	Cherpai	Naba Kumar Pegu
4	Devothar Gaon	Ram kumar Pegu
5	Hazarguri	Raju Pogag
6	Jakhaibua	Biliram Mili
7	Kalamua	Satyanath Doley
8	Kalitapar	Bhabesh Pegu
9	Kathalguri	Birananda Doley
10	Lakhimi Jengraimukh	Chiranjit Doley
11	Mohamari	Mohan Dolay
12	Ratanpur	Krishna Doley (I/C)
13	Kekuri	Baneswar Pegu
14	Singimari	Hemanta Pegu

Source: field survey and interview to pastor

CATHOLIC IN MAJULI

The Catholic faith came to Majuli in 1985 and the St. Paul School was established in 1987 in Jengraimukh which led by Fr. Jose Varghese was turn into new outlook both in the education and religion among the Misings.²⁰ This institution has been lighting in education not only among the Misings but whole in Majuli. The Catholic faith became popular very soon among the Misings and Hemanto Pegu and Rama Pegu became Father from the Misings of Majuli. However, the departure of Fr. Jose Varghese in the year of 2000 has great lost for the Catholic faith of Majuli. At present there are 6 Catholic churches and almost 550 members in Majuli. The list of place of the churches and the name of the pastor are listed below....

Table No. 1.2 Catholic Church and the name of the pastor in Majuli

Sl.No	Place of church	Name of the pastor
1	Baghmara	Gagon Doley
2	Borpomua	Dimbeswar Pegu
3	Cherpai	Binu Pegu
4	Jengraimukh	Lalit Pegu
5	Kakuri Lathibarchuk	Bipul Doley
6	Singimari	Francis Pegu

Source: field survey and interview to pastor

BELIEVERS' IN MAJULI

The Believers' are come to Majuli off late but the most influential among the other faith of Christian at present. The main headquarter for the North-East is located in Titabar, Jorhat and however the main headquarter for Asia continent is located in Kerala. However, the faith has set up special branch for the Misings in Dibrugarh district of Assam and the whole Majuli is controlled from there. The Believers' faith has been functioning in the Majuli since 1997 and their first preacher in the island was senior pastor Amulya Pegu. At present the believers' faith become the most dominant faith among the other faith under the initiative of Dairing Doley, District Supervisor of the Believers' church of Majuli. At present the Believers' faith has 18 churches and almost 3750 disciples in Majuli.

Table No. 1.3 Believers' Church and its pastor in Majuli

Sl no	Place of Church	Name of the pastor
1	Salmari	Biju Pegu
2	Kakuri Pomua	Robin Pegu
3	Jengraimukh Town	Josep Doley
4	Ujani Borpomua	Budha Pegu
5	Namani Borpomua	Dairing Doley
6	Borkalia	Dhaneswar Narah
7	Cherpaikua	Gopal Doley
8	Hazarguri	Ajoy Mili
9	Namani Cherpai	Amulya Pegu
10	Awli Bezermara	Manik Pegu
11	Nalanichuk	Amulya Pegu
12	Kumarbari	Sanjoy Pegu
13	1.no Kumarbari	Pranab Sagar Pegu
14	Lahsongaon	Juna Pegu
15	Chikari Dhunaguri	Mrigen Doley
16	Ratanpur	Ranjan Kumbang
17	Ujani Cherpai	Bipul Kutum
18	Monbarchuk	Rakesh Pegu

Source: field survey and interview to pastor

Thus, in Majuli majority of the Christians belong to the denomination of the Believer's faith with 3750 disciples, followed by the Baptist and Catholic with 700 and 550 disciples respectively.

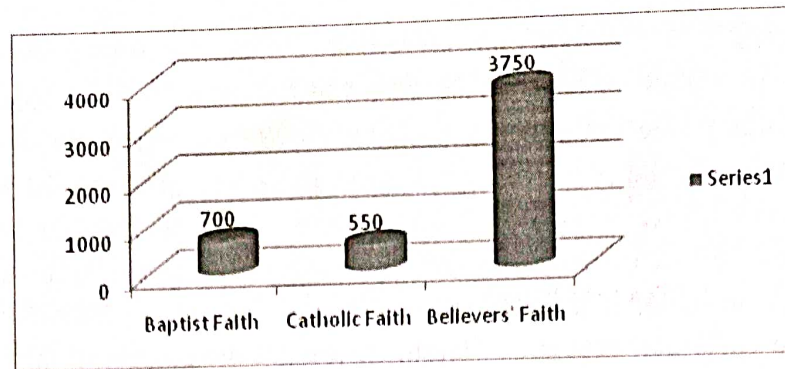
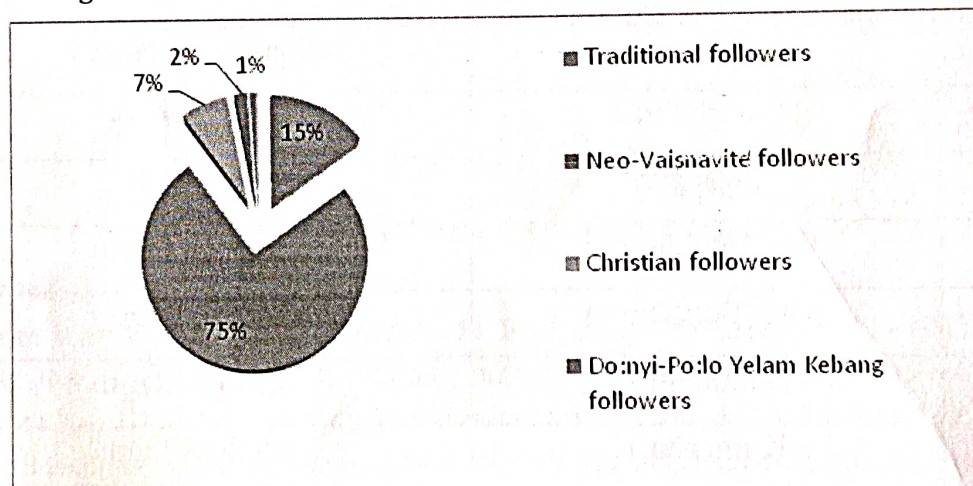


Table No. 1e: Religion and Followers of Misings in Majuli

Followers of Traditional Religion	Followers of Neo-Vaisnavism (Kewalia & Bhagavatia)	Followers of Christianity	Followers of Do:nyi-Po:lo Yelam Kebang	Other Followers/ Anukul Thakur, Krishnaguru etc.
10%	80%	07%	02%	01%

Source: Field survey

Diagram : Illustration of Religion and Followers of Misings in Majuli



Source: Field survey

FACTORS BEHIND

There are many factors which responsible in the converting of the people of Misings towards Christianity. The factors are given below

WELFARE ACTIVITIES OF CHRISTIAN

The Christian Missionaries has been launching many developmental welfare schemes such as education, medical aid, food, seeds, boat, mosquito nets, building houses etc to help the needs poor people in the island since their establishment. The Missionaries has been attracting the poor Misings through such material schemes. Every converted Misings are benefitted from the Missionaries. For example the Believers' faith has alone distributed as many as 57 tub-well, 1200 mosquito curtain, 700 blanket, 50 hand barrow, every year 15 families provides tin path (roofs), 5 boats and 37 houses in Majuli island only so far. Apart from it they have set up

'Bridge of Hope' and 'Sister of Confession' for those orphan and poor family student to provide all necessary goods such as books, school fees, uniform etc and poor widows to provide shelter, vocational education for livelihood and financial assistance. But it is equally right that every beneficiary of Missionaries has not converted to Christian.²¹



POVERTY OF THE MISINGS

Poverty of the Misings is another important factor to convert to Christianity by the Misings of Majuli. Almost 85% populations of Misings of the island are cultivator by occupation and they have been using the old traditional methods of cultivation and have completely depended on Monsoon and the havoc flood of the river Brahmaputra and Subansiri. The river Brahmaputra is gift for cultivators of island but the heavy and over flooded water very badly affected the cultivators almost every year. From the last few decades due to the heavy flood, the life becomes very difficult for the cultivators of the island. Many of their cultivated lands have swept away by the mighty Brahmaputra. The records reveals that since the year 1971 A.D. Majuli has lost 2,72,183 bighas of land and 10,314 families has been become homeless and landless.²² The situation has been using as advantage by the Missionaries and attracting those poor cultivators through providing foods, seeds, education, house etc.

EXPENSIVE AND UNORGANIZED RELIGIONS OF THE MISINGS

The traditional religious practices of the Misings are very expensive and it becomes very difficult to continue for the poor family. On the other hand, the Christianity is the simplicity and less expensive nature in comparison to the Misings.²³ The religion of the Misings is unorganized. They have no own such religious scripture, image of God or Goddess and place of worship. The traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Misings become mixtures due to the influences of Hinduism and Neo-Vaisnavism. They do not follow any strict rituals or practice in the name of religion. Therefore they have been easily attracted by the other religion and this advantage has been taking by the Christian Missionaries.

INDIFFERENT ATTITUDE OF THE HINDUS

Indifferent attitudes of the Hindus or the neo-vaishnavite Bhakats towards the Misings is another important factor for the conversion of the Misings to Christianity. Since the time of Sankaradeva, a great numbers of Misings becomes disciples' of neo-vaishnavism. But the Vaisnavite Bhakats or the Satriya society do not grant equal social status to Misings unlike other tribes of Assam. It seems that the satriya society looks down to the Misings and place in lower social order. For instances, they do not take food offer by Misings, consider impure and showering pure water in house if Misings people have entered and even throwing away that portion of the dried rice if a Misings shadow have fallen etc.²⁴ Diaring Doley, District supervisor of Believers' Church Majuli says in the interview that the satras only to know to collect tax or money from the Misings and never gives respectable position any time.²⁵ Visit of Satras by the Misings has been gradually decreasing day by day due to such unequal treatment by the satras in Majuli.²⁶ Indeswar Pegu, retired Principal of Jengraimukh College has also indicated the same thing that it is due to the despising outlook of the satradhikars that Misings are moving away from vaishnavism.²⁷ D. Nath has also mentioned that the Missionaries took advantage of the Brahmanical and caste policy of the satradhikaras which gave the platform to establish their center at Majuli.²⁸

The works of Christian Missionaries and the numbers of the Misings disciples has been increasing gradually in Majuli. The Missionaries has been attracting the poor families and the youth section of the Misings. The missionary has been benefiting the poor families through various development schemes and the youth section

of the Misings has been attracting on humanity services of the Christianity. Interesting in some families, the son has converted to Christianity but the father is follower traditional religion of the Misings. Interesting few of them could not totally give up their traditional beliefs and practices even after converted to Christianity and so they have been following some traditional religious beliefs along with the Christian religion.²⁹ But the impacts of Christianity among the converted Misings are clearly visible and they are now growing adaptation of Christian rituals, faiths and daily life actions. They give up the animal sacrifice in the name of God in the rituals and in the Dod:gang; abandon the expensive superstitious rituals and practices and embraces Christian rituals such as Christmas, Good Friday, pray before having foods, regular visit to church etc.³⁰

ACCULTURATION AND IMPLICATION

Around 07% of Mising population of the Majuli are claimed themselves to be the followers of Christianity. As mentioned in the earlier chapter that there are already 37 Churches (Big & Small) established in Mising inhabited villages. The missionaries have also setup many educational institutions and health centre along with the church. The Christian followers of the Misings are gradually abandoning traditional rituals and practices of the Misings. It is important to note that the Christian missionaries are mainly converted the poor section (except few devoted followers) of the Misings in the island and those poor section are mainly converted to Christianity as because of the simplicity and less expensiveness of the Christian religion.³¹ According to the Christian converted groups 'the traditional rituals and practices of the Misings are very expensive and it is very difficult for the poor section to maintain their traditional rituals and practices.' Due to the huge expensiveness in the traditional Dod:gang (funeral rituals) many family of the island could not perform Dod:gang of their father or mother or dear ones.³² Generally a traditional Dod:gang of the Misings needs huge arrangement such as 4-7 big pigs, 20-50 kg fish, 50-100 package of A:pong (each contain 2-3 kg of rice), 200-300 kg rice equal amount of different vegetables etc.³³ Such big arrangement are generally could not be effort by the poor family. Therefore, the most of the Christian converted Misings are given up their traditional rituals and festival except Ali-ai-Ligang. They have now celebrated Christmas, Good Friday, New Year and every Sunday come to church to pray etc. as their main festivals.³⁴

CHRISTIANITY AND ACCULTURATION OF FUNERAL CUSTOMS

The conversion towards Christianity resulted in change in the socio-economic structure of the Mising society. The nature of Christian religion is far different from the traditional religion of the Misings. Therefore the Christian converted people have to give up their traditional beliefs and practices. The Christian converted Misings has also burial their dead bodies. The burial rituals is alike with the traditional or Kewalia Bhaka rituals. But the Christian converted Misings pray to Jesus Christ from the Bible for the deceased one when the dead body brings to burial place. All the rituals process is same with the traditional burial system except the process of pray to Jesus Christ.

The rituals after the burial are same with the traditions, but they organize pray ritual for five days at the deceased family house to support the family in critical situation. Though, so many families has converted to Christianity, yet they cannot give up their age old traditional rituals and practices and also most of the converted family has a fear to their neighboring conservative society who sometimes blamed them about their ability to meet the expense of the rituals. So the most of the Christian converted family of the Mising has been continued their traditional rituals after the dead such as Tiloni or To:lensunam, Urom Apin and Dod:gang. But the difference the use of A:pong. They strictly prohibited the use of A:pong in the Dod:gang.³⁵ Except it, all other rituals and the food items are same with the tradition. But some family have performed the all rituals from the starting to till Dod:gang in Christian rituals. One Jordhan Patir has performed all the funeral rituals of

mother late Sumitra Patir in the year of 2013 at Singimari, in Christian rituals. However it cannot be said as Christian methods but it a mixture of both Christian and traditional funeral rituals. The funeral system was same right from the washing the dead body to burial except the praying words. But he did not perform the traditional way of Dod:gang. Instead of that he was arranged only a Dod:gang in a simple process where he was provided fish and meat only to the invited guest.³⁶ The Dod:gang of late Punya Pegu was performed by his son Dr. Bilash Pegu in 2009 in the same process.³⁷ They simply perform their funeral ritual accordingly to their Christian beliefs. A clear shift from animism to monotheism also has taken place.

CHRISTIANITY AND ACCULTURATION OF MARRIAGE SYSTEM

The Christian converted Misings are adopted the marriage system of the Christian rituals. On 29th January, 2016 the wedding ceremony of Dipok Mili, pastor of Baghmara Baptist church and Juli Pegu was held. In first step the parents were met each other after the consent of the couple. Then an auspicious day was selected by the parents and the wedding ceremony was performed in the Baghmara Baptist church. They call it the 'Holy Marriage' where the bride groom wear suit of clothes, with a red rose struck in his blazer pocket and the bride wear white saris. The holy marriage of the church proceeds with the bible reading and a sermon by the priest. After that the parents of the bride are asked to come forward to submit their daughter hand on the bride groom's hand for the oath. Then both the bride and groom are asked whether they love each other or not and whether they ready to accept as their husband wife or not. After that ritual the groom ties Mangal Sutra to the bride and the wedding rings are also exchanged by the bride and the groom. After that the priest declares them as husband and wife and gives a marriage certificate to them. After the marriage ceremony the reception was held at the groom house where people joined into congratulate and wishes them a happy married life by presenting gifts.³⁸ The Christian converted Misings of Majuli are now accepted the Christian way of marriage system. Church becomes important and sacred place for the marriage ceremony and the Christian priest performs the wedding ceremony through the reading of the Bible. Exchange of rings, wearing of blazers, white saris, taking oath in the church and the marriage certificate are important additions among the converted Misings Christian of Majuli.

CHRISTIANITY AND WOMEN

Christianity has little effected on the position and status of women in the Mising society. The Missionaries are spreading education along with their religion. The Missionaries have been continuously trying to uplift the poor women section of the Mising society. They set up a women society in the church and providing education, healthcare and vocational self-employed education for the women to live in dignity in the society which is promoting the women status in the society.³⁹ Many Mising girls are giving the training of nurse in the Christian medical institution. Kamleswari Doley, Vindra Doley and Late Purdoi Doley are few of them who are benefited by the Christian medical institutions.⁴⁰ The educational policy of the missionaries are become very important factors in the changing position and status of women in the Mising society. It is found that the educated women are more conscious about their right and activities in the society. It seems that the converted Misings are more liberal than the non-converted Misings in the matters of inter-caste marriage. Many converted Mising girls are married with non-Mising groom. Recently a wedding ceremony of Miss Elora Pegu and Simon Patnaik was held on 31 October, 2015 at Jengraimukh Lakhimi Baptist Church in Majuli. Simon Patnaik belongs to tea-tribe community and lives in Tezpur.⁴¹ Women are given very high position in the Christian Mising society but in the question of administrative areas and the maintenance of the Church the women are not provided equal status with the men folk. There is no such example so far in Majuli, where women are appointed as pastor or religious priest of the church.

CELEBRATION OF NON-TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS

I. CHRISTMAS : Every year, the believers of Christian are celebrated Christmas on December 25 to commemorate the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ. The celebration of Christmas is a very important time for churches. The church of Majuli is celebrated Christmas with great pomp and gusto. On this special occasion, the church is beautifully decorated with light and candle and distributed sweets to neighbors. The believers gather into the church and some other set up a Christmas tree in their respective house. Every follower's of the house is prepared special sweets dishes and invited their friends to home by sending of cards.⁴²

II. GOOD FRIDAY : Good Friday is another important festival celebrates by the Christians followers of Majuli. The Friday before Easter, on which Jesus Christ died on the cross is celebrated as Good Friday, Holy Friday, Great Friday or Black Friday by the followers of Christian. The message of Good Friday is that Jesus underwent for the cause of goodness and humanity and they believe that 'an eye for an eye' can't work. On this occasion, the followers devoted to fasting and prayers readings from the Bible. On this day, they encourage people to become involved in charitable deeds.⁴³

III. WEEKLY PRAY : Alike other, the followers of Christian of Majuli gathers every Sunday to church and pray before Jesus Christ for his kind blessing and happiness of the world. However it is important to note that the present of followers to the church on this day is irregular due to the burden of daily works as numbers of followers are daily labourers.⁴⁴

IV. NEW YEAR : They also celebrate New Year as end of the Old year and the beginning of the New Year. In church, the ceremonial practices of sharing, honesty, purity, compassion, and respect for life which reflect the good will, kindness, and peace among neighbors.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The proselytization of Christianity began during the British colonial period adding a new dimension to socio religious and cultural history of Majuli. Missionary activities had made its impact felt on a large section of the population in North East India by the turn of the 19th and early part of the 20th century A.D.⁴⁶ The role of the missionaries in the establishment of educational institutions is well known which has led to growth and development of the literacy from the pre-literate phases. In fact, they put the tribal languages to writing by using the Roman script and created primers for education and written literature in those languages. Another factor for the rise in the number of Christian converts among the Misings is the welfare and charitable work undertaken by the missionaries which brings the much-needed relief in times of severe crisis when the economic livelihood have been adversely affected by regular floods and erosion.

In Majuli, Christian Missionaries have made their presence felt and have increasingly become popular in the last few decades. In Majuli there is the prevalence of three denominations of the Christian faith viz. Catholic, Baptist and Believer's Church. At present the approximate followers of Christianity is above 5000 and 3 churches have been functioning in Majuli. Of these the largest number of followers belongs to the Believer's faith with around 4650 converts and 18 churches belonging to the denomination. Kamleswari Doley, Vinod Doley and Late Purdoi Doley, were the first three individuals to be baptized in Baptist Mission, Tezpur in 1971 A.D. and they were all nurse by profession. The arrival of Larson Sangma in 1981 A.D. was to usher in an expansion of Church activities and the first church named Batal Baptist Church was established in

Jangraimukh in the year 1982 A.D. Since the coming of the faith to the island in 1836 A.D., the Church as a religious institution has been active in the administration and discipline of church members, preaching, community service, counseling and the conduct of various ceremonies related to birth, marriage, death etc. by the pastor as per the prescribed norms. The Church plays an important role in bringing together the believers for Sunday mass prayer, celebration of festivals such as Christmas, Easter etc which brings the devotees together and thereby maintain Christian fellowship. The Christian converts are to strictly prohibit the use of a:pong or rice beer, and abstain from consumption of beef and practice of animal sacrifice. Yet, some Christian converts among the Misings continue to worship their traditional deities and also go to church as a member of their Christian denomination.

FOOTNOTES

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11. *Census Report: 2005* conducted by Mising Autonomous Council, Gogamukh, North Lakhimpur District, 2006, pp.27-29. Out of the 243 villages, 210 are cadastral villages (villages with revenues generated by administration and supported with revenue maps) and 33 are non-cadastral village (villages without revenue maps are mostly resettled or rehabilitated shifted due to flood and erosion in Majuli). The major tribal communities living in Majuli are Misings, Deoris and Sonowal Kacharis.
12. The Baptists are a denomination of the Christian faith, a group who believe in 'baptism of believers' through Jesus Christ; they are adult believers of Christ, and tend to reject doctrine of infant baptism by the Catholics.
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16. Appendix V: Illustration II, B (i) and (ii),
 17. Interview with Kamaleswari Doley, age 69, vill-Lakhimi Gaon on 10/04/2015.
 18. Interview with Dipok Mili, Executive General Secretary of Majuli Mising Baptist Church, age 45, vill- Namani Cherpai, Baghmara, Majuli on 07/04/2015.
 19. Interview with Naba Kumar Pegu, pastor Namani Cherpai Baptist church, age 40, vill- Namani Cherpai, Baghmara, Majuli on 08/04/2015.
 20. Interview with Lalit Pegu, pastor Jengraimukh Catholic Mission, age 47, vill- Jengraimukh on 15/04/2015
 21. Interview with Dairing Doley, District supervisor of Believers' Church Majuli, age- 40, in Jengraimukh on 07/07/2015
 22. Dah Sahasradik Bhumihin porivarkloi Sintit Nohoi Raijya Sarkar (State Government not worried about 10 lakh landless families) article published in newspaper Asomiya Pratidin dated 6 March, 2013 according to the record in Circle Office, Majuli, Government of Assam.
 23. Interview with Biliram Mili, pastor of Jakhaibua Baptist Church, age 40 in Jakhaibua on 7/04/2015 and Gopal Doley, pastor of Cherpaikua Believers' Church, age 42 in Cherpaikua on 8/07/2015.
 24. Interview with Indraneel Pegu, Assistant Professor, Rangashahi College, Majuli, age 31 at Jengraimukh on 15/04/2015.
 25. Interview with Dairing Doley, District supervisor of Believers' Church Majuli, age- 40, in Jengraimukh on 07/07/2015
 26. Interview with Guluk Mili, Bhakat of Garmur Satra, (permanently residing at Garmur satra) age 50 at Garmur Satra on 8/04/2015.
 27. D.Nath, The Majuli Island, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2009, p.94.
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 29. Interview with Robin Pegu, age 45 Believers' faith at Ratanpur on 9/04/2015 and Gagon Doley, age 45 Catholic faith at Baghmara on 7/04/2015.
 30. Interview with Chiranjit Doley, pastor of Lakhimi Baptist Church, age 40 at Lakhimi on 7/04/2015 and Dimbeswar Pegu, pastor of Borpomua Believers' church, age 43 at Borpomua on 8/04/2015.
 31. Personal interview with Dairing Doley, age 40 yrs, District Supervisor of Believer' at Jengraimukh on 14/04/2015.
 32. Personal interview with Amuly Pegu, age 57 yrs, pastor of Namoni Cherpai Believers' Church at Namoni Cherpai on 10/4/15.
 33. Personal interview with Tilok Sarah, age 70, Hattula (religious priest) of Malapinda at Malapinda on 11/2015.
 34. Personal interview with Chiranjit Doley, age 38 yrs, pastor of Lakhimi Borpamua Baptist Church at Lakhimi on 7/4/2015.
 35. Personal interview with Chiranjit Doley, pastor of Lakhimi Gaon Baptist Church, age 38 years, Borpamua Lakhimi, at Lakhimigaon on 07/07/and Dairing Doley, District supervisor of Believers' Church Majuli, age 40, vill- Jengraimukh on 07/07/2105.
 36. Personal interview with Jordhan Patir, age 35 years, at Singimari, Majuli on 11/10/2015.
 37. Personal interview with eye witness Dipok Mili, pastor of Baghmara Baptist Church, age 30 years, Baghmara on 7/04/2015 and Narutham Pegu, age 35 at Cherpai on 27/10/2015.
 38. Personal interview with Dipok Mili, pastor of Baghmara Baptist Church and Bride groom at Guwahati on 2/2/016.



39. Madhushree Das: Tribal Women of Assam, EBH Publisher, Guwahati, 2011, p. 157.
40. Interview with Kamaleswari Doley, age 69, vill-Lakhimi Gaon on 10/04/2015.
41. Personal interview with Elora Pegu, age 25 and Simon Patnaik, age 31 at Tezpur on 25/12/2015.
42. Personal interview with Dairing Doley, District supervisor of Believers' Church Majuli, age-40 vill-Jengraimukh on 07/07/2015 and Naba Kumar Doley, pastor of Cherpai Baptist Church, age 40 at Cherpai on 07/04/2015.
43. Ibid.
44. Interview with Josep Doley, pastor of Jengraimukh Town Believer's Church, vill-Jengraimukh, age-38 on 09/04/2015 and Binu Pegu, pastor of Cherpai Catholic Church, vill- Cherpai, age-45 on 09/04/2015.
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YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES AN OVERVIEW OF ASSAM POLITICS



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ABSTRACT

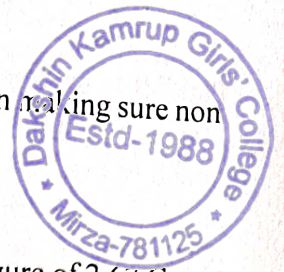
Participation of all citizens in formal political processes is fundamental for democracy. If a segment of the population is deprived of the right to vote or is disengaged, the representativeness and legitimacy of these processes is undermined. Although young people participate in political processes in multiple ways, their representation in formal political processes is limited. There is a growing recognition, however, that young people's involvement is critical to making elections more representative. Student-youth politics and activism has formed the backbone of most political and social movements in region. The paper examines the trend of participation of youth in Indian electoral. There is an uneven proportion of young Member of Parliaments (MPs) especially belonging to dynastic succession model. Demographic indicators revealed that the median age of India as of 2018 is 27.9 years old whereas an average Indian legislature leader (Member of Parliament) is 56 years. There might be various reasons for this form of representation be it socio-economic factors combined with institutional barriers taking a path dependent trajectory, based on comparative and historical analysis. It critically examines the contemporary modes of political participation spearheaded by the youth populace. The under representation seems to emerge from decline in student led ideological movements, prevalence of political nepotism and the culture of gerontocracy in a nation of youth majority.

Keywords: Youth, politics, Elections, India, Assam.

INTRODUCTION

Looking at political participation behavior of young adults in contemporary Assam, India, this paper provides the reader with a map of different terminologies and logics that are used to discuss youth political participation. This study addresses the question as to what extent and how do elections matter to the youth of Assam? Assam has been politically and geographically sensitive about its place in the scheme of nation building in independent India. Student-youth politics and activism has been the driving force behind many of the volatile social and political movements that have emerged in this region. Participation of all residents in formal political procedures is essential for democracy. If a phase of the populace is disadvantaged of the proper to vote or is disengaged, the representativeness and legitimacy of those procedures is undermined. Although younger humans take part in political procedures in a couple of ways, their illustration in formal political procedures is limited. There is a developing recognition, however, that younger humans's involvement is important to creating elections greater representative. EMBs and different electoral stakeholders have a important function to play in empowering kids to take part in formal political procedures. Indeed, the rising consensus has visible many electoral help businesses undertake a kids recognition of their programming. As a primary step in fostering multiplied kids inclusion, participation, and illustration in electoral procedures, EMBs should hire younger humans throughout all tiers in their organization, together with of their strategic planning. This could enhance EMBs' know-how approximately the desires of younger voters; pass EMBs in the direction of range in regard to age; leverage younger humans's flexibility, creativity and willingness to learn; and permit younger humans to have possession of the political process. Another manner of fostering kids inclusion, participation, and illustration in electoral procedures is for EMBs to guide kids-targeted and kids-led organizations, and to associate with CSOs and different electoral stakeholders that empower kids. Such alliances are in particular

crucial for EMBs to set up of their efforts to paintings with kids as companions and leaders in making sure non violent elections.



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As per details from Census 2011, Assam has population of 3.12 Crores, an increase from figure of 2.67 Crore in 2001 census. Total population of Assam as per 2011 census is 31,205,576 of which male and female are 15,939,443 and 15,266,133 respectively. In 2001, total population was 26,655,528 in which males were 13,777,037 while females were 12,878,491. The total population growth in this decade was 17.07 percent while in previous decade it was 18.85 percent. The population of Assam forms 2.58 percent of India in 2011. In 2001, the figure was 2.59 percent. A total of 1.98 crore people will be eligible to vote in the assembly elections and nearly 33 per cent of them are young voters (below 40 years of age)¹. According to statistics made available by the Election Commission of India, 6,76,595 new voters (2 per cent of the total electorate) have enrolled themselves in the electoral rolls this time and are in the age cohort 18-19. The highest percentage of voters is in the age group 20-29. In this group, there are 52,50,014 which is 15.5 per cent of the total electorate in the State. There are 51,62,855 voters (15.24 per cent) in the age group 30-39 and another 40,00,806 (11.81 per cent) in the age group 40-49²²<https://www.sentinelassam.com/top-headlines/young-voters-to-be-crucial-in-assam-polls/>. Thus, the young voters are crucial in its politics. The youth constitutes of almost 34% of the Indian population, and is India's precious human resource. According to the latest statistics from the Election Commission (EC), for the first time in each Lok Sabha constituency this year almost 90,000 voters, between 18 and 22 years of age, will be eligible to vote. The General Elections will witness over 1.79 lakh new voters on an average in each constituency. Data shows there will be around 4.5 lakh first time voters in Assam alone. These upcoming elections will witness the POWER of the youth to bring about a change in the nation.

OBJECTIVES

The prime objectives of this paper is to find out the

- Role of youths in the elections
- Participation of youths in the Assam Elections (last 2 elections)
- The importance of youth participation in formal political processes
- Obstacles of youth's participation in the politics

METHODOLOGY

Most of the data is gathered from the segregation of the list of voters available from Chief electoral officer of Assam, India. The present work seeks to analyse the variations in youth participation in electoral politics by examining various reports published by the Chief Electoral Office of Assam, India. In order to do so, in the first stage collection of data through key reporting agents, extending it with secondary sources concerning the specific areas to be researched and their corresponding indicators. The study is mainly carried out by taking secondary data collection.

REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS

In 1973, Robert Dahl offered a first glimpse of what it might mean. In "Poliarchy: Participation and Opposition" he declares PP an essential part of modern democracies as it enables citizens to hold their governments accountable (Dahl, 1973). However, Dahl didn't explicitly define his concept of participation. His definition only implicitly covered actions within the given institutional framework of a nation, meaning that actions such as consumerism (Stolle et al., 2005) or just hitting a "like" button wouldn't be categorized as participation, even though they could be seen as holding governments accountable.

Parallel to developments in participation-research, authors such as Flanagan (2013), Norris (2002), Putnam (2001), Zukin et al. (2006), or Daskalopoulou (2018) have been working on the concept of civic engagement, which has several intersections with PP research. The concept of civic engagement has been used to analyze all kinds of citizen behavior, including activities and actions, which can but don't necessarily have to be political. Putnam's "bowling alone," e.g., also includes going to a bowling alley as a weak indicator of engagement.

Van Deth (2001) nicely summarizes the evolution of political participation repertoires between the 1940s and the 1990s by tracing the publication of landmark studies. In the 1940s and 1950s, PP was mainly restricted to voting and campaign activities. In the early 1960s, though, appeared the later so-called "conventional" modes of PP. At this time, "political participation was broadly understood as activities concerned with traditional conceptualizations of politics as campaigning by politicians and parties, and with well-accepted contacts between citizens and public officials" (van Deth, 2001, p. 5).

BIJOY PRASAD DAS (2021) clearly stated that, the term "political involvement" may mean many different things to various individuals depending on their context. This idea encompasses all elements of civic engagement, including participation in the decision-making process, political action, political awareness, and other forms of civic participation.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES

Looking at the political participation behavior of young adults in contemporary India, one is faced with a contradiction. Representatives of the disengagement paradigm within the literature underpin their argument with empirical findings, such as young adults being the least likely to vote in national elections, the drop of youth membership in political parties, and generally low levels of political interest. On the other hand, the literature on an engagement paradigm of youth participation represents a more optimistic view as it is based on findings in the context of new forms of political participation, which are more appealing to and are used more frequently by young adults.

Young men and women participate in political processes in multiple ways. However, the representation of young people in formal political processes remains limited. Participation of all citizens in formal political processes is important for democracy; furthermore, young people themselves are calling for better integration into these processes. A consensus is emerging that increasing the participation of young people has both instrumental and intrinsic value for both the young men and women themselves and for the wider society. EMBs and other electoral stakeholders have a crucial role in encouraging and providing a safe environment for the participation of young people in representative political processes, and also in wider policy and political processes that directly impact young people's lives. Increasing the participation of youth requires EMBs and other electoral stakeholders to understand the obstacles that hinder youth participation in formal political processes. It also requires them to challenge persistent negative assumptions about young people and appreciate the active roles young men and women are already playing, particularly in regard to addressing different forms of violence³.

YOUTH AS AGENTS FOR CHANGE

Never before have so many young people been involved in movements for change worldwide. They are taking to the streets and using online social networks and communities to connect, express their voices, and campaign for change. They are protesting against authoritarian regimes, corruption, and inequalities. They are fighting

for sustainable development and a better future for current and new generations. However, the political representation of young women and men remains limited. They are increasingly demanding more meaningful participation in decision-making processes, so they can have more control over how their lives and futures are shaped. Although young people are involved in activism in the digital space, protesting, volunteering to improve their communities and innovating for social good, their participation in and influence on formal politics is limited. Voter turnout is in decline in all democracies and is concentrated among youth. Young people are underrepresented in political decision-making positions and their involvement in political parties is dwindling.



THE INDIAN SCENARIO

There is no need for a separate definition of youth political participation; instead, the various forms of political participation used by young adults is of central importance. Following this, the question arises as to what extent the PP behavior of young adults differs from that of other groups. A look at the previous research shows a perceived gap between young adult and adults. Many studies show the lowest scores in almost all areas of political participation for young adults and thus the image emerges that young people are not sufficiently engaged in politics. This perception is based upon trends such as voting in elections, where young adults have the lowest rates, and these rates continue to decrease just as the level of youth membership in political parties is decreasing (Kimberlee, 2002; Hooghe et al., 2004; Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Cross and Young, 2008). To capture young people's disengagement in politics, it can be said that "young people are less concerned with politics, less politically knowledgeable, do not participate in social or political activities, are more apathetic, and have low levels of political interest" (Quintelier, 2007, p. 165). Even if this representation seems clear, the disengagement of young adults in politics remains a contested issue in the literature. India has the largest youth population in the world that is poised to increase further in the coming decade.

Seventy per cent of India's population is below the age of 35 years. According to the initial figures of the 2011 Census, the youth population in the country, including adolescents, is around 550 million.¹ This phenomenal rise in the youth population has made India the youngest nation with a demographic dividend appearing to be a reality⁴. Today, youth has the power to transform our nation, and it will. The responsibility of transformation, progress and innovation lies on their young shoulders. Various parties in the country are stressing upon youth as a critical part of their preparations for the General Elections 2014.

Narendra Modi and Arvind Kejriwal have been the favourites of youth because of their anti-status quo stand. At the same time, Congress has got Rahul Gandhi to the forefront with the Youth Congress. Regional parties like the Trinamool Congress and Samajwadi Party have also tried to incorporate the youth feature in their political agenda to elevate their prospects in the 2014 elections. Let's have a look at how each party is focusing on the youth factor to attract them to vote in their favour⁵.

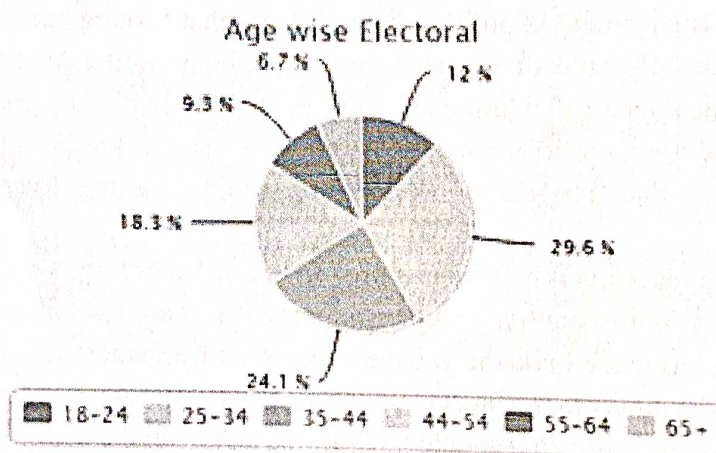
THE ASSAM SCENARIO

Assam is divided into three important physical regions based on its agro-climatic zones, they are the Brahmaputra Valley, Barak Valley and the Hilly areas. Since the pre-post independence Assamese youths and students plays a crucial role in its political process. For instance, withinside the mid-Nineteen Eighties in Assam, a pupil organisation, the All Assam Students Union, led an extreme anti-authorities agitation. In 1985, the Asom Gana Parishad emerged from this motion and shaped the State authorities in an unparalleled flow after contesting and triumphing the Assembly elections held quickly after the signing of an accord among the authorities and the motion's leadership. With this new-determined legitimacy and avenue to energy after the Assam motion, pupil politics in India's northeast has steadily come to be an important mechanism to articulate

unique agendas, socio-cultural assertions and political aims of the unique ethnic communities within the region. This brought about the argument that scholars and the youngsters have come to be the sellers of identification formation and pupil actions have become de-facto identification actions, or at the least the sturdy articulation of an identification politics⁶.

However, in the last two decades or so, the growing sway of a globalised worldview and the influence of a pan-Indian market outlook on the region's youth/students is discernible. As in the case of most of India, the last two decades have transformed the northeast region in ways incomprehensible to an earlier generation. A narrative of neglect is seen to be flowing alongside that of participation. Though such politics has evolved into a platform for voicing the grievances, frustrations and demands of the lot whose regional-local reality falls far below their 'globalised' aspirations, it now has to make space for the emergent aspirations and ambitions of its participants.

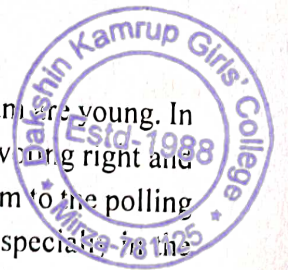
AGE WISE ELECTORAL: 2011 CENSUS



Age	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Others	
18	66 185	92 744	0	1 58 955 (0.9 %)
19	1 14 048	1 45 266	0	2 59 362 (1.4 %)
20	1 36 936	1 57 890	0	2 94 885 (1.6 %)
21	1 54 872	1 76 698	0	3 31 614 (1.8 %)
22	1 78 981	1 98 908	0	3 77 935 (2.1 %)
23	1 72 343	1 86 298	0	3 58 674 (2.0 %)
24	1 75 930	2 03 335	0	3 79 288 (2.1 %)

Sources: <https://www.indiavotes.com/state/summary/1>

The Data obtained from the 2011 census data reflects that a majority portion of voters in Assam are young. In the last two elections it was seen that young voters/new voters are very much aware of their voting right and prioritise in voting. Leadership of Srabananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma attract them to the polling stations. In the past two Assembly elections Assam witnessed a high rise of voters turnout specially in the young voters. In the both elections BJP led alliances were able to attract the young voters and the result was in favour of them. For the first time in Assam BJP formed two times government in Assam defeating 5 terms congress led government.



In essence, adolescents politics and activism withinside the location stays an powerful platform of protest that displays the ethnic paradoxes in addition to ethnic coalitions. The multipronged fact of the location is obvious thru contradictory developments that co-exist withinside the location. While a few adolescents organizations are shaped in elements of the location that call for truthful and corruption-unfastened elections, others take important positions at the electoral method accusing the elected representatives of nonfulfilment of pending needs and guarantees made. Thus, developments of electoral apathy and election boycotts with the aid of using the adolescents now mingle with calls at no cost and truthful elections from the identical populace organization withinside the location. This complicated fact wishes to be probed similarly and understood better.

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN FORMAL POLITICAL PROCESSES

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are disenfranchised or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives. A key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness.

To make a difference in the longer term, it is essential that young people are engaged in formal political processes and have a say in formulating today's and tomorrow's politics. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right but also is crucial to building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations. For young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, and in particular in elections, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.

When there are obstacles to participating in formal, institutionalized political processes, young people can rapidly feel disempowered. Many tend to believe that their voices are not going to be heard or that they will not be taken seriously even if they are heard. The problem becomes circular as politicians may lose interest in responding to the aspirations of young people if they cannot win their votes. This in turn leads to young people being increasingly excluded from taking part in decision-making, or in debates about key socio-economic and political issues, despite their sensitivity to the demands for social equity and justice, environmental protection and cultural diversity.

The perception of the youth towards elections will crucially reflect on the evolving political trends in the state. This study seeks to assess the predominant mood and perception amongst the youth of the state towards the electoral process, as expressed by the various resources found. As students unions and other youth organisations have been at the forefront of many of the social and political movements, it can be said that youth culture in the state is predominantly one of protest against perceived or felt odds.

OBSTACLES TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Significant obstacles to youth political participation occur at different levels and in different areas, including structural, individual, and organizational ones. Also, and importantly, election-related violence has a negative impact on youth participation in elections.



OBSTACLES AT THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

The following issues are hindering young people's participation at the structural level:

- **Age requirements to vote or run for office** : The first barrier for youth participation is the minimum voting age requirement set for national elections at 18 in most countries, which disenfranchises younger citizens. The second barrier for youth participation is the minimum age for eligibility to run for office, which is often set higher than the age to vote.
- **Age restriction in campaigning in some of the countries** : As youth (15-35) encompasses "minors without voting rights", "minors with voting rights" and "young adults with voting rights" some electoral laws penalize political parties who use minors for campaigning. It can be a challenge to both protect youth and encourage their participation at the same time.
- **Increased costs** : for candidate nomination and campaigning and the lack of political finance regulations make it even more difficult for youth to start a political career. Similarly, if parties are not giving financial support to young candidates at the same rates as for older candidates, they are disadvantaged.
- **Social and cultural traditions** : In most societies, politics has been for centuries a domain of older, often male and wealthy citizens, a situation that has resulted in the systematic exclusion of young people from political debates and decision-making and thus contributed to the under representation of youth. Despite a broad consensus that young people have an important role to play in political processes, the participation of youth in politics remains a sensitive issue in some regions. While participation of all citizens at the local level is the cornerstone to build healthy democracies, it is often at the local level that young people are not given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

OBSTACLES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The following obstacles hinder young people's participation at the individual level:

- **Distrust in political institutions** : A growing number of citizens (including young people) have little trust in formal political processes, political institutions and leaders, perhaps because they feel they are not representative of their interests.
- **Lack of confidence and trust in EMBs** : The composition of EMB leadership is in many countries a controversial issue. If stakeholders, political parties, do not agree with the composition of an EMB, there is an increased risk that they will boycott the elections and demotivate citizens from participating, which can lead to a low voter turnout.
- **Lack of access to/knowledge about political processes** : Young people are grappling with understanding the complexities of democratic societies and formal political processes. The UN 2016 Global Youth Report shows that nearly 53 percent of young college graduates say they always vote in national elections, in comparison with about 44 percent of all 18–29-year-olds. Other groups that are likely to lack the required knowledge to participate are marginalized youth such as minorities, unemployed youth, and those living in isolation and/or poverty. A weak understanding of democratic principles and electoral processes makes it more difficult for youth to perceive elections as routes to express their grievances, demand change, and hold governments accountable.
- **Social and economic exclusion/marginalization** : Finding a sustainable job has become a daily struggle for many young people in all parts of the world. They have to cope with precarious working conditions such as

part-time, short-term, temporary, and low-paid employment situations, all of which make it hard to find a work-family balance, rent a house and access health care services (among other important priorities). Living conditions are even harder for young women, youth growing up in poverty and conflicts, youth without education certificates, and unemployed youth.



FINDINGS

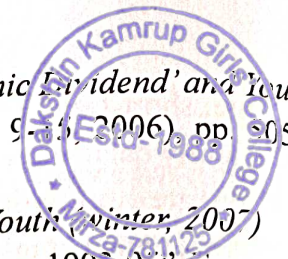
During the study it is found that, an overwhelming majority do vote and take part in elections and yet a near similar number of youth hold the event of election in some kind of negative light. The dual narrative of resistance and reciprocity needs to be understood. The many continuing acts of violence in the state point to a larger reality that the whole state is sitting on a powder keg of violence. Assam has become a sad battleground of ever changing ethnic coalitions between political groups who feed on the logic of ethnocentric political developments, changing their stakes as per the political exigency of the day¹. Opting for the mere formalities and prosaic procedures has, in fact, tried to manipulate these very vacillations among social groups and communities, eventually leading to protests of various kinds and even generating some of the conditions for violence. What has perturbed observers are the increasingly visible links of the nature and pattern of this violence to the multifaceted realities of the phenomenon of elections in this part of the country. These observations make one critically reflect on the crucial but often unnoticed gap that sometimes develops between formalities of democratic practices and the fulfilment of the democratic ideals. The urgent need of the hour is to move well beyond knee-jerk reactions and ad hoc measures, towards well defined, concrete policy formulations. Repeated setbacks for Indian democracy in Assam is a constant reminder that in a better democracy the substantive promises must be met right alongside the procedural requirements.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Elections are a key activity around which a representative democracy evolves. The success and legitimacy of elections hinge on citizen involvement in voting, and also in the overall election process. Besides voting, citizen engagement in campaign activities can momentarily bridge the gap between the elite and the ordinary mass of citizens. Such engagement also prepares the ground for more participation by citizens in politics even when there are no elections². Citizen political participation requires an enabling legal environment, one that includes social and political freedoms guaranteed in democracies. In autocratic, developing and/or politically fragile countries, civic space is shrinking; there are an increasing number of countries restricting civic engagement by enacting laws that restrict freedom of expression and movement. This has a serious impact on citizen participation in political and electoral processes, especially for youth, who often use non-formal methods of participation, such as activism. Restrictions on expression, assembly and association limit the freedom of citizens to demonstrate peacefully, to engage in political dialogue, and to criticize politicians and candidates. The ability to share and access information and to document human rights abuses or irregularities in governmental and election processes, is fundamental to a healthy democracy. However, in the name of protecting their citizens against threats to their security, governments frequently limit access to information, and in the most extreme cases, cut off internet services entirely.

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FOOTNOTES

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ABSTRACT

Education and politics have a close relationship with each other. However, when one tries to overpower the other, there are negativities that set in. This essay explores this relationship based on several research articles and opines that in the case of Indian education system, it is important to have policies in place that will help eliminate the negativities that has resulted from the hindu central ideologies of Bharatiya Janata Party which is the political faction of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Many political parties formed their student group which creates a political movement among the student. Student body of the political party spread their ideologies among the students through these groups.

Keywords: India, Politics, student, education.

Introduction :

Education and politics have an influence on each other. This paper discusses about the symbiotic relation between education and politics. This relation can vary on case by case basis. In some cases it can be negative while in others it has a more positive nature. Thus it is important to have policies in place that will help eliminate the negativities of this interaction between politics and education and promote the positivity. There are linkages going both ways with politics affecting the social order and exercising a certain level of influence on education and education on the other hand through its informal and formal system influences politics. Indian politics has different political issues. However these issues remain to be issues without any solutions for decades. Some issues are national level and some regional level. Some communities demand more economical and social rights for their communities, while others demand more autonomy for their cultures within the Indian states. Some demanded autonomous states within the Indian Union, while the others demanded to be independent from India. Indian present education system lacks vision and direction. This hollowness creates a sense of confusion and disillusionment among students. Due to rampant politicisation and commercialisation of Indian educational system, the focus has shifted from character building to making the student suitable for job market.

Objective of the Study:

The prime focus of the study is to understand the political influence in educational institutions and

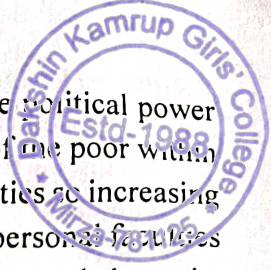
- Find out how the ideology of the ruling party influence educational system

Methodology :

In this work secondary sources are applied. Internal criticism is being applied to analyze the facts that are available to the research work and external criticism is used to authenticate the facts.

Literature review :

There have been several authors such as Stiglitz, 1974; Epple and Romano, 1996&; Glomm and Ravikumar, 1998; Glomm and Patterson, 2005 who have thought-about a public vs personal schooling selection through a system of ballot. Diamond State La Croix and Doepke (2009) discuss that the share of public and personal



faculties in a very region and therefore the illustration of a socio-economic class within the political power have an effect on the standard of public faculty education. once there's higher illustration of the poor within the organisation, there's acceptable allocation of the government income towards public faculties so increasing their quality however if there's lower illustration of the poor the alternative is the case and personal faculties have a much better quality of education. this is often as a result of within the second case the made have the finances to pay on costly personal education in order that they would rather pay the government income on alternative areas so degrading the standard of public education. however once scrutiny each cases, the previous appears like a much better choice than the latter. With sensible quality public education system, all the kids of the country area unit subjected to a similar level of education and development. This helps to forestall the inter-regional variations, inter- social category variations and students from made or poor background won't have a bonus or disadvantage relative to the opposite. currently if the country had the next illustration of the made in the organisation all the aforesaid advantages wouldn't be accomplished because of the politicization of the system. Buckley (1976) shares that education and politics have undesirable and sudden effects on one another with schooling being employed as an instrument publically policy for achieving things as a last live that political parties and churches couldn't manufacture. By increasing the dependency of the faculties on the federal funding system, there's a lot of autonomy on the a part of the bureaucrats and therefore the government to poke into the schooling system. So, so as to eliminate this dependency Buckley steered achieving monetary autonomy through a system of taxation.

Statement of the Problem :

The formal education that is provided by the institution of the school is crucial in helping to socialise the next generation. It enables people to learn literacy skills, transmits wisdom passed down through the years, offers fresh perspectives, encourages intellectual discussion, and instils proper behaviour. The transmission of moral principles that are binding on society is one of a school's most important duties since it helps to ensure human survival. Teachers call out and punish poor behaviour while praising excellent behaviour. Children learn the knowledge and skills necessary for society's advancement in school. Particularly for kids from less wealthy households, education is a major advantage since it allows them access to opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them.

Political and educational debate frequently centres on the Indian educational system. There are ongoing initiatives to persuade schools to teach a variety of ideals, many of which come from groups with clear political objectives. This is currently most obvious in two areas: gender and inclusiveness. Influential academics and policymakers in India have raised alarm about how strongly ideologically laden schools are becoming. This essay examines how this ideological capture could affect both schooling and the particular child.

P. J. O'Rourke, the Libertarian humorist, defined politics as "the attempt to achieve power and prestige without merit." To politicize something is to focus simply on how to play it for an advantage in that pursuit of power and prestige. Traditionally, when we talk about a issue that brings everyone together, we're talking about a crisis or concern that invokes an unspoken agreement that the various parties won't try to play the issue for an angle on power and prestige¹. The politicizing of everything means that we no longer view problems as problems to be solved, but as events to be spun for power acquisition (if not by ourselves, then by those people over there). Education was once viewed as a non-political arena, even if that agreement was not always honored. Many states still observe non-partisan school board elections. But education, like everything else in our culture, has been increasingly politicized².

Politics and education :

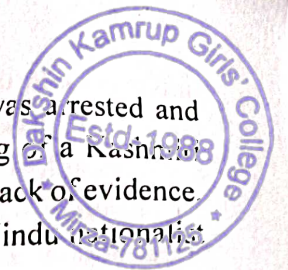
Students are more likely to join the army and some may even choose to be a civil servant in a nation where the educational curriculum is focused on patriotism and nationalism or emphasizes extracurricular activities like being an army cadet, such as India's National Cadet Corps. The school curriculum emphasizes that both of these career options help them serve the nation more effectively. On the other hand, some curricula may be focused on denationalization, which, in the long run, may encourage students to take part in anti-national activities or even plan a coup to overthrow the current system of government. Politics and education can interact in such a way that one region is favored over others for producing better national results and students receive higher-quality education than students in other regions. This can be seen in the fact that, despite the fact that Delhi Public School has locations all over India, parents prefer their children to attend the Prime located branch, which is in the nation's capital. The primary reason is that it is the oldest and delivers the most effective results. Now, if these students go on to become political leaders, they will naturally want to improve the facilities of this school and the surrounding area. A higher proportion of students from this region in the civil service as a result of their superior performance could be one of the other long-term effects. Again, bias is created in favor of this region and this school, which, despite benefiting the region's future students, will hurt students from other regions or branches in other regions. With the support of political leaders and public servants, there will be long-term growth inequality because one region's human capital formation will take precedence over that of other regions. The promotion of a single dominant religion may be a third link between politics and education. Legislation requiring religion to be taught as part of the curriculum can be passed by political parties with a religious inclination. In the long run, students will develop a more orthodox perspective on religion as a result, bolstering the dominance of one religion over others. An excellent illustration of this would be the situation in India, where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has the goal of promoting Hinduism. This goal is based on "an organic view of the Indian society where the different social limbs have complementary roles within a national whole unified by Hindu cultural values" (Lars Tore Fleten, 2017). When the BJP came to power, they changed the textbooks for elementary education, particularly the history ones. Children are indoctrinated with Hindu-centered ideologies as a result of all of this. This is an early warning sign that a religious civil war could happen in the future. As previously stated, education and politics are linked in two ways.

Influence of politics on education :

The accessibility to education and financial assistance: In developing nations like India, public entities like political parties have an impact on who receives scholarships and who has access to education. According to caste and ethnicity, the government of India has established quotas and reservations for the admission of economically disadvantaged groups. These plans were meant to make social class inequality less of a problem. However, in recent years, this has been criticized due to increased competition for the limited number of seats available to students from other social classes and students admitted under the schemes who do not possess the same skill set. Despite the limited success of these affirmative action programs, political parties have continued to use education as a means of achieving their political agenda and remaining in power, hoping to win votes and political support from the lower classes. This corrupts the nature of the understudies as well as leaves out the potential understudies who might have accomplished ICT in Training.

The freedom that students and staff in the country are granted to discuss political issues outside of the campus of their educational institutions is one of the aspects of education that is most politically charged. Students who try to spread their opinions on a political issue and organize political protests have been observed to be silenced by the ruling political parties. This can be seen in the case of Kanhaiya Kumar in India in 2016, when

he was the president of the student union at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. He was arrested and accused of sedition because he didn't try to put down the student protest over the hanging of a Kashmiri separatist and didn't encourage people to use anti-India slogans. He later received bail due to a lack of evidence but the opposition criticized the ruling BJP for restricting student speech and propagating Hindu nationalist ideals³.



India's New Education Policy 2020 and Politics Involved herewith :

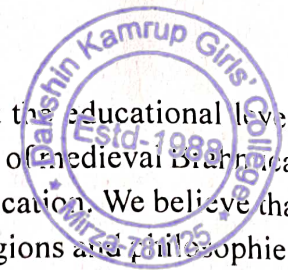
It is a historical fact that rulers have always attempted to control education. In ancient India, the educational policy of the Aryans demanded that the natives—Dasyus—learn according to the norms laid down by the former. Though the ancient Indian thinkers regarded education as an instrument that puts an ignorant person on an intellectual, progressive and virtuous path (tamaso ma jyothirgamaya—from darkness, lead me to light); (aanobhadrahkrtyovantuvishwatah—Let good thoughts come from all directions), the period between 1000 BC and 400 BC witnessed a struggle between Buddhism and Brahminism⁴. The design of the NEP 2020—5+3+4-years structure, etc.,— and catchy titles and acronyms like 'All for All', SAFAL, NISHTA, are superfluous in making an effective educational policy. What matters is the 'content' of it, not its 'form'. History and literature become easy tools in the hands of powerful rulers. We see in our twin, Pakistan, how the children, through compulsory 'Pakistan Studies' are fed with fake and hate-filled understanding of mankind and how recently, many 'Western' educated youngsters in that country have been fighting against such brain-stunting impositions.

The opposition-ruled states have opposed Modi government's New Education Policy (NEP), calling it an attempt to centralise education and questioning the reason for pushing it during the Covid-19 pandemic. Aam Aadmi Party-ruled Delhi, Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, and Trinamool Congress-run West Bengal governments have opposed the policy passed by the Cabinet on July 29. The states are now awaiting parliamentary scrutiny before they announce what parts of NEP-2020 would not be implemented in respective states⁵.

Again, In the National Education Policy 2020, language is a negative factor as there is a problematic teacher to student ratio in India, thus introducing mother languages for each subject in academic institutes is a problem. Sometimes, finding a competent teacher becomes a problem and now another challenge comes with the introduction of the NEP 2020, which is bringing study material in mother languages. It needs mention here that, ruling party plays the card of language in support of their ideology. Here comes their hidden agenda of influencing ethnic groups of the diverse India.

Conclusion and Findings :

Education in India are expected to embrace more radical views of inclusion, gender and sex education. Many of those views and practices have found their way into schools and curricula across India and probably other countries in the name of progress. This is concerning because there continues to be considerable controversy surrounding these issues in academia and society as a whole. The ideas behind these agendas may be noble as their proponents strive for a more equitable and just society. Unfortunately, radical desires for reform have often led to painful educational aberrations. Instead, it could be argued that schools should protect themselves from ideological appropriation and concentrate on their core tasks, passing on society's collective knowledge and cultural achievements and socialising children to act with self-discipline in meeting their own goals. The RSS, a right-wing organization in India that promotes Hindu ideologies, has been focusing on education to promote a Hindu-based idea of Indian nationalism. It has been placing its hardline adherents in the best



universities in the country on a consistent basis. It has also implemented changes at the educational level, changing textbooks and including classes that teach Hinduism's rituals. The philosophies of medieval Brahminical societies will be ingrained in the minds of future generations thanks to this kind of education. We believe that the orthodox way of thinking will make younger generations less tolerant of other religions and philosophies, which is contrary to the beliefs of upper caste Brahmins. Since its political faction, the BJP, won the election and formed the government, the RSS has gained more power. They have started to criticize the textbooks that are already used to teach students because they believe they portray the Indian invaders as heroes. The RSS leader has increased significantly in influence, and he was successful in persuading Penguin, the largest publisher in the world, to remove Wendy Dorniger's academic book "The Hindus: An Alternate History," which interprets sensitive issues like caste and gender in a way that goes against the RSS's plan for a hierarchical system. In addition, books have been produced and distributed in some states as a test run to convert younger generations to nationalism and hinduism. The top institutions of the country that deal with history, education, and social sciences have leaders in power who are aligned with the RSS ideology of Hindu nationalism, which is in stark contrast to the constitution's definition of Indian nationalism. This puts a lot of pressure on the government.

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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND TABOOS OF THE MISINGS OF ASSAM



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Introduction:

The word 'Taboo' derived from the Polynesian word '*tapu*' means a ban on use of certain resources. In every society taboos are connected with place, person beliefs and tradition. As MacDonald¹ states, 'historically taboos have been used to impose restrictions for social wellbeing and their legacy is passed on from one generation to another.' So, Freud² rightly observes, 'taboos symbolize key cultural values with a high level of adherence that have deep rooted social ethics.' In an ancestral worshipping society such as the Misings the religious activities revolve round a series of rituals. Ancestors are linked to their descendants by a chain of rituals, thus affirming the continuity of social relations through time.

Data and Methodology:

The research follows an analytical method of investigation within the framework of historical methodology. It also attempts to incorporate sociological and anthropological approaches to understand the subject from a wider perspective. The study is conducted using combined methods (qualitative and quantitative) of Social Sciences - their integration in appropriate methods of data collection keeping in mind the scope of the study. Both primary and secondary sources have been used in the research work. Field-based study is crucial in collecting data regarding religious rituals. Personal interviews have been conducted which form an important data base for the research. The information gathered from questionnaire will supplement the study. Oral traditions such as myths, legends, folktales, folksongs etc. have also enriched the present work. Primary sources include relevant materials from the Archives, Government Proceedings, Census Reports, Gazetteers, Statistical Handbook, Journals etc. Secondary sources include books, articles in magazines, newspapers etc. related to the study. E-resources such as e-books have also been consulted for the study.

Traditional Religious beliefs of the Misings:

Assam hosts approximately 15.64% of tribal people among the total population 3.09 crores of the state.³ The Misings who belongs to the Mongoloid stock and speaks of Tibeto-Burman language⁴ are the second largest tribal group in Assam with a population of 6,80,424.⁵ At present their inhabitation are mainly concentrated in the ten districts of Upper Assam viz; Tinsukia Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat in the southern bank of Brahmaputra River and Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Biswanath and Sonitpur districts in the Northern bank of Brahmaputra Rive.

The traditional religious philosophy of the Misings is based on polytheism and animism. In most traditional societies cosmogony myths are prevalent.⁶ Like other primitive society, the Misings have also unique myth about the creation of the universe and their repositories of Creation Myth are found in the religious verses that preserved as oral tradition and that is known as known as *Mibu Aa: bangs*.⁷ Their worldview consists of three major aspects, viz; the creation of the universe (*keyum*), existence of spirits (*Uie*) and that of the human soul (*Ya:loo*). The Misings believe that there are three worlds in the universe which include the *Regi-Regam* i.e. heaven or kingdom of Gods, the earth known as *Dong-Aamong* and the abode of spirits called *Uie-A: mong*. Myths say that the *Regi-Regam* and the *Dong-Aamong* remain within the orbit of the solar panorama whereas *Uie-A: mong* exists outside it and it is in perpetual darkness.⁸ Misings believe that the universe was created by

Se:di-Babu (Se:di, the father) and *Me:lo-Nane* (Me:lo, the mother) whom they believe to be the creator of the universe.⁹ The Misings invoke the name of their Ultimate Parents, namely, *Do:nyi Ane* (Sun Mother) and *Po:lo Abu* (Moon Father) on all important occasions. It is believed that *Do:nyi-Po:lo* sprang directly from *Se:di-Me:lo*. *Do:nyi-Po:lo* literally meaning 'Sun-Moon'. It is important to note that they don't worship *Se:di-Me:lo* and *Do:nyi-Po:lo* but instead of that they take oath and invoke their name in every ritual as they are believed to be the custodian of law and truth. They believe that the *Abotani* (*abo*: father of man, meaning father; *tani*: man) is the first man of the community.¹⁰

An ancestor worshipping community, the Misings perform various rites and rituals in their everyday lives which included both benevolent and malevolent spirits. The Misings are predominantly an agriculturist community of Assam. However, before migration to the plains of Assam, they mainly depended on hunting, foraging and shifting cultivation. They learnt the technique of cultivation in the plains of Assam.¹¹

Ali-Aye-Ligang and Taboos :

Ali-Aye-Ligang (*ali*: root, seed; *ai*: fruit; *ligang*: sowing) is the most important festival of the Misings held in spring season every year on the first Wednesday¹² of the month of *Ginmur-Polo/Phalgun* (February-March). There is also a ceremony performed at home in the early morning where the head of each family offer a few drops of rice beer in the four corners of the *meram* or hearth chanting prayers by invoking the name of their forefathers¹³ and soon after that he goes to the paddy field carrying with him a handful seeds, a sword, *A:pong* (rice beer), *Pu:rang A:pin* (boil rice wrapped in *taling* leaves) ginger, cotton threads etc. The symbolic sowing of seed is done chanting the name of their forefather i.e. *Se:di-Me:lo*, *Karsing-Kartag*, *Do:nyi-Po:lo* etc. seeking their blessings for good harvest and to witness the ritual of sowing seeds in Mother Earth.¹⁴ They observe as forbidden day and no one go to work. It is forbidden of cutting tree, fishing, plough the field and burn jungle. Female are also forbidden to do weaving activities. Apart from that egg, boil fish, oil meat curry, sour items and fruits are not allowed eat on that day. On the fifth day, *Chag:len* (end of taboo) ritual is performed. In the early morning they go for hunting or fishing in a group and whatever they get in their hunting the family perform a ritual called *Lig:len* where they arrange *A:pong*, meat, *Pu:rang A:pin* etc. to offer *Umua* (fire God) by invoking the name of *Se:di-Me:lo* and *Do:nyi-Po:lo*. In this way they end their taboos with the witness of their forefather, *Se:di-Me:lo* and *Do:nyi-Po:lo*.¹⁵

As mentioned earlier that the Misings beliefs both benevolent and malevolent spirits and according to their traditional beliefs all ill occurrences happened due to the presence of that evil spirits. To make propitiation of such evil spirits, they perform different kind of rituals in different situation.

Do:bur and Taboos:

Do:bur is one of such important propitiation ritual performed by the Misings. It is performed in the event of a bad incident that occurred in the village and blessing is sought for welfare of the entire community. The term *Do:bur* implies *Do*: means Eat and *Bur* means do fertility meaning to get fertility of mother earth.¹⁶ There are four types of *Do:bur* rituals performed by the Misings viz. *Mo:pun Do:bur*, *Raban Ko:son Do:bur*, *Burte Do:bur* and *Ko:son Do:bur*. *Mo:pun Do:bur* (*Mo*: stands soil and *pun* stands flower, meaning soil flower) is performed when there is destruction or damage of crops. The ritual is performed in a paddy field by sacrificing a black colour gilt and two or three hens, praying to *Ko:je -Yango*, (the Goddess of wealth and fertility) and other supernatural forces for protection and good harvest of their paddy field. *Raban Ko:son Do:bur* is performed to prevent suffering of the community. The *Burte Do:bur* is performed both individual family or village. The individual family is performed due to sudden incidents such as outbreak of fire, intra or inter-family fights,

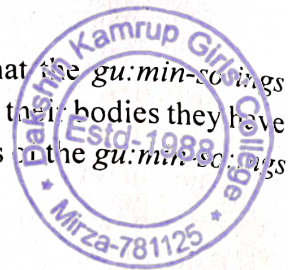
property issues, any sin committed by a member of the family or disasters like earthquake, famine, flood and draught etc. They follow very strict rules during and after the *Do:burritual*. They believe if anyone tries to violate the rules he or she may become permanently blind or deaf or any ill incident may occur to him or her. The common taboo applied in the *Do:burritual* is the complete cessation of work in the entire village for five days. Being exclusive to the village, no member of the community is allowed to move out of the village on the ritual day. In case there is an emergency, the person must move out of the village on the previous day. Bamboo sticks are erected in the boundary of the village and chicken legs or pig ears and nails are put on it indicating that no individual belonging to other villages are permitted to enter the enclosed space. In case any outsider entered the village, then the person has to stay in the village for the whole day till the ritual is completed. The women and children are debarred from attending the ritual. As such menstruation and childbirth are also considered inauspicious and the women during such periods are kept out of the village.¹⁷

Taleng Uie (Sky Spirit) and Taboos :

The Misings consider the *Taleng Uie* or *Mugling-miren* (*taleng*: up, heavenly; *uie*: spirit, ritual), translated as the Sky Spirits to be the most powerful among the invisible spirits. It represents air, storm, thunder, lightning, cloud, cyclone etc. are feared since they can harm and destroy the universe.¹⁸ The rituals are elaborate and not performed inside the house. A temporary house is made by bamboo and banana leaf. The items required for performing the ritual include a black gilt for mother earth, ten hens as well as rooster of various different colours, rice, two types of rice beer viz; *nogin* and *poro apong*, seven different items specially banana, rice flour, *Chira* (fried rice) and *banko* (*solanum indicum*) along with various leafs such as *ombe*, *takuk*, *yayyo*, *dermianne*, *tajik* etc. The *Mibu* who is the traditional priest of the Misings officiates in the function. At first the black gilt is sacrificed to *A:mong ane* (mother earth), followed by the hens and rooster for the heavenly deities. The blood of the sacrificed animals is sprayed around the place of worship. After preparing all the items, it is placed in a particular manner under the temporary symbolic house and offered to the deities. In case the prepared food is in excess, it is kept under a tree or any open space for consumption of birds and animals. The *taleng uie* is performed with very strict manner and there are lots of taboos related with this. First of all the *Bhakats* who are invited for the ritual should be pair. A widower or widow cannot participate as a *Bhakat* in the ritual. Menstruation and childbirth women are considered inauspicious and they are not allowed to participate in the ritual. Round shape vegetables like bottle gourd cannot be cooked in the ritual. The excess cooked items cannot bring to home; therefore remaining foods are kept under a tree or any open space for consumption of birds and animals. After the performance of the ritual the family member cannot cross river and travel in bus or other vehicles, attend others rituals, restriction in the use of certain leafy vegetables and thorny fruit vegetables specially pumpkin, honey, garlic, coriander etc. until the new moon is seen. The *Ro:lentsunam* ritual is performed when the new moon is seen and soon after this all the restrictions are lifted from the family.¹⁹

Urom-Posum (ancestor worship) and Taboos :

Ancestor worship is an important element in the traditional religious beliefs of the Misings. According to their traditional belief the departed *ya:lo* reside at *uie a:mong* (land of spirit) for period of five generation from where they occasionally visit their near and dear one. The departed forefathers are considered as benevolent spirits and they protect the family from the all ill spirits. So, they worship and propitiate them at regular intervals in order to ensure the well-being of the household. This ritual is performed in every 5 years. As a propitiation measure to ward off from these spirits a function called *urom-to:sag* is done in advance with a pig and when the pig is fully grown into boar the actual *urom-posum* is performed. The head of the family sacrifices the boar invoking the name of their forefather for blessing and well being of the whole family. There are certain taboos related with this ritual. Pumpkin cannot be used in this ritual. The meat of the boar cannot share



with any other person who is not belonging to the family three. There is a belief that the *gu:min-so:ings* (ancestor spirits) of the family enter into the bodies of the family members and through their bodies they have the meat of the boar. So that the meat of the boar do not share with outsider as the spirits of the *gu:min-so:ings* of the family cannot enter into the bodies which are not belonging to the family.²⁰

Conclusion :

The ancestor worship along with the forces of nature is the central religious beliefs to Mising. In their worldview the universe was created by *Se:di-Babu* (*Se:di*: father) and *Me:lo-Nane* (*Me:lo*: mother) who occupies the highest place in the pantheon and they believe that the *Do:nyi-Po:lo* (Sun-Moon) is the visible form of *Se:di-Me:lo*. The traditional belief system is based on animism and the spirits are worshipped throughout the year to seek blessing, ward off evil, or cure serious illnesses. The members of the community are continuously reminded of the kinship bonds through the many rituals conducted at both private and the community levels, viz; at home or in the village which are officiated by priests called *Mibus*. Clans and lineages played a significant part in the Mising society thereby sustaining the cult of ancestral worship. Each member of the clan group is drawn together for collective observance of ancestral rituals which gives the members of the clan group a sense of emotional security thereby reinforcing the internal solidarity of the group. However, the plain cultures of Assam have brought about significant changes in the Mising society in all aspect of their life. The changes that came about in their religious outlook and traditional habits and customs such as dress, food-habits, mortuary practices, festivals etc. was the result interaction of the Misings with people of Neo-Vaisnavism which was propagated by Sankaradeva and his disciples. Their traditional deities and festivals lost some importance when a large section of the Misings was converted to Neo-vaishnava. The place of *Mibu* is taken by *Sadhu Bura* or *Hattulas* who are directly or indirectly learnt the knowledge of hymns from the *Gossains* of Satras or Brahmanical Priest. Therefore they invoke the name of Ram, Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva etc along with that of the traditional deities during the practice of religious rituals. The influence of Brahmanical rituals are clearly visible in the every religious rituals like use of earthen lamp, *haanti-paani* (sacred water for purification), *tamul-pan* (betel-nut), *mah-prasad*²¹, chanting *Harinaam*, donation of cow, clothes, utensil etc. to the priest, forbidden of beef² etc. Non-traditional ritual like *Sat-jonia*, (Seven Bhakats) *No-jonia* (Nine Bhakats), and celebration of *Jnamastami*, *Shivaratri*, birth and death anniversary of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, Diwali, Lakhi Puja, Kali Puja, Durga Puja etc. become part and parcel of their religious life. Recently, the socio-religious life of the Misings witnesses more changes due to conversion to other religions such as Christianity, Anukul Thakur or Satsanga, Krishnaguru etc. As a result religious ritualistic practices as well as other social aspects have seen acculturation due to the presence of the alien religions.

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 18. Personal interview with Mibu Hemo Doley, *op. cit.*
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. Personal interview with Mibu Hemo Doley, *op. cit.*
 21. An offering made to Hindu deities, usually edible items such as *kheer* (preparation of rice and milk; a kind of rice pudding) which are distributed to the devotees after the ritual.

Sacred Groves, Cultural Ecosystems and Conservation



Edited by

Rena Laisram

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The unprecedented pandemic times which created a global health crisis like never before has had a deep impact on the way we conceive the world. The theme of this book finds immense relevance in the context of biodiversity conservation and Sustainable Development Goals.

This work is a collaborative effort of so many people who have faced the challenges of uncertain times and emerged stronger in their own ways. My deepest gratitude to all of them.

Rena Laisram

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ABBREVIATIONS

FSI: Forest Survey of India
GFA: Gumpa Forest Areas
IJTK: Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge
ISFR: India State of Forest Report
ICCA: Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas
ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature
NCMM: National Commission for Museums and Monuments
NEC: North Eastern Council
NTFP: Non-Timber Forest Products
SFR: State of Forest Report
SGS: Sacred Groves
TFAP: Tanzania Forestry Action Plan–North Pare
TNA: Tanzania National Archives
TKS: Traditional Knowledge Systems
TNT: The Northeast Today
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



INTRODUCTION

RENA LAISRAM

Concept and Context

Ecosystem degradation represents one of the major global concerns which is threatening human well-being and biodiversity as a whole. Although nature worship has been integral to religious belief systems around the world, forest covers have been shrinking at an alarming rate due to disregard for indigenous cultures and encroachments in the name of development. *Sacred Natural Sites* are part of a broader set of cultural values that different social groups, traditions, beliefs or value systems attach to places and which 'fulfil humankind's need to understand, and connect in meaningful ways, to the environment of its origin and to nature' (Putney 2005, 132). The close relationship between the divine world and the natural environment is traced to Graeco-Roman antiquity which is attested by textual and material evidence (Caroll 2017, 3). The terms *alsos* and *temenos* were used in Greek literature to refer to a terrain set aside for a divinity (Barnett 2007). Natural sacred sites are found in all the continents except Antarctica (Bhagwat and Rutte 2006), Africa and Asia being home to a large number of sacred groves. The size of sacred groves may range from a few trees to dense forests of hundreds of hectares. Here, it is crucial to distinguish between a single tree being regarded as sacred, such as the famous oak of Zeus at Dodona, in north-western Greece (Frazer 1925), and a sacred grove, which refers to a cluster of trees that are close together and accorded sacrality. The type of evidence available includes texts, visual representations, and material remains.

Hughes and Chandran (1998) define sacred groves as...

".... segments of landscape containing vegetation, life forms and geographical features, delimited and protected by human societies under the belief that to keep them in a relatively undisturbed state is expression of an important relationship of humans with the divine or with nature."

Sacred groves are relatively undisturbed tracks of virgin forests with often very old trees and are categorised according to the deity, shrine, burial or cremation grounds associated with it. In tribal-based societies, sacred groves provide spaces for veneration of ancestors through a chain of rituals. However, irrespective of particular belief systems, sacred sites are recognised as community-based symbols of spiritual and socio-economic values. Myths and taboos have attempted to explain the relation between the spiritual and the human world. A storehouse of biodiversity, such sacred spaces are protected by the communities since their ethnic history is closely connected to it through mythological traditions. Women and men experience sacred space differently and often play contrasting roles within the spaces. It must be noted that most of the world's religions have promoted a patriarchal structure of male authority and female subordination, and the liturgical practices and rituals are performed by male functionaries. However, the Okinawas in Japan offer an example of an indigenous religion where women lead the official mainstream religion of the society (Sered, 1999). Religion's central role in consolidating gender difference and inequality was recognized, explored and critiqued by 19th century feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (*The Woman's Bible*, 1999). Given the enormous influence of religion in human affairs, the continued exclusion of women's roles of religion is bound to reflect negatively on Sustainable Development Goals.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP, 2007) addresses the protection and recognition of sacred natural sites. There are currently thirty-six biodiversity hotspots worldwide with a unique set of diverse ecosystems that are home to more than 2 billion people. Conservation experts and ecologists have taken increasing interests in these sites, and acknowledged 'the ability of traditional societies to preserve biodiversity through their knowledge and rituals' (L'Homme 1998, 10). The United Nations declared 2010 as *The Year of Biodiversity*, bringing to focus the value of biodiversity and urgent need for action. The two key organisations that play a crucial role in addressing indigenous concerns of such invaluable sites are: *International Union for the Conservation of Nature* (IUCN) working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, and *International Council on Monuments and Sites* (ICOMOS) which focuses on the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places. The need to protect sacred groves is agreed upon, but the question is: what urgent steps are being taken by individuals, governmental and non-governmental organisations to safeguard the endangered environment?

Conserving Sacred Groves: An Interdisciplinary Approach

This volume addresses cultural and conservation aspects of sacred groves threatened by habitat loss through an in-depth study of representative samples from Africa and Asia. Based on the long-term research of the contributing authors, the nine chapters reflect a continuous process of redefining the sacred grove within an interdisciplinary framework grounded on existing literature and ethnographic field research. In analysing the various dimensions of the sacred sites, the researchers have also collected information through interview and questionnaire methods. The addition of photographs, tables, and figures have enriched the subject under discussion. Biodiversity hotspots around the globe are homes to culture-specific vegetation, which offers a huge scope for scientific research. The highlight of the discourse is the complex interactions and negotiations between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' - which brings center-stage the subject of sacred status that communities have given to nature.

The book is organised in two parts, viz.,

Part I: Culture, Nature and the Sacred;

Part II: Sacred Ecology and Sustainable Development.

Chapter I: Sacred Groves of the Karbis in Religio-Cultural Perspective by Laxmi Hansepi, examines the centrality of sacred groves in Karbi society and attempts to gain insights into the changing dynamics of interface between nature and culture. It is worthwhile to mention that culture is understood as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The sacred groves of Karbi Anglong district (undivided), located in Assam, India exemplify the role taken by communities in preserving natural resources that are consistent with Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) globally. The Karbis as one of the largest ethnic groups in Assam represent one of the many Indo-Mongoloid groups of people whose worldview centres around ancestor worship. The community shares a close connection with the ecosystem culturally and/or because of livelihood needs. Animistic belief system is manifest in the living tradition which is reinforced through various rituals performed throughout the year. All members of the clans partake the feasts and revive their bonds of kinship. The myths and taboos ensure that the sacred groves are protected and maintained. The study reveals that the community is the major decision maker in management and conservation of



the natural resources. Therefore, the community-conserved areas thrive on a symbiotic relationship between nature and culture.

In **Chapter II: Ritual Practices and Nature Conservation among the Misings of Assam**, Ripun Doley discusses the Mising religious belief system in the context of ritual observances and conservation of nature. Ritual as a component of culture is crucial to the sustenance of social organisations among ethnic groups. The importance of rituals in religious activities have been explored by anthropologists such as Victor Turner, who defined 'ritual' to mean 'prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having references to belief in mythical beings or powers.' Prescribed ways of carrying on religious acts and procedures, ways of worshipping, praying, chanting, sacrificing, making offerings etc., are practiced in rituals. Ritual is an inevitable component of culture, extending from the large-scale social and political processes to the most intimate aspects of self-experience. The Misings of Assam follow social norms which can be divided into four categories, viz., beliefs, rituals, superstitions, and taboos. Taboo is a ritual prohibition that is rooted in specific cultures. It is through the practise of these customs that the community has helped to maintain the sacred sites as repositories of traditional knowledge systems. The traditional priests also play a key role not only in officiating as priests, but also as healers or medicine - men as the indigenous method of curing diseases has been known to them and handed down from generation to generation.

Chapter III: Of Groves and the Goddess: Women, Ecology, and Sacredness by Sakti Sekhar Dash, analyses the complex dynamics between human community, religion, socio-cultural beliefs, and ecology. It examines the role of groves and the creation of ecological sacredness which coincides with the emergence of the cults of the *magna mater*, celebrated as the Great Goddess of the Earth.

Rosy Yumnam explores textual knowledge to understand nature and culture in **Chapter IV: The Tunes from the Sacred Groves: An Ecocritical Reading of Hijan Hirao**. Ecocriticism is one of the crucial recent research trends in the field of cultural and literary studies. The main aim and concern of ecocriticism is to explore the artistic and creative power of literature and to relate it to the environment in the present times. Relatedly, cultural ecology is an approach of ecocriticism which aims to unify various cultures of knowledge across diverse disciplines and sub-disciplines. This chapter seeks to examine the ecocritical elements in *Hijan Hirao*, a folk song of Manipur in North-East India. The framework of cultural ecology is explored