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Amazing Andamans and North-East India
A Panoramic View of States, Societies and Culture -
Pages from the Diary of an English Language Teacher

Vijay Kumar Sunwani, Ph.D.

AMAZING ANDAMANS AND NORTH-EAST INDIA A PANORAMIC VIEW OF STATES, SOCIETIES AND CULTURES

Vijay Kumar Sunwani, Ph.D.

Introduction

Having lived and worked actively for nearly quarter century in Eastern India it is time now to raise a paean to the states particularly of North East India, which has been my playfield, in academic, educational and at times even administrative or as purely historical concerns. Never did I commit the mistake of mixing pleasure with work, taking the family with me on official tours. Mix the two and you enjoy neither. As Robert Frost says, good fences make good neighbours. In the same sense, good boundaries between work and pleasure, between academics and pleasure, make for a heady combination. Bruce Springstein sang soulfully of *Romancing the Stone* after having been *Born in the USA*, and so I thought I could do the same, raising a toast to the states of the north east, comprising Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.

An aside is for the union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

THE NORTH EAST

India's Northeast, a region of mystic splendour and rich cultural heritage, spreads over a vast area. It is characterized by varied habitat, heavy rainfall, extremely rich bio diversity, mountains and hills, high seismic activity and a drainage pattern marked by lateral valleys in the north and transverse valleys in the south, dissected by major rivers.

Travel to any of these states is some experience. You are lucky if the plane is on time, if it takes off, and you land at your destination without a hitch and on the scheduled time, or if your plane lands on a destination not what you planned for. North East India is a land of Blue Mountains, green valleys and red rivers. Nestled in the eastern Himalayas, this region is abundant in nature's beauty, wild life, flora and fauna and colourful people

Located in the Northeastern most corner of India, this region has 4, 500 km long international border with five foreign countries - Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, and Nepal. That makes a generous 29 % border-states with the neighbouring countries. The international borders already are spaces of cooperation, though the confrontation part catches the media's attention once too often. The whole north eastern region is connected with the rest of the country by a tenuous 22 kilometre land corridor through Siliguri in the state of West Bengal - a link that is often referred to as the 'Chicken's Neck'.

Comprising only 8 per cent of the country's geographical area, Northeast is home to nearly 40 lakh people, 3.80 per cent of the country's population. It accounts for a density of 149 persons per sq km., much less than the national population density of 324. Assam is the most highly populated state in the North East and Sikkim the least. Mizoram has the highest literacy rate of 88.49 in the entire North East and Arunachal Pradesh the least with a literacy rate of 54.74. Incidentally, Mizoram is the second most literate state in the country, after Kerala.

Mizoram also ranks highest among the Northeastern States in the human resource development index. Sikkim has the highest incidence of poverty in the region.

There are differences among these states with respect to their resource endowments, levels of industrialization, as well as infrastructure facilities. The economy of all these states is comparatively underdeveloped and primarily agrarian with not too strong industrial sectors and inflated service sectors. The industrial sector has mainly developed around tea, oil, timber in Assam and mining saw mills and plywood factories in other parts of the region.

The government is giving special assistance with the boom in recent technology to upgrade and expand infrastructure. As Tony Howard has said, "If India was the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire; the remote North east of that country is its hidden jewel." It needs to take on the need to tackle terrorism, militancy, and insurgency as a matter of national priority. Territorial integrity of existing states is to be maintained.

Developments and Technologies for N.E. Region

Several studies have been made on investment potentiality of the North Eastern Region where suggestions for several viable industries for the region have been made based on its resources. Organisations like Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Assam Productivity Council (APC) & Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) have developed quite a number of viable technologies as well as project profiles for the region. They have suggested Food & Agro based technologies, technologies on Cultivation & Processing of Economic Plants, Leather and Animal waste based technologies. The North Eastern Region has a vast potential to become an important player in the processed food sector.

Therefore, there is requirement of technologies for post harvest processing and production of useful products. CSIR is developing technologies for the storage and preservation of resources and their processing to make value added products as well as to meet substantial needs. A number of CSIR laboratories contribute in this area, with the Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore playing a major role. The technologies imply establishments of small-scale units, which need raw materials like cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, oilseeds, spices, condiments, besides meat, fish and poultry. There is an increase in demand of natural plant materials for use in the manufacture of drugs, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, food flavour, perfumes and other industrial products. For these purpose CSIR has developed technologies for cultivation and processing of economic plants. In case of Leather and Animal waste based technologies, the Central Leather Research Institute, Chennai has developed technologies for wet rendering, flaying, preservation, de-hairing and tanning of special leather, preparation of value added products from animal residues and improved tools for artisans. In the field of construction technologies for building materials, components and systems, CSIR laboratories have been making efforts to develop innovative construction materials, components and systems that are

cost effective, acceptable and appropriate to the climatic conditions of the region. These technologies focus on materials of higher quality, substitutes for scarce materials and items based on wastes. CSIR has some good technologies to offer to the rural artisans for upgrading their skills and producing new crafts to increase their earning capacity. While selecting the projects, consideration has been given to resource availability, easy accessibility of raw materials, technology levels, quantum of investment and market potential. The technological inputs required for products/process development relate to resource availability, processes, machinery requirements, as well as addresses for plant and machinery suppliers.

Shall we then begin with the aside?

ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

My first visit to the Andamans was in the early eighties where I had gone to conduct an inservice program in the teaching of English. It was a sight to behold when the captain lowered the aircraft so that we could have a first glimpse of the islands in the Bay of Bengal. Enthralling, to say the least considering that this was for the first time I had seen so much water with land mass in between. Airport, a small one and we went to fresh up at The Megapode. We then were driven to the Technical Teachers' Training Institute to begin the program - in all enthusiasm, on many topics of ELT as could be covered in a span of seven days. The facilities provided were good, the response from the participants enthusiastic. What was surprising that I ran into persons whom I had taught earlier, then my colleague ran into his old English teacher who had led him through the maze of English. Kind of *The Return of the Native*.

Evening we sat on the lawns of the hotel to savour the sea. Bulbs twinkling from the anchored ships. There was this big navy vessel that instantly reminded me of Coleridge.

Painted ship on a painted ocean.

*Water, water everywhere
But not a drop to drink*

The food served was excellent, visitors aplenty each with its own description of A & N and the places they planned to take us, besides talking shop of the difficulties in ELT, the diversity of languages in the islands. Textbooks, supplementary readers, the newspaper *Andaman Telegraph* made as much part of the conversation as did Aberdeen Bazaar, Ross Island, Chatham Island, Cellular Jail and the like. On the Sunday, that we got in between we took a ride in their city bus; to be precise, in their big boat ferrying people to nearby islands. Our man in A & N asked him to take the boat further into the high seas which he did to my immense thrill. And the water did look black because of the vegetation and the corals.

Geography

There are over 572 islands in the territory, of which only 38 are inhabited. Most of the islands, 550 are in the Andamans group, 26 of which are inhabited. The smaller Nicobars comprise 22 main islands (12 inhabited). The Ten Degree Channel 150 kms. wide, separates the Andamans and Nicobars. The total area of the Andaman Islands is some 6,408 square kms. That of the Nicobar Islands approximately 1,841 square kms.

As a Union Territory, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is under the direct control of the Indian Head of State. A Lt. Governor administers the territory.

The territory is divided into two districts for administrative purposes. These are the Andaman district and Nicobar district, responsible for their respective island groups. In turn, the two districts are further sub-divided into administrative entities known as tehsils.

Andaman district —

Mayabunder subdivision:

Diglipur tehsil, Mayabunder tehsil and Rangat tehsil

South Andaman subdivision:

Port Blair tehsil and Ferrargunj tehsil

Nicobar district —

Nancowry subdivision: Nancowry tehsil

Car Nicobar subdivision

Nancowry tehsil covers all of the Nicobars except for Car Nicobar; it has two administrative centres, one on Kamorta and the other at Campbell Bay.

Languages

Formed on 11 January 1956 with its capital at Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands has official languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Telugu, Punjabi, Tamil, Nicobarese and English. The total literacy rate is 81.3%. Of this, 86.3% are for males, and 75.2 for females.

The Nicobarese languages form an isolated group of six closely related Mon-Khmer languages from the Austro-Asiatic language family, which are spoken by the indigenous inhabitants of the Nicobar Islands. They have about 30,000 speakers (22,100 native). The majority of Nicobarese speakers use the Car language.

The morphological similarities between Nicobarese languages and Austronesian languages have been used to help support the Austric hypothesis. These languages are Chaura, Teressa, Bompoka, Southern Nicobarese (dialects: Condul, Great Nicobar, Little Nicobar, Milo, Sambelong, Tafwap), Central Nicobarese dialects: Kamorta, Katchal, Nancowry, Trinkut, and Shom Peng.

The Captain's Table

On our next visit, having become familiar with the fare they wanted, after completion of the work a party was arranged for us on one of the huge ships. It appeared to me as if it was in the middle of the ocean. Whatever could be given in any five star restaurants was available. Pedantic to mention that The Captain's Table is a place for only the privileged on the ship. With the taste of ice cream still on our lips, the salty waters which touched our hands and then the lips made us the mainlanders and the islanders. The islanders took the sea as routine; we put an arm in the seawaters for the feel. They generally refer to people from the mainland as mainlanders, and to themselves as islanders. It is their graciousness that they think the mainlanders are more

knowledgeable than their own selves. Multicultural courtesy. Beforehand they cautioned us to steady our feet on the jetty or you would plunge in for a sea bath. Also, do not dip your hand in the waters near Corbyn's Cove where we plan to take you tomorrow. Further, if you have a bandaged finger, the visit is off. Why? I asked in consternation. They told me if by chance, you dip that finger in the water the sharks will be there to greet you at the Cove as they smell a drop of blood 5 kilometres away which is lure enough for them. Fortunately, nothing of that kind happened and we continued our visits whenever there was a demand from their administration for our program in ELT.

Sea surfing

The November 2004 visit was a great one. We had gone to conduct a program in English requested for by the A & N administration. The team also included my faculty members of social sciences for they too had been requested for a similar program. We were quite at ease and with the car at our disposal, we could move around freely. My courage failed me, two heart conditions, but my colleagues including the courageous girl Shatarupa Palit went sea surfing, speed boat riding and shouted in glee as the boat lurched. Those ten minutes they said were memorable. Over the years the *son et lumiere* show at Cellular Jail had been installed. Taking the old tree that had weathered over all these years, the program narrated the full freedom struggle, the treatment to incarcerated prisoners and culminated on India's Independence with Nehru's, " .. tryst with destiny..." Never have I seen the crowd after a program leave their seats in such hushed silence. The silence said it all.

Ross Island was a trip with the participants. Learning and teaching English through visits. The place has been preserved as it is, as the Britishers used to live and command Port Blair and other islands from this perch. Much like Quinetra in Syria, which did the retreating Israelis bomb. New Quinetra rehabilitates the survivors now.

And of course the usual visits to and by the hosts, the Education Secretary, the Principal, State Institute of Education, old students, guest lectures at the District Institute of Education and Training at Garacharma, Bamboo Flat island for an evening's shopping picking up trinkets. We promised to return with similar zeal for the next program. The welcome had been joyful, our departure boisterous with many officials to see us off, our bags loaded with sea shells, artefacts. Been there, seen the video, and bought the T-shirt.

Tsunami Relief

Came March 2005 and volunteers were required for the Education and Relief Programme NCERT and RIE planned for the Tsunami affected. Mine was the first hand to go up. As team leader. Then others joined me both from our own Institute and its attached DM School. We selected volunteers from among the trainees who had come for the BEd, MEd., PGDC, and BScBEd course.

This time I put the diamonds in the girl's eyes. Yes, I mean the airhostess's eyes. I was at Hyderabad for a meeting and from there I had to proceed directly to Port Blair for 10 days. My flight should have been the first to leave. All my colleagues left. Their flights were on time. Mine had to be delayed. Finally arrived at Kolkata at 230 am. No way to steal forty winks. Time to get ready to catch the 5.30 am flight to Port Blair, which I did in the best manner possible. Spruced myself up and checked in. Thanks they said for the flights were going vacant. A snowstorm fills all the movie halls in the USA, call for an uninitiated, unheard of tsunami in the

Indian Ocean and you get the seats, you can own the airlines as well! I opened my eyes only when the plane touched down.

I had ascertained over the phone that work for the tsunami was being executed as planned by me, my colleagues and students with guidance from the Principal, Prof. K. Dorasami.. The 1999 super cyclone of Orissa had prepared us for the work but the tsunami work was more focused, demanding and had to be result oriented. My main concern was to put the smile back into the frightened faces, glitter in the still moist eyes. Leela Hanif Varghese and Jeetendra Gupta, are profiles of courage, who refused to move from Nicobar which had been the worst affected. They had already made rapid strides in the hearts of the people and their children by their love, affection, sympathy after they rescued many of them and stood by them through the seven hours that shook the world on 26 December 2004.

Over the years

The Andaman & Nicobar Islands is a union territory. Informally its name is abbreviated to A & N Islands. Located in the Indian Ocean in the southern reaches of the Bay of Bengal it comprises of two island groups - the Andaman islands and the Nicobar islands - which separate the Andaman Sea to the east from the Indian Ocean. The name *Andaman* presumably comes from *Handuman*, which is Malay for the Hindu god Hanuman. The name *Nicobar* is Malay for *land of the naked*.

First inhabitants

The Andaman and Nicobar islands have been inhabited for several thousand years, at the very least. The earliest archaeological evidence yet documented goes back some 2200 years; however, the indications from genetic, cultural and linguistic studies point to habitations going back 30,000 to 60,000 years, well into the middle paleolithic age. In the Andaman Islands, the various Andamanese peoples maintained their separated existence through the vast majority of this time, diversifying into distinct linguistic, cultural and territorial groups. By the 1850s when they first came into sustained contact by outside groups, the indigenous peoples of the Andamans were the Great andamanese, who collectively represented at least 10 distinct sub-groups and languages; the Jarawa,; the Jangil (or *Rutland Jarawa*); the Onge, and the Sentinelese (most isolate of all the groups).

In total, these peoples numbered around 7,000 at the time of these first encounters. As the numbers of settlers from the mainland increased (at first mostly prisoners and involuntary indentured labourers, later purposely recruited farmers), these indigenous peoples lost territory and numbers in the face of land encroachment and the effects of various epidemic diseases. The Jangil and most of the Great Andamanese groups soon became extinct; presently there remain only approximately 400-450 indigenous Andamanese, the Jarawa and Sentinelese in particular maintaining a steadfast independence and refusing most attempts at contact.

The indigenous peoples of the Nicobars (unrelated to the Andamanese) have a similarly isolated and lengthy association with the islands. There are two main groups:

the Nicobarese, or *Nicobari*, living throughout many of the islands; and the Shompen, restricted to the interior of Great Nicobar..

The islands provided a temporary maritime base for ships of the Marathas in the 17th century. The legendary privateer and Admiral Kanhoji Angre made shipping routes with a base in these islands.

The setting up of Kalapani

After an initial attempt to set up a colony in the islands by the British was abandoned after only a few years (1789 - 1796), a second attempt from 1858 proved to be more permanent. The primary purpose was to set up a penal colony for dissenters and independence fighters from the Indian subcontinent. The British used the islands as an isolated prison for members of the Indian independence movement. The mode of imprisonment was called Kalapani. The Cellular Jail in Port Blair was regarded as the “Siberia” of British India.

The British continued their occupancy until the Japanese took over during World War II. The islands were nominally put under the authority of the Arzi Hukumate Azad Hind of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Netaji visited the islands during the war, and renamed them as “Shaheed” (Martyr) and “Swaraj” (Self-rule).

Andamans and Nicobar Islands became an Indian Union Territory (UT) in 1950.

Yesterday

The coasts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were devastated by a 10-metre high tsunami following the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake. Thousands of people and livestock were killed on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. While newer settlers of the islands suffered the greatest casualties from the tsunami, most of the aboriginal people survived because oral traditions passed down from generations ago warned them to evacuate from huge waves that follow large earthquakes.

The graveyard silence was deafening in comparison to my recent visit of Nov. 2004. The zeal to live surpasses everything and people wanted to smile. It was amazing to look at teachers who had lost everything, *everything*, dressed in charity clothes and still smiling and wanting to talk, wanted to know of the mainland.

People were afraid to look at the sea, forget about venturing into it again. Many people cannot erase the images of the waves destroying their family or property. A nightmare keeps haunting them. The small boats shake; the ten-minute trip to Ross Island becomes a hazard. Bamboo Flat is inundated and the shops on the sea front are a wreck. Asia’s largest timber mill, the Chatham Saw Mill, now damaged. And Viper Island, so named after the vessel *Viper* in which the Britishers first arrived in 1789 to establish a penal settlement.

We also paid a visit to local places such as the Cellular Jail, Corbyn’s Cove, Science Centre. Sippighat Farm was totally submerged with sea water. We also went to Junglighat, Sports Complex, Haddo Jetty, Aberdeen Jetty, and Wandoor to get some idea of the devastation that had been caused. The damage was very much less in Port Blair; it was apparent that it would be much worse in Car Nicobar. Students also liked this idyllic town. They got a general idea of the places affected by tsunami. They also saw places of historical interest. Tears were aflow from many an eye after seeing the sound and light show at the Cellular Jail which stands as a sentinel to our freedom struggle. Andaman was made a penal settlement by the British, and Indian freedom fighters were transported for life in this jail, built in 1906.

The Relief and Education Programme of RIE, Bhubaneswar, reflected not so much profiles of courage but perhaps profiles of defiance: of a stubbornness to tackle the injustice that Mother Nature had handed out in equal measure to everyone – irrespective of religion, riches and rank. The RIE’s Tsunami Relief and Education efforts showcased the “inherent selflessness of people.” The commitment and dedication to a people lost in trauma shows that not all is lost, those talking of erosion of values have just to look around. In happier times, we may put some values on hold, but they do come cascading down when needed most. Everyone in whatever manner tries to placate ruffled feathers, wipe a tear, miss a meal, exchange smiles to make the affected realize that life has to continue, the show must go on.

During the onslaught of the tsunami, a child was born to a young couple.
Baby Tsunami (now a chubby 3) is the ultimate symbol of life.

And as if to put the icing on the chocolate cake the Refresher Course in PGTs in English of A&N islands was wholly handled by my two colleagues last year 2006, Shatarupa Palit and Sandhya Rani Sahoo. They did an admirable job, it was reported by Shri R. Dev Das, Principal, State Institute of Education, Port Blair. Diffident at first since they were going without a male companion, this venturesome experiment has given them new unbounded courage and confidence. Was it not Margaret Thatcher who said that ask a man to do the planning, but if you want to get the work done put a woman behind it. Here we had two.

ASSAM

Located just below the eastern Himalayan foothills, Assam is surrounded by other northeastern states Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, West Bengal, and Meghalaya. It forms the gateway to the northeastern states. Assam shares its international borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan. Assam was formed on 26 January 1950.

T-shaped, the state consists of the northern Brahmaputra valley, the middle Karbi, Cachar hills, and the southern Barak Valley. It experiences heavy rainfall between March and September, with very high humidity in the summer months. The temperatures are generally mild, never extreme during any season. High rainfall, deforestation, and other factors have resulted in annual floods that cause widespread loss of life, livelihood and property. An earthquake prone region, Assam has experienced two large earthquakes: 1897 (8.1 on the Richter scale) and 1950 (8.6). Thunderstorms known as Bordoichilla are a frequent occurrence during the summer afternoons beginning middle May. Assam is very rich in vegetation, forests and wildlife. Timber was once a lucrative business. The region also has a number of reserved forests, and one of them, Kaziranga, is the home of the rare Indian Rhinoceros. The state produces a lot of bamboo, although the bamboo industry is still nascent. The wildlife, forests and flora, rivers and waterways, have great natural beauty.

With its capital at Dispur, its largest city and commercial capital is Guwahati, which takes its name from being a commercial centre for guwa, meaning betel nut, or the more popular *tambul*. Assam is divided into 23 districts. The benefits of development in Assam are evenly spread. It has a larger representation of leadership at regional levels and relative gender equality.

Languages

Assamese, Bengali, Karbi, and Bodo are the official languages of the state. Linguistically modern Assamese traces its roots to eastern Magadhan Prakrit, with strong influences from the Tibeto-Burman and Mon-Khmer languages that are spoken by ethnic groups in the region. Bodo is a Tibeto-Burman language. Sylheti is the dominant language in the Barak valley. Nepali and Hindi are other important languages spoken in the state.

Assam is a multiethnic society. In 1961, the Government of Assam passed a legislature making the usage of Assamese language compulsory. Different communities in Assam speak forty-five different languages. The state is the meeting place of three major language families: Austroasiatic (5), Sino-Tibetan (24) and Indo-European (12). They have a problem pronouncing the 'r' sound. Three of the spoken languages do not fall in these families. There is a high degree of bilingualism.

Out of a total literacy rate of 62.3%, literate males are 71.3%; female literacy rate is 54.5%. The number of ethnic communities in the state is very large. There are 115 communities. Of these 79 (69%) identify themselves regionally, 22 (19%) identify themselves locally, and 3 communities identify themselves transnationally. There are 42485 schools 358 colleges and 7 universities. There are 16 Scheduled Castes and 23 Scheduled tribes constituting 7.40 and 12.82 per cent respectively of the state's population.

Culture

Assamese culture is a rich conglomerate of ethnic practices and assimilated beliefs. When the Ahoms entered the region in 1228, they had their own cultural features. Over the six centuries of their rule, they adopted the local language, religion and cultural customs, and embellished it with their own to such an extent that it puts them apart from medieval rulers of India. This is one reason why Assamese culture is so rich in heritage and values.

Old?

The land corresponds with a world of contrast and excitement, something celestial and amazing. It is a *Magic Land*, a *Green Paradise*. Assam has a history dating back to the *Vedic* ages. During *Mahabharata* age, it was known as *Pragjyotish* (Land of Eastern Light). In the *Puranas* and *Tantras*, Assam was referred to as *Kamrupa*- the land where *Kamadeva*, the God of Love, was reborn. It was during the Varmana dynasty that Assam was chronicled in the *Si-Yuki*, the famed travelogue of Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim. After the decline of the Kamarupa kingdom in the 12 century, Shan people, who called themselves Tai, but who were called Ahoms by the others, ruled the land that included a part of the old Kamarupa kingdom and regions to the east of it. This kingdom lasted for nearly 600 years. Assam then became part of British India in 1826 and then a constituent state of Independent India. A large number of tribal groups peoples the state; major among them being the Boro-Kacharis, the Deori, the Misings, the Dimassas, the Karbis, the Lalungs, the Rabhas.

While the Shan invaders called themselves Tai, the indigenous people of the area generally referred to them as *Āsām*, *Āsam* and sometimes as *Acam*. The modern Assamese word *Āhom* by which the Tai people were known is derived from *Āsām* or *Āsam*. The epithet applied to the Shan conquerors was subsequently transferred to the country over which they ruled and thus the name *Kāmarūpa* was replaced by *Āsām*, which ultimately took the Sanskritized form *Asama*, meaning "unequalled, peerless or uneven". The state has a reputation for warm hospitality. People are homely, charming and openhearted. The small and serene hilly villages shelter the lovely people, warm, fascinating, and as colourful as the land itself.

Assam and Early documented mentions

The name Assam is of relatively recent origin. One of the first references comes from Thomas Bowrey in 1663 about Mir Jumla's death: "They lost the best of Nabobs, the Kingdome of Acham. Tavernier's "Travels in India", of 1676 uses the spelling "Assen" for Assam. The official chronicler of Mir Jumla too calls the place "Asam". Most scholars accept that the first known mention of the word Assam today is in a stanza from the Bhagavad Puran composed in this region about the middle of the 16th century. From 1826, "Assam" was used to denote first the principality of the erstwhile Ahoms, and then the British province which was expanded to include regions that were not part of historical Ahom kingdom.

Other mentions

The word *asama* or *assama* was used during the time while Bhaskarvarman ruled Kamarupa. Then the present upper Assam used to emit poisonous gasses and was uninhabitable. Some of the *Kamrupi criminals* escaped to this land during those days in order to avoid punishment, as reported in the travel notes of the Chinese traveler Xuanzang. In Kamrupi, the term *asama* could also mean one who is *not comparable with*, in addition to *weird/sinner*.

The British concentrated on the name "Anthera Assama", i.e., by dropping "Anthera" and "a" of "Assama". *Assama* here implies *unequal* or *not comparable with* – *assama* was chosen as part of the *scientific name* because of the silkworm that could only live in the climate of foothills of Eastern Himalayas.

Pre-historic and ancient Assam

Assam and adjoining regions have evidence of human settlement from all periods of the Stone ages. The earliest ruler according to legend was a *mlechchha* (non-Aryan) ruler named Mahiranga (sanskritized form of the Tibeto-Burman name Mairang). Others followed him in his line: Hatakasura, Sambarasura, Ratnasura and Ghatakasura. Naraka removed this line of rulers and established his own dynasty. Historians consider Naraka's victory over the *mlechchha* rulers to mark the beginning of sanskritization in this region. The Naraka king mentioned at various places in Kalika Purana, Mahabharata and Ramayana covering a wide period of time were probably different rulers from the same dynasty.

Medieval Assam

Medieval Assam was known as Kamarupa and was ruled by many dynasties. Chief among them was the Varman Dynasty (350-650). During the rule of the greatest of the Varman kings, Bhaskarvarman (600 - 650) the Chinese traveler Xuanzang visited the region, and recorded his travels. The other dynasties that ruled the region were the Kacharis, the Chutias that belonged to the Indo-Tibetan groups.

Two later kingdoms left the biggest impact in the region. The Ahoms, a Tai group, ruled eastern Assam for nearly 600 years (1228 - 1826). The Koch, a Tibeto-Burmese / Dravidian group, established their sovereignty in 1510 which later extended to western Assam and northern Bengal. The Koch kingdom later split into two.

In spite of numerous invasions from the west, mostly by Muslim rulers, no western power could establish its rule in Assam until the advent of the British. The most successful invader was Mir Jhumla, a governor of Aurangzeb. He found it difficult to control the people, who carried on

guerilla attacks on his forces and forced his army to leave the region. The last attempt by the Moghuls under the command of Raja Ram Singh resulted in the victory for the Ahoms in Sariaghat (1671) under the Ahom general Lachit Borphukan.

British conquest

With the Burmese having reached the doorsteps of the East India Company's borders, the First Anglo-Burmese War ensued, in which Assam was one of the sectors. The war ended with the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, and the East India Company took control of the region. Under British Administration, Assam was made a part of the British India province called the Bengal Presidency. Sometime about 1905-1912, Assam was separated and erected as a separate province of Assam.

At the time of Independence of India, it consisted of the original Ahom kingdom, the present-day Arunachal Pradesh (North East Frontier Agency), Naga Hills, original Kachari kingdom, Lushai Hills, and Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Of the Assam province on the eve of Independence, Sylhet chose to join Pakistan in a referendum; and the two princely states Manipur and Tripura became provinces.

At the turn of the last century, people from present-day Bangladesh migrated to Assam, encouraged by the British to increase agricultural production and thus revenue. The tea planters imported labour from central India to work in the estates adding to the demographic canvas. Militant groups began forming along ethnic lines after Independence, and demands for sovereignty grew, resulting in the new states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram in the 1970s.

Bihu

Bihu is Assam. The festival is celebrated to mark the seasons and the significant points of a cultivator's life over a yearly cycle, in recent times the form and nature of celebration has changed with the growth of urban centres. A non-religious festival, all communities, take part in it. Three Bihus are celebrated: *rongali*, celebrates the coming of spring and the beginning of the sowing season; *kongali*, the barren bihu when the fields are lush but the barns are empty; and the *bhogali*, the thanksgiving when the crops have been harvested and the barns are full.

Durga Puja

Other than Bihu, Durga Puja is celebrated in Assam with great pomp and splendour, although this might be a cultural effect of the many Bengali people living in the state. A festival of rejoicing, Durga Puja, signifies the victory of good over evil.

Music

Assam, home to many ethnic groups and different cultures, is very rich in folk music. The indigenous folk music has in turn influenced the growth of a modern idiom, that finds expression in artists like Rudra Baruah, Parbati Prasad Baruah, Jayanta Hazarika, Bhupen Hazarika, Khagen Mahanta among many others.

The cup that cheers

Assam's biggest contribution to the world is its tea. Assam produces some of the finest and most expensive teas in the world. Other than the Chinese tea variety *Camellia sinensis*, Assam is the only region in the world that has its own variety of tea, called *Camellia assamica*. Assam tea is grown at elevations near sea level, giving it a malty sweetness and an earthy flavour, as opposed to the floral aroma of highland (e.g. Darjeeling, Taiwanese) teas. While Assam tea is characterised by colour also, Darjeeling tea has much flavour. The tea industry developed by the British planters brought in labour from as far as Bihar and Orissa and their descendents form a significant demographic group in the state.

Assam Oil

Assam is the second place in the world (after Titusville in the US) where Petroleum was discovered. Asia's first successful mechanically drilled oil well was drilled in Makum (Assam) way back in 1867. The second oldest oil well in the world, Digboi, still produces crude oil and natural gas. Most of the oilfields of Assam are located in the Upper Assam region of the Brahmaputra Valley. Assam has four oil refineries located at Guwahati, Digboi, Numaligarh and Bongaigaon.

English Language Teaching - Jorhat

Who says ELT is only for teaching English? ELT is for all kinds of activities. Cooperation, interaction, sustenance, caring and sharing for each other, respecting languages. In one of our programs in Jorhat, one of our colleagues impressed a (female) participant in ways more than one, including teaching. Was it deliberate or natural? Came a car jaunt. A crash, hospital, bandages, the works. Profuse Assamese sympathies from the participants (participant?). A year later I was pleasantly surprised with an invitation to attend their marriage ceremony at Jorhat. ELT also encourages National Integration - Karnataka and Assam are quite distant even as the crow flies.

Majuli

Majuli - the world's largest marine island is located close to Jorhat. This riverside island nestles in the lap of the mighty *Brahmaputra or Lohit* as Bhupen Hazarika sings of it soulfully. The sublime and the serene atmosphere of the island – the intimate companionship of the soul with the elements and the river – provided the backdrop for the historic *Manikanchan Sanyog* between Assam's pioneer Vaishnavite saints *Shree Sankardev* and *Madhabdev* in the fifteenth century. Ever since that meeting, Majuli emerged as the crowning glory of vaishnavite culture in Assam. Majuli boasts of rare migratory birds like Pelican, traditional handicrafts, ethnic culture and dance forms, water sports, village life of a real tribal type. It is a melting pot of different plain tribes possessing colourful and resourceful identities.

Mirza

On another occasion I had to go to Mirza, a place about 40 kms from Guwahati as a member of the Management Committee of the English Language Teaching Institute, Assam, situated there. I could travel by taxi or bus. I preferred the latter to taste a bit of the land of the rhino. Moreover, my status then and our accounts office regulated my choice of transport. Hardly had we left the city, at a *chariali* (crossroads) some police entered and started checking all of us for what have

you? Shaken, for this was the first such experience for me apart from airport frisking. Sure enough, the police got down from the bus, a man in tow, naturally with a cache of arms in its high day of insurgency.

Same as a more recent experience when travelling from Kolkata to Balurghat by bus, at Krishnanagar, the police video taped all the passengers, Balurghat being a border town with Bangla Desh, East Pakistan of yore.

And so back to ELTI for the official business which did last a good while. I noted that the problems of teaching English in Assam were almost the same as we encounter in other states. The solutions were almost similar. Teachers resorted to the mother tongue whenever they felt like. It set me thinking that while most of us teachers denounce the grammar translation method, majority of the teachers use it in the class. It does require another look, a deeper, focussed assessment of this method will wipe out the teacher's guilt feelings. Alternatively, English teaching in India has to be bilingual. Linguists, language teachers, pedagogues and scholars have to join to fork out a multi pronged Indian approach to Indian English Language Teaching.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

“Arunachal Pradesh” means “land of the dawn-lit mountains” or “land of the rising sun”.

The capital of Arunachal Pradesh, New Itanagar was being built, when we visited the place the first time in the early 1980's. Itanagar, so named after Itafort meaning fort of bricks built in 14 century AD. We lived in a place known as the Field Hostel meant for officers and engineers, doctors and others of the ilk who were transferred or were on deputation to Arunachal for the specific purpose of giving a local habitation and a name to the new capital. Naturally the sun rose early and our work began almost immediately, sharing the commonalities at the dining table with other similar officers, till the car came and took us to our venue.

Teaching English here was fun for many of the teachers knew a lot of Hindi and being bilingual was not so much of a problem. In fact, they liked it.

North Lakhimpur is the road head to Itanagar, and you get fascinated by the dewy fresh salad leaves which though air lifted elsewhere may not taste the same as these ones. This statement, coming as it does from a fond non-vegetarian has lots of truth in it. Ziro is also an interesting name and a town. It is a 3 day foot march to Pasighat if you do not avail of the government helicopter. Nearby is Pobha Wildlife Sanctuary created exclusively for the protection of the magnificent wild water Buffalo. Close by Garampani in Karbi Anglong is a hot spring, the water of which is believed to have medicinal value.

Two natives of Arunachal Pradesh visited us in Bhubaneswar. Naturally, I invited them for a bite and made friends with them. What a privilege! They were part of the summer school cum correspondence course leading to the B.Ed. degree. The course was very popular, benefited many of the teachers who found it convenient to catch up with their studies after having raised a family, attended to their parents, read leisurely, and completes the course over two summers.

Languages

The official languages of Arunachal Pradesh are English, Aka, Adi, Asi, Nishi, Miji, Monpa, Sherdukpen, Apatani, Tagin, Hill Miri, Daffla, Idu-Mishmi, Khamti, Nocte, Tangsa, Wanchu, Nepali and Bengali. It has a literacy rate of 54.7%. Males are 63.8% literate, while 43.5% females are literate. The literacy of the State rose to 54.74% in 2004 from 41.59% in 1991. There are 1901 schools, 9 Colleges and 1 Central University in the state.

Demographics

65% of the Arunachalis belong to 20 major-collective tribes and 82 tribes, who had a heritage of a diverse and rich culture, language and beliefs. Most of them are either of Tibetan or of Thai-Burmese origin. Another 35% of the population are immigrants, including 30,000 Bangladeshi and Chakma expatriates, and immigrants from other parts of India, notably Assam and Nagaland. The most notable tribes include the Adi, Nishi, Monpa and Apa Tani.

Religions

Recent statistics shows that 36% of Arunachal's population follow religions such as Donyo-polo and Rangfrah. 37% claim to be Hindus, and many are members of immigrant groups.

Another 13% of the population claim to be Buddhist. Tibetan Buddhism predominates in the districts of Tawang, West Kameng and isolated regions adjacent to Tibet, and Theravada Buddhism is practiced by groups living near the Burmese border.

Christians, whose presence was first made after 1961, mostly Baptist, account for another 13% of the population. Christianity is widely practiced by several Naga tribes in Changlang and Tirap adjacent to Nagaland.

McMahon Line

Arunachal Pradesh is on the northeastern tip of India, bordering Bhutan on the west, China on the north, Myanmar on the east and Assam on the south and Nagaland on the Eastern Himalayan ranges. This state covers 83,743 sq. km, with climate varying from sub-tropical in the south to alpine in the north. The McMahon Line separates it from the zone of control of the People's Republic of China to the north. Evergreen forest covers more than 60% of the state area. Besides the streams, rivers, mountains and peaks, its' endless variations of scenic beauty are the first to greet sunrise in the country.

In 1913-14, the British administrator, Sir Henry McMahon, drew up the 550-mile McMahon Line as the border between British India and Tibet during the Simla Conference. The seemingly cordial Sino-Indian relations erupted during the War of 1962. Since then Indo-Chinese relations had deteriorated. There is thaw in the air, and we hope that the two great nations of Asia will become great friends once again.

NEFA

Arunachal Pradesh was administered as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) until 1972, when it became the Union Territory. It was given full statehood on 20 February 1987 after taking into consideration the security situation in the east. Arunachal stretches from snow capped mountains in the north to the plains of Brahmaputra in the south. Much of Arunachal Pradesh is covered by the Himalayas.

The colour of life

Although a good number of tribes constitute the total population, the density of the population is only about thirteen per sq. km. The society is patriarchal and primogeniture. Fundamental laws of inheritance with variations are not uncommon. They follow endogamy and strictly observe the rule of clan exogamy. Polygamy is socially sanctioned. Their organizational institutions maintain law and order, decide disputes, and take up welfare activities. Artistic craftsmanship in Arunachal has been passed on from one generation to the other. The Buddhist tribes make beautiful masks. They also periodically stage pantomimes and masked dances. They make exquisite carpets, painted wooden vessels and silver articles. People from the central part of the state are expert in cane and bamboo. They weave articles that are in common use in their daily lives. The shawls and jackets, shoulder bags and coats all stand for the perfection that the people have attained in this art. The people of the southeastern part of the territory are famous for their wooden carvings. Goat's hair, ivory, beads of agate and other stones as well as of brass and glass is the specialties of the people of this part of the region.

The womenfolk throughout the territory have an excellent sense of colour. The basic colours that dominate are black, yellow, dark blue, green and scarlet – all put together in the most fascinating combinations. The weaving designs are essentially geometric varying from a formal arrangement to lines and bands. Most of the domestic requirements are made of cane and bamboo. Hats, baskets, cane vessels, cane belts – woven and plain, bamboo mugs with carvings, a wide variety of ornaments and jewelry items are all crafted by workmen.

Crafts

A specialty of the Monpas, the Buddhist community, is carpet weaving, with exotic designs of dragons, geometric and floral patterns. The Monpa wood carver also scoops out beautiful cups, dishes, fruit bowls, and ceremonial masks for dances and pantomimes. They also make paper for writing religious prayers from pulp of trees called susko or the paper trees.

Crafting ornaments is another art widely practised by the Arunachalis. Besides multicoloured beads, feathers of birds and wings of the green beetles are used as embellishments. They make bamboo bangles and ear-rings, which are occasionally decorated with various designs. The Khamtis carve out beautiful religious images, figures of dancers, toys and other objects.

History

Arunachal Pradesh finds mention in the ancient literature such as the Kalika Purana, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. It was here that Parasuram washed away his sins, Vyasa meditated, Bhismaka founded his kingdom, Lord Krishna married his consort Rukmini, and King Balinarayan drew men for his armies from among the hardy people. The 6th Dalai Lama was born and the 13th found refuge on the soil of Arunachal Pradesh.

The first ancestors of the tribal groups migrated from Tibet during the pre-historic period, they were joined by Thai-Burmese counterparts later.

Little is known about the history of Arunachal Pradesh, although the Apatani tribe had legendary knowledge of its history. History was available only in the Ahom chronicles during the 16th century. The tribal Monpa and Sherdukpen do keep historical records of the existence of local chiefdoms in the northwest as well. Northwestern parts of this area came under the control of the Monpa kingdom of Monyul, which flourished between 500 B.C. and 600 A.D. This region then

came under the control of Tibet, especially in the Northern areas. The remaining parts of the state, especially those bordering Myanmar, came under the control of the Ahom and the Assamese until the annexation of India by the British in 1858.

Recent excavations

Recent excavations of ruins of Hindu temples such as the 14th Malinithan at the foot of the Siang hills in West Siang shed new light on the ancient history of Arunachal Pradesh. Paintings of the Hindu gods and altars remained untouched for many years. They attracted many local pilgrims. Another notable heritage site, Bhismanagar, suggested that the Idu Mishmi had a local civilisation. The third heritage site, the 400-year-old Tawang monastery in the Tawang district also provides historical evidence of the Buddhist tribal peoples.

Festivals

Losar is the New Years' Celebration of the Monpas. During five festive days, prayers are offered, religious flags are hoisted atop their homes; Buddhist scriptures are read in every home and butter lamps lit in houses and campuses. *Reh* is essentially associated with the Idu Mishmis, its special attraction being the Priest dance. During *Tamladu*, the Digaru Mishmis offer prayers to the God of the Earth and the God of the Water. The supreme God Jebmalu is also worshipped. *Khan* is significant because of a ceremony where the priest ties a piece of wool around everybody's neck. During *Sangken*, people sprinkle water on each other as a sign of merriment. Smearing of rice powder on each other's face marks the beginning of the five-day celebrations of Mopin.

Climate

The climate of Arunachal Pradesh varies with elevation. Areas with very high elevation in the Upper Himalayas near the Tibetan border enjoy an alpine or Tundra climate. Below the Upper Himalayas come the Middle Himalayas, where people experience a temperate climate. Fruits like apples, oranges, etc are grown. Areas at the sub-Himalayan and sea-level elevation experience a humid sub-tropical climate, with hot summers and mild winters.

The state receives heavy rainfall of 80 to 160 inches (2,000 to 4,000 mm) annually, most of it falling between May and September. The mountain slopes and hills are covered with alpine, temperate, and subtropical forests of dwarf rhododendron, oak, pine, maple, fir, and juniper, sal (*Shorea*) and teak are the main economic species.

Arunachal Pradesh is divided into fifteen districts of are Changlang, East Kameng, East Siang, Kurung, Kumey, Lohit, Lower Dibang Valley, Lower Subansiri, Papumpare, Tawang, Tirap, Upper Dibang Valley, Upper Subansiri, Upper Siang, West Kameng and West Siang.. Especially along the Tibetan border, the Indian army has considerable control over the territory due to the continuing concern about border intentions. In the Northern areas and areas near the Indo-Burmese border and Nagaland special permits are needed to enter the area.

In these districts from highly stylised religious dance-dramas of Buddhists to the martial steps and colourful performances of the Noctes and Wanchos, dances here are the source of real joy. Teams of young girls in perfect rhythmic unison perform the Ponung dance of the Adis. Similar group dances in colourful costumes are performed in the Upper and Lower Subansiri.

Economy

Agriculture is the primary driver of the economy. Jhoom, the local word for shifting cultivation, which was widely practised among the tribal groups has come to be less practiced. The forest-products are the next most significant sector of the economy. Among the crops grown here are rice, maize, millet, wheat, pulses, sugarcane, ginger and oilseeds. Arunachal is also ideal for horticulture and fruit orchards.

Its major industries are sawmills, plywood (now restricted by law), rice mills, fruit preservation units and handloom handicrafts. The unspoiled environment of Arunachal has encouraged the state government to organize significant locally arranged tourism to see the cultural diversity of Arunachal Pradesh, places from Bomdila and Tawang.

MEGHALAYA

On cloud nine

Meghalaya is a hilly strip in the eastern part of the country about 300 km long (East-West) and 100 km wide, with a total area of about 22,429 sq km. It is the third largest state in the North East in terms of geographical area. The state is bound on the north by Assam and by Bangladesh on the south with which it shares its international border. The years 2000 and 2001 have shown a drop in the registered industrial units mainly due to the fact that forest based industrial units had to be closed down in view of the ban imposed by the Supreme Court of India. Its capital is Shillong, which has a population of 260,000. The State has vast natural resources of coal, limestone, kaolin, and granite.

On 21 January 1972 from the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hill districts of western Assam was carved out the infant state of Meghalaya. Abundant rainfall, sunshine, virgin forests, high plateaus, tumbling waterfalls, crystal clear rivers, meandering streamlets ornament Meghalaya with natural beauty. But the real jewels of Meghalaya are the sturdy, intelligent and hospitable people. Meghalaya is the home of three mongoloid tribes - Khasis, the Jaintias, and the Garos: all the three have a matrilineal social system in which the family lineage is taken from the mother's side.

Tribal peoples make up 85 per cent of Meghalaya's population. 85.53 per cent of the population is of scheduled tribes, while 0.53 is of the scheduled castes. The Khasi, the largest group, followed by the Garos, were among those known to the British as "hill tribes". Other groups include the Jaintias, the Koch and the Hajong (40,000). Generally the people are short in stature with muscular bodies and highly developed calves. They are cheerful and hospitable. The women proudly continue the tradition of ethnic sartorial elegance.

Languages

The principal languages spoken in Meghalaya are Khasi, Garo, Bengali, and Assamese. The official language of the state is English. Meghalaya has a total literacy rate of 62.6%. The literacy rate for males is 65.4% and for females 59.65. Literacy and education are important criteria to reflect the progress of individuals at the level of understanding in day-to-day activities. The percentage of literate persons of Meghalaya was 49.1% in 1991 and in 2001, the percentage has gone up to 63.31%.

Education occupies an important position in the planned programmes of the Meghalaya Government. The North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) is the only university in the State and it

is the direct responsibility of the Union Government. The State does not have any medical or engineering college; only one polytechnic at Shillong.

There are 7531 schools, 46 colleges and 1 university. With the growth of the primary and junior basic schools, the enrolment at these institutions has also increased by 47.26% between 1981-82 to 1991-92.

Meghalaya? What do we do here?

We conducted two programs, at different times, in Shillong on the teaching of English. Even though English is the language of the state, yet they had a number of queries and difficulties, which we were able to explain to the best of their satisfaction or at least to ours! Now that we have one more RIE at Shillong, especially for the northeast, the NERIE, there is greater contact between these states, NERIE and RIE, Bhubaneswar.

What was our purpose so far as education and ELT in Meghalaya was concerned? Strange are the ways of Indians and Indian Airlines. Came all our baggage, except that of our leader, TRS Sarma. Then the bag contained, besides his change of clothes, unimportant as they were (!), the cheque for the program.

Angrily the program began with our man TRS in old clothes, old smiles, old styles, whisker and stubble-full chin. Fine. We managed the day and the remaining part when, on the penultimate day of the program, the airlines informed us to please pick up and identify your baggage as a safety measure and sorry for the inconvenience, that kind of thing.

TRS, I've never seen such a happy person again.

It was a good sail through then with the 1980s, TG and stuff, our high flown guy going higher, I sticking on terra firma.

Rest read later for after Shillong we went to Jorhat.

Religions

About fifteen percent of the population is defined as non-tribal; these include about 54,000 Bengalis and 49,000 Shaikhs. Meghalaya is one of the three states in India to have a Christian majority; the other two (Nagaland and Mizoram) are also in the north-east of India. 16.7 % of the population follow an ancient Animist philosophy. Christian: 64.6% Animist: 16.7% Hindu: 14.7% Muslim: 4% . Besides those mentioned already other ethnic groups are 2.3% Koch: 2.8% Hajong: 1.8% and others: 10.4%

Festivals

The 100 Drums festival, Wangala, is held in the Garo hills for the Sun God of fertility. Doregata and Pomelo are the other two major Garo Festivals imbued with rhythm, fun and frolic.

The Khasis do the colourful Nongkrem dance, a religious ritual with its origins in ancient times, and the Shad Suk Mynsiem, a dance of thanksgiving which displays traditional khasi finery. The jovial Harvest dance of the War's of Southern Meghalaya provides much fun. The Khasi Mandarin oranges add delicious juice to the frolic.

The Jaintias celebrate Behdienkhlam where decoration and artistic presentation reign supreme. Lahoo dancers in their ethnic traditional bright attire force you on the dance floor to the tune of this indigenous vibrant melody.

Raindrops keep falling on your head

Popularly referred to as The Scotland of the East by the British, the climate of Meghalaya is moderate but humid. The average annual rainfall touches a high of 1200 cm in some areas, making it the wettest state of India. The town of Cherrapunji, south of Shillong holds the world record for most rain in a calendar month, while the village of Mawsynram, near Cherrapunji holds the distinction of seeing the heaviest yearly rains. Literally, Meghalaya means the Abode of the Clouds, and describes the climatic phenomenon that brings torrents of rain to its mountainous terrain. Not surprising that the two most wettest places on earth 'Mawsynram' and 'Cherrapunjee' are found here.

Cherrapunji (Sohra) is a pleasant drive to see roaring waterfalls leaping into deep gorges, including Nongsngthiang falls. It is situated in one of the rainiest belts in 1,300 metres above sea level. Cherrapunji is famous for its limestone caves, orange, and honey. It is also the centre of Khasi culture and literature. The oldest Presbyterian Church and the Ramakrishna Mission are situated here. Natural beauty complemented by springs and sacred forests, beautiful parks, aviaries, Mawsmi cave and falls are all nearby. Nohkalikai falls, the fourth tallest falls in the world, add to the glory of Cherrapunji.

Mawsynram is the place of highest rainfall in the world, known for the giant stalagmite formation shaped into a *shivlinga* and a cave. A place of pilgrimage for Hindus, it is also unique in geological formation called symper rock: an almost flat topped loaf-shaped rocky dome, which rises sharply from the midst of the surrounding hillocks. From its base, one has to take an exciting uphill trek to reach the summit of the rock. From the top of the hill, one can see the plains and the fast-moving rivers of Bangladesh.

Power and Electricity

The rivers in the State cascading into the rivers present a good scope for generation of hydel power. The Sunapani Hydel Project, Umtru Hydel Project, Umium Hydel Project, Tura Diesel and Nangal Bibra. Meghalaya consists of towns and villages situated in rural areas, in very inaccessible parts of the State that makes rural electrification a gigantic task. Meghalaya's hydro-electric and thermal potential has been estimated at about 2500 and 1000 megawatts respectively,

Caves

Shillong Peak is the highest point at 1,965 metres above sea level. Meghalaya boasts of many caves, of all shapes and sizes. There are many caves with unique limestone structures forming curious stalactites and stalagmites. They are special: some of them are even the longest in the sub-continent. *Krem pullut*, south of Cherrapunji has a large section of fossil passage, two stream ways and three entrances totaling a length of 1003m. *Krem mawmluh* has a five- river passage

and a length of 4503m making it the 4th longest in the sub- continent. *Krem um-lawan*, in the Jaintia hills, is the longest(6381m) and deepest (106.8m) cave in the sub- continent. *Krem katsab* has 8 entrances.

Siju are famous limestone caves, the most researched in India.

The Meghalaya subtropical forests eco region encompasses the state; its montane forests are distinct from the lowland tropical forests to the north and south. The forests of Meghalaya are notable for their biodiversity of mammals, birds, and plants.

This hilly state has been called 'a patch of beauty and grace' and is linked to the Barail Range, an offshoot of the Himalayan Mountains.

The grandeur of the districts

Meghalaya is divided into 7 districts : East Garo Hills, East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi, South Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills. The refreshing mountain air, the whispering pines, the babbling streams, the hospitable atmosphere, the pleasant climatic condition and exotic flora and fauna gives to Meghalaya the rare grandeur it has. Nature's bounty: find its lakes, expansive rivers, unpolluted rushing streams breaking into waterfalls, then disappearing into the jungle Here's Nature in all its glory. Deep caves, limpid lakes, expansive rivers, babbling streams breaking into waterfalls, twisting, and turning, disappearing in the jungle.

Meghalaya is a land of silvery cascades. An uphill drive, 10 kms off Shillong, through the idyllic country takes you to the Elephant Waterfall. The colourful blooms of Rhododendron and cheerful chirping of colourful birds make the rest of the orchestra. The other waterfalls are Nohkalikai at Cherrapunjee, awe-inspiring Mawsmai, Dain-Thlen, Sweet Spread Eagle, Bidon, Bishop, Krangsuri, Rongbang, Imilchan.

Flora

Meghalaya is a nature lover's and botanist's paradise. Even the names of its orchids are fascinating - *Lady's Slipper*, *Queen's Ransom*, *Blue Vanda*, *Leopard Orchid*, *Foxtail Orchid*. and many others. Try the *Bird of Paradise*, or *Lipstick Plant*! The rare carnivorous *Pitcher Plant* is a botanical wonder, unique even in the tropics. Its cultivated floral treasure is generous and richly varied, dense endemic, and exotic, giving Meghalaya the vegetation worthy of its name.

A majestic serene lake with surrounding sylvan hills, myriad emerald green and azure blue skies provide the setting for Umiam Lake, few kilometres away down the Shillong-Guwahati National Highway. Water Sports facilities are available here. The resort has row-boats, paddle-boats, cruise-boats, sailing-boats, water scooters, speed-boats and an up to date motel with restaurant and conferencing facilities. Umiam is also an angler's paradise. Have the patience to snare a big catch at Umiam. In fact, some fish have been sighted with physical proportions as big as that of a Ford Escort.

Ward's Lake, located in the heart of Shillong, is a pleasant beauty spot. The lake with undulating grounds, hemmed in by lush greens, has a charming winding walk-a-way in the midst of rolling flowerbeds and fairyland lighting. The 100-year-old lake has a beautiful arched bridge under which you can go through by boats of all sizes and shapes, and have tea at the cafeteria. Other notable spots are Lady Hydari Park, St. Paul's Cathedral, Crinoline swimming pool, Botanical Gardens, with Shillong Peak giving a 180-degree view of the city.

Nestled between tall and elegant whispering Pines at an altitude of 4750 ft above sea level, the 18 hole Shillong Golf Course finds mention in International Directories of Golf Courses of repute.

Archery is another game of precision popular in Meghalaya. It is interesting to note that the only government sanctioned gambling is in this state and is organised around archery activities. It is known as 'Teer'.

MIZORAM

Zoram

Mizoram state in the Mizo Hills, *Land of the Highlanders*, is sandwiched between Myanmar, Bangladesh and the states of Tripura, Assam and Manipur. Mizoram lacks a snowy backdrop, yet it has a feel of a Himalayan hill station. It is generally cool during the summers with temperatures ranging from 20 to 30°C and heavy rains during the months of May to September. Winter temperatures range from 10 to 20°C. Fog is commonplace, and the first rays of the sun drive it away to make way for the mountain peaks.

The capital Aizwal is located at an altitude of 3500 feet above sea level. I was put up in the government circuit house. What was really good about the place was its splendid quietness, and cleanliness. The food was served at the time you wanted it with complete decorum, right to the last spoon for the custard. Courtesy is their main strength.

Languages

The principal languages spoken in Mizoram are Lushai, Mizo, Bengali, Lakher, besides English, which is mostly understood, and Hindi widely understood, though not generally spoken except for the migrant labour community. Of a total literacy rate of 88.49%, the male population accounts for a literacy rate of 90.69, whereas the female literacy rate is 88.49%. In Mizoram, there are 2489 schools, 29 colleges, and 1 University.

While my main work was for the selection of award to teachers, the Government invited me to give a talk on the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, brought out recently by the NCERT. They were planning to implement it in a big way, having already installed about 40 teleconferencing centres in different parts of the state.

Christianity in Mizoram

It is the seat of a rich cultural extravaganza, famous for its handicrafts. The town is blessed with exotic natural beauty. Aizawl is 466 km from Guwahati, 366 km from Shillong, and 140 km from Silchar. The Durtlang Hills constitute a natural barrier immediately south of Aizawl, their high ridges punctuated by Mizo villages and Christian missions. Aizawl perches precariously on the steep slopes of a sharp ridge, straddling the watershed between the Tlawing and the Tuirial river valleys at an altitude of 1100 metres.

The first church of Mizoram was found in Lunglei Town, also its airport, known for its natural landscape, cool and pleasant climate, rich flora. The river Tlawing flows quietly on the east, on the north one can see the jagged hills of Durtlang. The rivers, mainly Tlawing, the Sonai and the Tuivawl, peaks, plains and the lakes are the treasures of Mizoram. It is full of high ranges

running from north to south covered by greenery throughout the year. The scenic beauty of the hill ranges and river valleys during dry season, the rolling clouds mixed with thundering sound followed by heavy rains, slowly moving across the hills and valleys, during rainy season are unforgettable sights.

The Mizos, the main ethnic group, are closely related to the Chins of Myanmar. More than 80% of the population is Christian. Once part of Assam state, Mizoram became a union territory in 1972 and a state on 20 February 1987. Secessionist factions were active in Mizoram. The rebellion was officially ended by a negotiated settlement in 1985. Smaller ethnic groups have complained of domination by the Mizos, which has fueled armed movements in the state.

Independence Day of Israel is generally celebrated in Mizoram!

Ever since it was gradually confirmed that they belonged to the Ben Menashe, one of the lost tribes of Israel many Mizos have left for Israel. They converted to Judaism and have been practising Jews for more than two decades. These Judaized Mizo-Kukis-Chins, all affiliated tribes living in the Mizoram-Myanmar region have organised themselves under a banner called 'Beni Menashe', which literally translates into 'Sons of Menashe'. Considering Israel not only as a land of opportunities, these migrating Mizos settle down in Gush Katif and the Gaza Strip. Mizo Jews from the Biblical Lost Tribe have traveled to Israel and found themselves in combat fatigues, defending their Promised Land. However, some Mizo scholars and researchers are not quite sure about the reported links of Mizos with Israel.

It may be mentioned here that the Mizo community following Judaism recently celebrated the Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover) with great fervour, with bread coming from Israel. Hundreds are waiting for the arrival of Rabbis from Israel, in particular the Beni Menashe clan. Israel's Chief Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar has decided to recognise the "Beni Menashe" clan. After the conversion to Orthodox Jewry the members of the tribe will be taken to Israel without any hindrance as they would fall under the 'Law of Return of Israel', which allows Jews to return to their homeland or the holy land as citizens ending a 2,700-year exodus. In North-East India every time they kiss the 'Mizuza', a pious symbol on the entrance of a Jewish home, a new ray of hope grips them.

The Hebrew Centre is located in the heart of Aizawl city.

Work done, and having known my background in the interim, it being Christmas time, I delivered a lecture on the birth of Christ to a big applause. I did pose them a question as to why did the Magi take the gifts they did, symbolisms notwithstanding. Answers easy enough. What if the Magi had been women and what would they have taken as gifts, and how would they have gone about the whole process. Set the whole audience nodding their heads and waving me emotional, provocative thanks.

History

The whole state of Mizoram was a part of Assam until 1972 when it was made a Union Territory. There were insurgency problems in the region until 1987, when it was declared a State. Unusually enough, almost all problems of terrorism and demands for freedom from India have subsided since then. The Mizos are Christians by faith and most of them speak English. Mizoram has a literacy rate of 87%, which is the second highest in the country. Because of the border problems and the insurgency, the Indian Home Ministry has planned to fence the 318-km stretch of the Mizoram-Bangladesh frontier at the earliest. The model of fencing is "double concertina coil" as

followed in other states. The Centre has begun work on sealing the porous Indo- Bangladesh border in the rugged Mizoram, undeterred by the problems.

Artifacts, Nature

At the State Museum at Babu Tlang one can have a glimpse of Mizo dresses, implements, historic relics, and other traditional artefacts. The mini zoo has some rare Asian animals in it and the most important one is the endangered Sun Bear. The Cultural Sub-Centre is a good retreat centre. Others include the Zoological Garden, Bung picnic spot, Mahco Showroom, Treasury Square, Vengthlang, and Bethlehem.

Located at distance of 85 km from Aizawl, Tamdil Lake, with boating facilities, Vantwang Falls 137 km from the capital, provide a memorable sight of water falling amidst bamboo forests. To take a fantastic view of the Myanmar hills, one can visit Champai, 192 km from Aizawl. Luangmual at a distance of 7 km from Aizawl is a small village known for its handicrafts centre.

The highest mount in the state situated at 2165 metres above sea level is the Blue Mountain, Phawngpui National Park in an area of 3000 sq. meters, rich in flora and fauna. It is a home for tigers, sambar deer, hoolock gibbon, barking deer, bear, serow and birds.

Palak Lake is an oval shaped lake, the biggest in the state, surrounded by original thick forests and plantations. It is rich in flora and fauna and for its wild elephants. Various types of water lilies and varieties of water birds nested in these plants cover a large part of the waterfronts.

Kolodyne River is the longest river in Mizoram, having its source from eastern Myanmar.

Fairs, festivals

Mizoram is known for its jhoom crops and the people of the region celebrate the festivals related to it with traditional gay and pomp. In the months of February and March the clearing of the jungles to make way for sowing is celebrated through the festival of *Chapchar Kut*. The Harvest is celebrated during December and is called *Pawl Kut*. Another festival, *Mim Kut*, is celebrated after the maize harvest in September in honour of all departed souls.

The birth of Christ, and New Year's Day are, naturally, major festivals.

The Mizos are famous for their Bamboo dance. Cheraw, Chheih Lam, Solakar or Sarlamkai are other famous dances. Come over and see how beautiful does a blue mountain look, and learn to pronounce, learn to say, Phawngpui, as do the Mizos.

MANIPUR

Polo in Loktak

My friend in the defence services was posted at Thoubal. We had many coincidences we realized later - same first name, same date of birth, same place of birth, National Defence Academy connections.

Another friend of mine Felix Das posted at the Loktak Hydroelectric Project, a high official, made all arrangements for me to float on the biggest fresh water lake. Not used to the water so much, just a day's itinerary was sufficient. Survival is a priority item and has to be of different kinds,

for you know not where the local home made grenade may strike, or who gives you the unexpected karate chop if you happen to be in the wrong neighbourhood at the wrong time.

Living together since time immemorial sharing turbulent inroads of war, amalgamation, assimilation and unity and hence possessing dynamism and resilience resulting from experience and destiny, the Manipuris are an ideal society. The Meiteis who constitute the largest population generally reside in the plains. The tribes including Naga, Kuki- Chin- Mizo groups inhabit the hills. Manipur has a long tradition of martial arts and indigenous games. Manipur shares 352 km. of common International boundary with Myanmar and lies south of Nagaland, north of Mizoram and east of Assam.

The Sagol Kangjei (Polo) originated in this land. Now internationally popular Manipur attracts world famous Polo players to participate in the Polo tournaments at Imphal.

Languages

Principal languages spoken here are - Manipuri, Thadou, Tangkhul, besides Hindi and English. Hindi was much spoken and appreciated in Manipur, formed as a full-fledged state on 21 Jan 1972, and they made special efforts for Hindi until recently. With Manipuri and other local and home languages in the area crying for a share of the linguistic cake, it has been put on the back burner. Hindi films are screened reluctantly and Hindi speakers persuaded to speak Manipuri. In any case, Hindi speakers in Manipur do control the economy. Marwaris and Biharis have learnt to survive in all terrains, climes and languages, doing good to themselves and the states they are in. Finance, muscle and mind do everyone good.

In Manipur, of the total literacy rate of 68.87% , males have a literacy rate of 80.3%, and females that of 90.5%. Manipur has 4033 schools, 63 colleges, and 1 university.

Examiners for teacher certification, B.Ed.

In Manipur, we had gone in batches to conduct the final practice teaching examination of the students who had enrolled for the BEd in two summers elaborated elsewhere. We had to examine about 20 students in a day, which kept us busy throughout. The first day we did not realize this. From day two we went to the People's Canteen in the market where hot fresh food complete with dal, rice, fish curry, fish fry, vegetables, and salad was all ready and served with aplomb right at 9 am. In addition, topping up with the mouthful of Manipuri paan. It sufficed us until 6 pm with energy to spare.

Came the last day of the examinations and the Director of Education, S. Bira Singh invited all of us for dinner to his place. Vegetarian though the meal was, it was delicious and by the time we finally washed our hands, the count was of 21 courses. Enough for mortals of our ilk. Chappan Bhog or a meal of 56 courses has to be a repast rich for the gods, or for mortals of a higher disposition.

As far as the in-service courses were concerned we enjoyed them in the morning sessions from 8.30 to 2 pm. After that, the sun trying to go home, so do the other humans and the work becomes sluggish. By six it is totally dark in Imphal, Manipur.

Came a day when they suggested a trip to Moreh, the easternmost town of India bordering Myanmar. Being far away they asked us to be ready by 3.30 am. No way, I yelled. Then I did wake up the next morning at that time only to see that it was as sunny at 3.30 am in Imphal as it is at 9 am elsewhere in India.

Flora and fauna

The wet forests, the temperate forest and the pine forests occur between 900-2700 metres above sea level and they together sustain a host of rare and endemic plant and animal life. Hoolock gibbon, Slow lorries, Clouded leopard, Mrs. Hume's Barebacked pheasant, Blyth's Tragopan, Hornbills etc., form part of the natural heritage of Manipur. The most unique is the "Sangai", the dancing deer. The floating mass of vegetation on the Loktak Lake sustains small herds of this endemic deer that is the most threatened species in the world.

There are around 500 varieties of orchids that grow in Manipur of which 472 have so far been identified.

Festivals

Manipur is a mosaic of traditions and cultural patterns. Legend says that Manipur was discovered as a result of the delight the Gods took in dancing. Today Manipur's mythological concept of creation is revealed in her famous folk-dances. Manipuri dancing is one of the classical dances of India. Male dancers perform acrobatics and the graceful movements of female dancers are delightful

Some of them are -

Gang-Ngai: A festival of the Kabui Naga community, it is celebrated in the month of December-January for five days. Starting with a religious ceremony on the first day the remaining days are feasts, dances and presentation of gifts. Kabui Naga is a very fast dance form. The troupe picked me up from the special audience and putting an apple on my head, halved it into two with a sharp sword. I did not even feel it, nor was a strand of my hair cut or disturbed. Or was I too shell shocked to observe what was happening.

Lui-Ngai-Ni: This is a festival of sowing which the Naga community celebrates on 15 February every year. Social gatherings, songs, dances and rejoicing highlight the festivity.

Id-Ul-Fitr is the most popular festival of the Manipuri Muslims, marking the end of Ramzan, the holy month of fasting.

Yaoshang (Doljatra) is celebrated for five days commencing from the full moon day of Phalguna (February/March). The **Thabal Chongba**- a kind of Manipuri folk dance, where boys and girls hold hands, sing and dance in a circle, is particularly associated with this festival. **Thoubal Chonga** is a beautiful celebration of holi with dances and songs that continue for nearly a fortnight. Such celebrations are after-dinner affairs where the local community joins in the fun and frolic. The colour allowed is only yellow, and that also turmeric which thus adds to the health and a glowing skin.

Rath jatra (kang): Rath Jatra is celebrated for 10 days in June/July. One of the greatest festivals for Hindus of Manipur, Lord Jagannath leaves his temple in a Rath known as "Kang" pulled by pilgrims and devotees. Shows the ties between Orissa and Manipur and that the cult of Jagannath is not limited to a God but is spread throughout the world.

Heikru hitongba: This festival is celebrated in the month of September. Along a 16 metre wide moat, long narrow boats are sailed by a large number of rowers. The idol of Lord Bishnu is installed before the commencement of the race.

Kwak yatra(dussehra): Celebrated during September/ October, goddess Durga is propitiated with pomp and ceremony.

Ningol chakkouba: It is observed on the second day of the new moon in the Manipuri month of Hiyangei (October). In this festival, married women pay a visit to her parental house along with her children to revive familial ties.

NAGALAND

Buy & Fly

The visit to Nagaland was an SOS. As a Central Government nominee for the National Award for Teachers for 2006-2007 I was comfortable till a fax from the Nagaland government jolted, asking me for a convenient date within the next fortnight. Non-plussed, why the hurry? They replied that last year's, i.e. 2005-2006 nominations had also to be sent and so could you make it fast. Fixed up the date and requested them for the necessary arrangements.

Came the day of travel. Everything is fine until you arrive at the railway station or the airport. The porter said everything was o.k. and that he would seat me in my AC first class cabin. Looking forward to a nice sleep; then came the announcement over the PA system that the train by which I was supposed to travel was running late by three hours. To hear an announcement at a railway station is not an easy job. All your exercises on listening comprehension, memory span, gestures, particularly kinesics have to be brought into play. To make sure that I need not visit an ENT surgeon I went to the enquiry counter and my worst fears were confirmed. My problem was to reach Howrah railway station by 7.30 the next morning to catch the 9.55 a.m. flight to Dimapur enroute Kohima, the capital of Nagaland where the meeting had been scheduled. Poor and fuzzy with numbers and timings I could still figure out that if I waited for my train I would miss my flight. Time for prompt decisions. Somehow, switching trains at midnight, 100 metre platform sprints thrown in, I managed to land in Howrah by 730 am. Then taxi to Kolkata airport. Being in the haste that I was I settled for whatever fare the driver asked for. Entered the airport area with a flair, and before long I was freshening up to be presentable to the air hostess. Done, time to check in, it being 8.45 a.m. now. Smiling people, we all are at *Indian*. Which seat, aisle or window? I do not have any such preferences, anything does. No, she told me, it would matter, because your flight is rescheduled and instead of 9.55 a.m. will now leave at 2 p.m.

Have you ever imagined a more crestfallen face?

If I had known it, I could have travelled in AC comfort, rather than torturing myself traveling second unreserved, paying exorbitant portorage and vehicle charges; but then a government of India officer is conscious of his duties. Nothing could be done: relax, read, roam, run, do whatever, till they called you for an in-flight delayed lunch. That also is quite a humiliation. Even the waiters look down on you. They show all pretence of courtesy, very hurriedly. Those who are sitting in the other section paying for the flute of apple juice are the ones who are the waiter's pets. These guests, with a smirk, also point at the rush the delayed flight people are making for the lunch, as many dishes and helpings they can have of it, avian flu or no.

Nagaland is bound by Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Assam in the North; Manipur in the South, Myanmar on the East and Assam in the West. Sixteen major tribes along with other sub-tribes inhabit the State. Each of the sixteen odd tribes and sub-tribes have their own languages, customs and traditions and they can easily be distinguished by their colourful dresses, ornaments and beads that they wear. Blessed with salubrious climate throughout the year, Nagaland provides the right ambience for a quiet getaway from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Life here is one long festival. Apart from the rich, incomparable traditional and cultural heritage that is exclusive, Nagaland offers a rejuvenating bonus of the cool refreshing mountain air, and the dreamless sleep amidst the roaring sound of silence. Belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid stock, their ancestors lived off nature's abundant gifts, blessed with sturdy formidable dispositions. Above all, the Nagas have a reputation for a warm-hearted hospitality. By nature, they are lovers of fun and frolic.

People

The different Naga groups vary considerably in physique and appearance; the Angamis being tall with regular features, and Semas, shorter with more strongly pronounced Mongolian features. Most are a beautiful light brown - the typical Kirata 'gold', but differing in shade from tribe to tribe; a light colour is generally admired. Choice of hair :wavy, straight, and even the Negrito frizzled.

The traditional ceremonial attire of each tribe is in itself, an awe inspiring sight to behold; the multi coloured 'spears' and 'daos' decorated with dyed goats' hair, the headgear made of finely woven bamboo interlaced with orchid stems, adorned with boar's teeth and hornbill's feathers, elephant tusk armlets.

The present generation has ventured into fashion designing in a big way; reproducing fabrics that represent the ancestral motifs blended with modern appeal. Nagaland is vibrant with music in the air: the traditional folk songs, the poetic love songs, the gospels, the exquisite classical tunes ...it has them all. Tribal artistes will give short performances, only for you, at a reasonable fee.

Tribal festivals are celebrated seasonally throughout the year. During such times one gets to see a glimpse of the past animistic traditions of each tribe, being enacted at their robust best. The visitor is welcomed like a family to share their past, a fleeting moment in time. Does one need an invitation to join such fun?

By the rivers of Zungki

The main rivers of the state are the Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhu, Milak, Zungki and Tizu and the highest peak is Saramati, which is 3841 metres above sea level. The capital of Nagaland, formed on 1 December 1963 is Kohima, a hilly town (1445 metres above sea level), so full of cars. Estimates say there is a car for every 10 persons in the city. Traffic jams are the order of the day. And so if you have to catch your flight better start much in advance. The airport at Dimapur is 70 kms away and takes a good 3 hour drive without any traffic snarls. Join the jam, or miss the flight; the option is yours. However the on NH 39 can be an amazing experience. One could sample the mouth-watering pineapples or treat oneself to a hot hearty meal of local cuisine from one of the typical Naga wayside amenities that line the road at regular intervals, nestled among the pristine hills.

Nagaland is divided into eight districts: Kohima, Mokokchung, Mon, Phek, Tuensang, Wokha, Zunheboto and Dimapur. The various Tribes in Nagaland are Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Lotha, Konyak, Kuki Khiamniungan, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sema, Sangtam, Yimchunger, Zeliang.

The land, flora, fauna, the people and their warm hospitality give to Nagaland its charm and uniqueness.

Languages

Languages spoken in Nagaland are English, Nagamese, Hindi, and other dialects such as Ao, Angami, Sema, and Konyak. Nagaland is most diverse of all states so far as languages are concerned. A rich variety, different pronunciations. Every hillock is justly proud of owning its language. Of the total literacy rate of 66.61% , 71.2% is the literacy rate for men and 61.5% for women. Nagaland has 2058 schools, 37 colleges and 1 University

Besides Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Tribal Religions also have some worshippers.

The Hornbill Festival

Every year, the Government Department of Tourism, organizes the Hornbill Festival during the first week of December. All Naga tribes dressed in their traditional and colourful attire including spears and daos, participate in this gathering. An annual five day event filled with a generous feeling of great natured fun and laughter is the spirit – a cauldron filled with the state's heritage and culture and spiced with a generous helping of food, fun and festivity. The festival showcases the diversity of the proud Naga tribes that people this hilly terrain. Handsome young warriors and maidens with dewy complexions dress up in traditional costumes – richly plumed headgear, necklaces of animal fangs, war paint across their faces and bodies, menacing spears, sturdy shields. The ground is alight with colourful song and dance performances. The simple yet essential tasks of tilling the fields, the initiation of young lads into adulthood, mock wedding ceremonies, tribal games, the delightful farce of the headhunters and more. Nagas dance and music are intrinsic part of Naga life – mostly eulogizing bravery, beauty, love and generosity.

The festival is held in a cultural village, sloppy for most part of the year *Kohima Village*, one of the largest in Asia, an admixture of the past and present. A traditional gate greets the visitor, with a scimitar of hornbills and buffalo horns. Stones of varying sizes and shapes implanted within the compound or skulls of buffaloes and mithuns adorn the portico, bringing to mind the glorious status of our great ancestors who performed feats of merit. Tuephema – the model tribal complex is 10 km outside Kohima. Souvenir shops, entertainment centres complete with gambling joints, games of skill- every stall owner draws a crowd, which does not seem to move, During Hornbill the place transforms into a bustling carnival.

Hunger drives you to the food stalls. Meat makes the staple, and the aperitif with light rice beer is served in fresh bamboo shoots.

I asked for and got some real ethnic Naga food in Hotel Japfu where I was put up. As if to check on the authenticity, I also had ethnic Naga cuisine at wayside eateries with Naga friends. Good food, good experience. The food is as tasty as the one prepared in your own kitchen. As always, be prepared for some chance happenings. Advice: carry some ice with you to beat the chillies grown to damage even an asbestos lined stomach.

Be that as it may, in fact almost every evening in Nagaland comes to an end with the young boys and girls in branded sneakers and jeans twirling on the stage keeping pace faster than the psychedelic strobe lights. The houses reflect the architectural styles of the different regions of the state.

Other Festivals

The tribes in the state have their own festivals, celebrated with great enthusiasm. Some of them are: Sekrenyl - Angamis and Chakhesang, Moatsu - Aos, Naknyulum - Chang tribe, Bushu - Kacharais, Tsokum - Khiam niungan tribe, Aoling Monyu - Konyaks, Minkut - Kuki, Tokhu emong - Lothas, Monye - Phoms, Jeshha - Pochury tribe, Ngada - Rengma tribe. The Sanglam tribe celebrates amongmong festival, the Sumi, the Tuluni festival, the Yimchunger celebrate the Metemneo and the Zeliang tribe celebrates the Nga-Ngai festival. It is interesting to note that all these festivals are celebrated throughout the year in different districts of Nagaland. Naturally, they have a replica in the capital Kohima, so that it is a festival throughout the year in Kohima, in Nagaland.

Wrestling

It was my good luck I happened to be in Kohima, Nagaland on 9 March 2006 to witness Nagaland sports in action. It happened to be Nagaland Wrestling Meet when people from all over the place came to enjoy the sight of huge hunks (average weight 100 kgs) felling each other down. It is the biggest sporting event in the state. The audience also joined in. There was a special section for them, so infectious was the spirit.. The wrestler who won the year's championship happened to be from Chiechama village, a place which I visited for its centre - District Institute for Education and Training. Robert Browning said, a good mind in a good body, and Nagaland makes it sure it happens that way. There are two categories of wrestling matches : those for the sumos, and those who are amateur. Sturdy well built men with toned muscles gripped their opponents by the waistband Sumo style and struggled to flip them over. Every year sees a new champion being crowned. I was saved the embarrassment of being invited into the ring as I was a guest of the government, on duty. Further, it would not be fair to talk about my body, its toughness or otherwise, under any circumstances, before such hunks. The Chief Minister appealed to his fellow Nagas to popularise the sport in other parts of the country.

Spots in and around Kohima are:

War Cemetery, a symbolic memorial raised for the supreme human sacrifice made by officers and soldiers of the allied forces, to halt the tide of the Japanese onslaught during the Second World War. This was their last post. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains this Cemetery.

State Museum, depicting artefacts; log drums, tools and implements, ancestral weaponry, Naga currencies of old, attire of warriors, dress of women, hearth of a Naga kitchen. In diorama it is the entire Naga lifestyle with traditional flavour.

Japfu Peak, at 3048 metres above sea level, is situated for exhilarating scaling and trekking. Watch the sun draw fascinating pictures over the entire sky, as it travels slowly beyond the horizon. Marvel at the ocean of mist at the crack of dawn.

The rare Blythe's Tragopan, believed to be on the verge of extinction, is being reared here in captivity at the Zoological Park in Kohima.

The exquisitely picturesque landscape, the vibrantly colourful sunrise and sunset, lush and verdant flare, this is a land that represents aberrant beauty, moulded perfectly for a breath-taking experience. Thanks Roky, my guide and friend. Roky means lucky. So does Vijay, as it does victory, but I have been lucky all my life. Hard work they say is another name for luck.

SIKKIM

Nestled in the Himalayas Sikkim is the least populous state in India, and the second smallest in area after Goa. Sikkim was an independent state ruled by the Chogyal monarchy until 1975, when a referendum to make it India's twenty-second state succeeded. The thumb-shaped state borders Nepal in the west, China to the north and east, and Bhutan in the south-east. West Bengal borders Sikkim to its south. Gangtok is its capital and largest town.

The most widely accepted origin of the name Sikkim is that it is a combination of two words in the Limbu *Su*, which means "new", and *Khyim*, which means "palace" or house, in reference to the palace built by the state's first ruler, Phuntsok Namgyal. The Tibetan name for Sikkim is 'Denjong, which means the "valley of rice".

Guru Rinpoche is the patron saint of Sikkim. His statue in Namchi is the tallest in the world at 118 feet. The earliest recorded event related to Sikkim is the passage of the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche through the land in the 8th century. The Guru is reported to have blessed the land, introduced Buddhism to Sikkim, and foretold the era of monarchy in the state that would arrive centuries later. In the 14th century, according to legend, Khye Bumsa, a prince from the Minyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet, had a divine revelation one night instructing him to travel south to seek his fortunes. His descendants were later to form the royal family of Sikkim. In 1642, the fifth generation descendant of Khye Bumsa, Phuntsog Namgyal was consecrated as the first Chogyal (king) of Sikkim by the three venerated Lamas who came from the north, west and south to Yuksom, marking the beginning of the monarchy.

Following the arrival of the British Raj in neighbouring India, Sikkim allied with them against their common enemy, Nepal. The Nepalese attacked Sikkim, overrunning most of the region including the Terai. This prompted the British East India Company to attack Nepal, resulting in the Gurkha War of 1814. Treaties signed between Sikkim and Nepal — the Sugauli Treaty — and Sikkim and British India — Titalia Treaty — returned the territory annexed by the Nepalese to Sikkim in 1817. Ties between Sikkim and the British administrators of India grew sour, however, with the beginning of British taxation of the Morang region. Later, Darjeeling district and Morang were annexed to India in 1835. The British invasion therefrom led to the Chogyal's becoming a puppet king under the directive of the British governor.

Sikkim: India's 22nd state

In 1947, a popular vote rejected Sikkim's joining the Indian Union and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to a special protectorate status for Sikkim. After a period of unrest in 1972-1973, matters came to a head in 1975, when the Kazi (Prime Minister) appealed to the Indian Parliament for representation and change of Sikkim's status to a state of India. A referendum was held in which 97.5% of the people voted to join the Indian Union. On 16 May 1975, Sikkim officially became the 22nd state of the Indian Union, and monarchy abolished.

China eventually recognised Sikkim as an Indian state in 2003. As part of a significant pact between India and China signed by the prime ministers of the two countries, Manmohan Singh and Wen Jiabao, China released an official map clearly showing Sikkim as part of the Republic of India (2005).

Languages

The official languages are English, Bhutia, Nepali, Lepcha, and Limboo. It must be noted though that almost all written transactions are in English. Nepali is the lingua franca of Sikkim. English and Hindi are also spoken and understood in the state. Other languages spoken in Sikkim include Bhutia, Dzongkha, Groma, Gurung, Lepcha, Limbu, Magar, Majhi, Majhwar, Newari, Rai, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Tamang, Thulung, Tibetan and Yakha.

The southern urban areas have English, Nepali and Hindi dailies. Nepali language newspapers are locally printed, whereas Hindi and English newspapers are printed in Siliguri. English newspapers include *The Statesman* which is printed in Siliguri, as well as *The Hindu* and *The Telegraph*, printed in Kolkata, and are received a day late in the towns of Gangtok, Jorethang, Melli, and Geyzing. The *Sikkim Herald* is the official weekly publication of the government.

Say *tashi delek* in Sikkimese, and you wish the person for the day, namaskar, namaste.

Syllabus design

We went to Sikkim on an invitation to design a short course with which to improve the communication skills and fluency of English of the students who had just joined the mainstream of education after the rudiment at home or at some preparatory schools, so called English medium schools. Along with Dr. ON Koul, who later became Director of the National Open School we designed the course to the entire satisfaction of the government. It was appreciated by the students and parents but for some mysterious reasons known only to the government it was discontinued after a trial of three years.

Another time it was to set model question papers in English for the students of secondary classes of Sikkim and to train their teachers in preparing a balanced question paper. We prepared the blue print, made model question papers on the texts, did a practical run on real students, in a real class. Till reports last came in teachers were following the basic pattern we had told them, incorporating changes following changes in syllabus and the text books.

On another occasion, it was to conduct a course in development of text based instructional material. The course of seven days was fine as it went, except that it lacked the lustre. My friend Emu Foning who was to have coordinated it passed away of cancer. I missed this young woman from Sikkim who at CIEFL, Hyderabad was afraid of the ceiling fans lest they fall on her, while she was sleeping. Sikkim is cold enough to do without the ceiling fans and these gadgets in hotter climes were quite a terror to her. R.I.P.

Literacy and Education

Literacy in Sikkim is 69.68%, which breaks up into 76.73% for males and 61.46% for females. There are a total of 1545 government-run educational institutions and eighteen private schools mostly located in the towns. There are twelve colleges and other institutions in Sikkim that offer higher education. The State has five Colleges of Teacher Education. The largest institution is the

Sikkim Manipal University which offers higher education in engineering and medicine. There are two state-run polytechnics, Advanced Technical Training Centre and Centre for Computers and Communication Technology in Sikkim which offer diploma courses in various branches of engineering. ATTC is situated at Bardang, Singtam and CCCT at Chisopani, Namchi. Many students however, prefer Siliguri and Kolkata for their higher education.

Information technology

The State has already made great strides in the knowledge-based industries such as Information Technology. The State can gain from the advantage of skilled manpower, which has shown potential for the IT industry. A software technology park is being set up which will have wide-bandwidth, stable power supply and incubation space for entrepreneurs. The Department is also promoting IT enabled services like medical transcription, telemedicine, and computerized Braille.

Ethnicity

The majority of Sikkim's residents are of Nepali ethnic-national origin who came to the province in the 19th century. The native Sikkimese, consist of the Bhutias, who migrated from the Kham district of Tibet in the 14th century, and the Lepchas who are believed to have migrated from the far east. Tibetans reside mostly in the northern and eastern reaches of the state. Immigrant resident communities not native to the state include the Marwaris, who own most of the shops in South Sikkim and Gangtok, the Biharis, most of whom are employed in blue collar jobs, and the Bengalis.

The terrain

Sikkim is characterised by wholly mountainous terrain, with elevations ranging from 280 metres (920 feet) to 8,585 metres (28,000 feet). The summit of the Kanchenjunga is the highest point. Agriculture is difficult because of the precipitous and rocky slopes. However, some hill slopes have been converted into farmlands using terrace-farming techniques. Numerous snow-fed streams in Sikkim have carved out river valleys in the west and south of the state. These streams combine into the Teesta and its tributary, the Rangeet. The Teesta, described as the "lifeline of Sikkim", flows through the state from north to south. The state has twenty-eight mountain peaks, 21 glaciers, 227 high altitude lakes, 5 hot springs, and over 100 rivers and streams. Eight mountain passes connect the state to Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. There are a total of eight towns and nine sub-divisions in Sikkim. Jorethang is an important start, with Rangpo welcoming you to this Shangri-la (pun intended).

Flora and fauna

Sikkim boasts around 5,000 flowering plants, 515 rare orchids, 60 primulas species, 36 rhododendrons species, 11 oaks varieties, 23 bamboos varieties, 16 conifer species, 362 types of ferns and ferns allies, 8 tree ferns, and over 424 medicinal plants.

The fauna includes the snow leopard, the musk deer, the Bhoral, the Himalayan Tahr, the red panda, the Himalayan marmot, the serow, the goral, the barking deer, the common langur, the Himalayan Black Bear, the clouded leopard, the Marbled Cat, the leopard cat, the wild dog, the Tibetan wolf, the hog badger, the binturong, the jungle cat and the civet cat. Among the animals more commonly found in the alpine zone are yaks, mainly reared for their milk, meat, and as a beast of burden.

The avifauna of Sikkim is comprised of the Impeyan pheasant, the crimson horned pheasant, the snow partridge, the snow cock, the lammergeyer and griffon vultures, as well as golden eagles, quail, plovers, woodcock, sandpipers, pigeons, Old World flycatchers, babblers and robins. 550 species of birds have been recorded in Sikkim, some of which have been declared endangered.

Kanchenjunga

The stately massif of Kanchenjunga is all of its own. From any angle and in any season, the world's third highest mountain that India shares with Nepal has a bewitching appeal. It is close. It is perfectly sculpted it is almost spiritual. See the sunrise on it from tiger Hill or better still from Sandakphu on the Singalita ridge. The clouds swirl in the monsoon season, a shaft of light striking the summit all around is dark and gloomy. Or gaze on it in the clear bright air of the winter months when it seems to lean back, at peace itself and the world. Kanchenchunga holds the eye like a coronet on the crest of the earth.

Nathu La Pass

The historical re opening of the Nathu La Pass between Sikkim and Tibet after 44 years on 6 July 2006 connecting Lhasa, Tibet to India is scheduled to give a boost to the local economy. The Pass, closed since 1962 was an offshoot of the fabled ancient Silk Route, 4500 meter high pass which was essential to the wool, fur and spice trade connecting bringing China and India, along with West Asia and providing an arterial link with Europe. The financial transaction should improve the emotional bondings between the peoples. The opening of the Nathu La also reflects the opening up of the mindsets in India and China.. It also shows a larger global reality facilitating movements of peoples and goods across various borders to make the world small. The lesson to be learnt from this opening is that borders, both national and international, should become the meeting point of ideas, people and goods rather than dividing them.

Rumtek

The Rumtek monastery is the most famous monument of Sikkim. To get away from the daily grind just ascend a little to the monastery, a three storied building completed in 1966, but built in the traditional Tibetan style, just 23 kms from Gangtok.

Hinduism and Buddhism are the religions professed by most Sikkimese. Sikkim also has a small Christian population, consisting mostly of people of Lepcha origin. Mosques in Gangtok and Mangan also serve the small Muslim population.

Enter Sikkim

Sikkim does not have any airports or railheads because of its rough terrain. The closest airport, Bagdogra, is near the town of Siliguri, West Bengal. The Gangtok helipad is the only civilian helipad in the state. The closest railway station is New Jalpaiguri, about sixteen kilometres from Siliguri. Most roads in Sikkim are exposed to landslides and flooding by nearby streams. National Highway 31A links Siliguri to Gangtok, South Sikkim to the rest of the country. The highway is an all-weather metalled road which mostly runs parallel of the river Teesta, entering Sikkim at Rangpo. Landslides are less frequent in these areas. The state government maintains roadways that do not fall in the BRO jurisdiction.

A branch of the highway from Melli connects western Sikkim. Towns in southern and western Sikkim are connected to the northern West Bengal hill stations of Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Within the state, vehicles with four wheel drives are the most popular means of transport, as they can navigate rocky slopes.

Infrastructure and Industrial policy

Sikkim's economy is largely agrarian, based on traditional farming methods, on terraced slopes. The rural populace grows crops such as cardamom, oranges, apples, tea and orchids. Rice is grown on terraced hillsides in the southern reaches. Sikkim has the highest production and largest cultivated area of cardamom in India. Because of the hilly terrain, and lack of reliable transportation infrastructure, there are no large-scale industries. Breweries, distilleries, tanning and watch making are the main industries. The state has an impressive growth rate of 8.3%, which is the second highest in the country after Delhi. India's least populous state, Sikkim has only 76 persons per square kilometre. Its growth rate is 32.98%. Its per capita income at Rs 11,356 is one of the highest in the country. Sikkim has a number of hydroelectric power stations, providing a steady electricity source.

The drive from Siliguri /New Jalpaiguri/ Bagdogra along the Teesta river is a sight that keeps you looking towards the river most of the time with the result that when you enter Sikkim, it is that your head is bent right. Teesta waters are gushing, the forests do make their presence felt by the swishing sound of their leaves, the gentle grind of the bamboos.

Climate

The climate ranges from sub-tropical in the south to tundra in the northern parts. Most of the inhabited regions of Sikkim, however, enjoy a temperate climate, with the temperatures seldom exceeding 28 °C (82 °F) in summer or dropping below 0 °C (32 °F) in winter. The state enjoys five seasons: winter, summer, spring, and autumn, and a monsoon season between June and September. The average annual temperature for most of Sikkim is around 18 °C (64 °F). Sikkim is one of the few states in India to receive regular snowfall. The snow line is around 6,000 metres (19,600 feet). During the monsoon months, the state is lashed by heavy rains that increase the number of landslides. The state record for the longest period of non-stop rain is eleven days. In the northern region, because of high altitude, temperatures drop below -40 °C in winter. Fog also affects many parts of the state during winter and the monsoons, making transportation extremely perilous.

Courtesy

Sikkim was a different area, then for those were the times when the helicopter services had just started. We however asked the government to pick us up from New Jalpaiguri station with big, railway platform comparable to Kharagpur, the largest railway platform in India.

Came a day when we were travelling on our own and the bus gave way on the tenth mile from Gangtok. Ruffled, but keeping cool, (cold in Sikkim, anyway) I rang up the nearest possible helpline which happened to be the Tashi Namgyal Academy whose Principal said he would send a vehicle right away and before I could put the receiver down the vehicle was there calling for my name.

In recent years, the government of Sikkim has promoted tourism. For which it has a vast potential. By tapping into this the state has grossed an earnings windfall. A fledgling industry the state has recently invested in is online gambling The "Playwin" lottery, which is played on custom-built terminals connected to the internet, has been a commercial success, with operations

all over the country. Among the minerals mined in Sikkim are copper, dolomite, limestone, graphite, mica, iron, and coal.

Given the fragility of the eco-system, the approach towards industry is a cautious one and primarily environment friendly. Industries should be entirely pollution free and effluents should be bare minimum with nature friendly disposal of wastes. The strategy would be to build on State's comparative advantages in terms of raw materials and cheap labour surmounting State's handicaps. In other words, promotion of the industries should be in tune with the development strategy.

Sikkim probably is the only State in the north-eastern areas, which is free from any insurgency related problems. The friendly environment and pollution free atmosphere is absolutely conducive to investment. There could not have been a better situation.

TRIPURA

The diktat

Cut short your program but enrich with all pre-planned academic inputs and be in Bhubaneswar for the silver jubilee exhibition your department is putting up was the Principal's decree. No way can you circumvent the Peter Principle. The Boss is always right. Being senior yet I have consideration for age. Apart from it, the late Dr. G.B. Kanungo was a great person and a man God had created exactly in his own image. Then he broke the mould. No one who left the Principal's room left without a smile. Being called on the carpet acquired a new meaning and nuance in those times.

We generally go in a batch, at least a company of two. So also here. Age again, though I was senior in work and responsibilities. Asked my colleague a million times for advance reservations, but we were compelled, courtesy colleague above, to take the last train to Kolkata which had to be late, since I was on it! The flight to Agartala had flown before we had even arrived at Howrah railway station. Then the taxi drive would take more than an hour, but we were much past beyond that worry now. The greater one was to get tickets for the flight next day and claim refund on the unused tickets. Not done, the Duty Officer, growled, Later, in passenger interest and as government officials he confirmed our tickets for the next day. Air is the fastest way to get to Tripura. Thanks Indian Airlines, now known as *Indian*.

Tripura is bound on the north, west, south and south-east by Bangladesh whereas in the east it has a common boundary with Assam and Mizoram. It is the remotest in the Northeast. It shares 84% international border with Bangladesh (830 km) of which 60% is hilly terrain, 60% is forest and 52.76% is forest cover.

There is a common belief that the name of the State originated from "*Tripura Sundari*" - the presiding deity of the land, which is famous as one of the 51 *pethos* of Hindu Pilgrims. Apart from this traditional view, it is believed that originally the land was known as "*Tuipra*" meaning a land adjoining the water. In days of yore the boundaries of Tripura extended up to the Bay of Bengal when its rulers held sway from Garo hills to Arakan. Legends speak of the existence of Tripura as an entity from the days of the epic, *Mahabharata*. The temples reflect the religious preference of a long established Hindu dynasty.

Tripura, formed on 21 January 1972 is a mountainous land cleft by valleys of about ten rivers with plains and warm humidity, warmer hospitality. All over India, the *Gomukh* is an auspicious emblem. Ancient drinking fountains and clear springs are often directed to flow through spouts

fashioned in the form of a cow's head. Tripura is the gomukh of the northeast. It thrusts out into Bangladesh with only its neck attached to Mizoram and Assam.

Languages

The main languages used in Tripura, besides English are Bengali, Tripuri, Manipuri, Kokobarak and Hindi. The state has a literacy rate of 60.44%, of which males have a literacy rate of 81.0% and 64.9% for females. The literacy of the scheduled tribes is 40.37%. Long and intimate association of Rabindranath Tagore with Tripura has added lustre to its rich cultural heritage. The Nobel laureate's novel *Rajashri* and the play *Visharjan* grew out of legends of Manikya dynasty of Tripura. There are 3732 schools, 17 colleges and 1 University in Tripura.

Tribes, Craft

16% of the inhabitants are scheduled caste, 31% schedule tribe (19 tribes) and 46% are other backward communities. Each of the tribes with their traditions and customs make Tripura a variegated state. Tipras dominate all other tribes of the state. Laskars and Notias are the other two Tipra groups of tribes. This group belongs to the Bodo race. The Mundas, Oraons, Santhals, Bhils, Lepchas, Bhutias migrated to Tripura in recent past. The Kukis form another group of tribes in the state. Hindus are in majority. The tribals prefer highlands and relatively remote tracts, while others live in the plains.

Different ethnic groups in Tripura make excellent variety of handicrafts using bamboo and cane. The most famous products are Room Dividers, decorated Wall Panels, attractive furniture, dining table mats, floor mats etc. We can watch the craft persons at work in different villages.

About 2/3rd area of the state is under forest cover where different species of trees, orchids, birds and wild life are found. Tripura offers excellent opportunities for being an eco-friendly state.

History

The history of Tripura as an administrative unit dates back to the days of Maharajas when the territory was a native State. It is significant to note that all though Tripura was conquered by force of arms in 1761, no Political Agent was appointed in the state till 1871 - a gap of 110 years.

The former princely state of Tripura was ruled by Maharajas of Manikya dynasty. It was an independent administrative unit under the Maharaja even during the British rule in India. This independence was qualified subject to the recognition of the British, as the paramount power, of each successive ruler. After Independence of India, an agreement for the merger of Tripura with the Indian Union was signed by the Regent Maharani on September 9, 1947 and the administration of the state was actually taken over by the Govt. of India on October 15, 1949.

Former Glory

Within its small geographical area, Tripura offers magnificent palaces (Ujjayanta Palace and Kunjaban Palace at Agartala and Neermahal - Lake Palace at Melaghar). Splendid rock-cut carvings and stone images are found at Unakoti near Kailashahar, Debtamura near Amarpur and Pilak in Belonia Sub-divisions. Important temples of Hindus and Buddhists including the famous Mata Tripureswari temple (one of the 51 Pithasthans as per Hindu mythology) at Udaipur. The state has vast natural as well as artificial lakes such as Dumboor, Rudrasagar, Amarsagar, Jagannath Dighi, Kalyan Sagar. At Udaipur is the beautiful hill station of Jampui

bordering Mizoram and is the highest hill range in Tripura. Wild life sanctuaries at Sepahijala, Gumti, Rowa and Trishna showcase the rich cultural heritage of Tribals, Bengalis and Manipuri communities residing in the state. Jampui Hill is situated about 200 kms away from Agartala

Administration

Administratively Tripura is divided into 4 Districts, 15 Subdivisions, 38 Rural Development Blocks, 31 Revenue Circles, 183 Tehsils, 874 Revenue Moujas, 962 Gram Panchayets, 3 Jilla Parishads, 18 Notified Areas, 1 Municipal Council. The economy is primarily agrarian. The primary sector (Agricultural) contributes about 64% of total employment in the state and about 48% of the State Domestic Product(SDP).A variety of Horticultural/ Plantation Crops are produced in Tripura like Pineapple, Oranges, Cashewnut, Jackfruit, Coconut, Tea, Rubber, Forest , Plantations etc. As regards Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, the present level of production is not adequate to meet the demand of the state and there is need for considerable development.

The Industry Sector has remained undeveloped so far. Tourism has been declared as an Industry in the state since 1987. Handicraft is emerging as a potential industry in Tripura. The Handloom Industry also plays an important role as a rural industry of Tripura.

Dance

Tripura has a rich cultural heritage of 19 different tribal communities, with Bengali and Manipuri. Each community has its own famous dance forms.

The main folk dances are Hozagiri - Reang community, Garia, Jhum, Maimita, Masak Sumani and Lebang boomani - Tripuri, Bizu - Chakma, Cheraw and Wekcome - Lusai, Hai-Hak - Malsum, Wangala - Garo, Sangraiaaka, Chimithang, Padisha and Abhangma - Mog, Garia - Kalai and Jamatia, Gajan, Dhamail, Sari and Rabindra - Bengali and Basanta Rash and Pung chalam - Manipuri. Each community has its own traditional musical instruments such as ‘ Khamb (drum)’, Bamboo flute, ‘Lebang’, ‘Sarinda’, ‘Do- Tara’, and ‘Khengrong’, etc.

Music

The state has produced famous musicians. Sachin Dev Burman and Rahul Dev Burman popularly known as Pancham. Music and song are an integral part of the Hindi cinema or even the Indian cinema. We love to see the man and the woman cavorting round a tree, with a song on their lips, and the inevitable rain, *barsaat* ..From Khemchand Prakash, KL Saigal, SD Burman, to Adil Shrivastava, Lalit-Jatin is a long span. All of them migrated to vend their talents in tinsel town Mumbai and came back home, their bags full of laurels besides other goodies. Chubby cheeked Pancham made the public dance to his tunes when he was composing. Today even 12 years after his death, his music is selling and people, young and old, are swaying to it. The man from Tripura, his father Sachin Dev Burman, gave up his princely fiefdom at the call of his genius, at the strum of the tanpura. Certainly, it has been worth it. The Burmans have become a brand in Indian film music with Asha Bhosle’s voice adding the necessary semibreve to it. With her seductive, husky voice Asha Bhosle had not hesitated to singing any of the Burman numbers, combined as they did the western tunes with Indian settings using all Indian musical instruments. At the same time, Pancham embellished the Ragas as well.

IMPLICATIONS

AS A TEACHER, AS A LANGUAGE TEACHER

I have visited these states many times in different capacities, most important of them being mostly two.

1. to conduct short in-service courses in English as programme coordinator, and / or as a resource person.
2. on committees for selection of National Award to Teachers, help in designing their syllabus, curriculum etc.

What impacts have these visits had on me and what were the changes on either side?

- a. Earlier, in the early eighties I used to rattle out prepared lesson plans, lectures, talk about skills, spoken English and related topics. The change today is we negotiate the topics with the participants who are experienced teachers or chief functionaries in the state. We allow them to do most of the talking and, having arrived at topics, we try to work out solutions together after plenty of interaction. It is no longer a one way monologue but a two way process which satisfies both parties, hopefully.
- b. At the same time I encourage them to reflect on their own teaching to help them forge solutions to their own problems. Thus I try to make them into reflective practitioners since what we need in future are reflective teachers.
- c. In times past, the blackboard was the main teaching aid (it still is), helped sometimes with the audio-cassette. 16 mm films such as *Teaching Observed*, and the *Walter and Connie series*, which had to be ordered in advance. These either reached far too early or they missed the post. When they were screened, they were indeed enjoyable. Having advanced in technology with computers, CDs on ELT are freely available everywhere. I have in mind CDs on nursery rhymes both in English and in Indian languages, English pronunciation – RP as well as the American call center variant and those now available free of cost from the Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore. It is a matter of some satisfaction to note that participants do enjoy these as well as more advanced CDs on ELT and do not hesitate to enact some rhymes and games which they thought they had forgotten in the grind (?) of teaching.
- d. The Internet is an extremely good resource for material on ELT – be it Lesson plans, activities, articles, critiques and the like. You just have to know the proper site and this will lead you on a great ELT adventure. I wish I fully know how to use the computer but with the little, I know I am able to give to these participants the latest in the world of ELT, besides the world itself.
- e. Involving the participants themselves to teach their own colleagues is a recent technique that I have picked up. Simulated teaching, and teaching English under difficult circumstances. Caring and sharing in the language classroom is a sound strategy.
- f. Of late, I have become bilingual in my own (inimitable!) style since in India only one language will not do. Multilingualism is the strength of our country.

However, what has been common through all these years is a sense of enthusiasm because dejection like enthusiasm is infectious. In addition, as suggested earlier, leave your emotional baggage outside the classroom. Measure the classroom temperature with laughs in the class. As Wilga Rivers advises, end the English class on a happy note so that the participants enthusiastically anticipate your next class.

On the score of National Awards to Teachers, the officer who had come to receive me at the airport started giving me the details, talking shop. I managed to change the conversation by pointing out to the changes, which had taken place in the town since my last visit, and asked him

to give me the files which I would go through at night. At the meeting the next day my assessment was received well though there were changes from the assessment made by the state. This has been my practice and being very objective is free from bias of any kind – person, subject, or language.

Being a patient listener similarly, I listen in thoughtful detail to what is being suggested as far as the textbooks, syllabus or the curriculum is being talked about. Once they have done, I take centre stage and with a few adaptations, the view that emerges is the one arrived at after consensus.

The figures shown may have indicated the sharp rise in the number of schools, colleges and universities in the northeast. It shows their eagerness to be educated and to contribute their powerful mite to India, by joining in its mainstream. The states are eager, impatient and poised to take to speedy economic and social growth path. However, importance to sectors like education that have been give more importance as compared to agriculture and industry has in a way increased unemployment. A balanced approach is required.

CONCLUSION

The North-East is rich: in culture, language, sartorial codes, cuisine, festivals, dances, resources, landscape. People think it as an area that has been forgotten. No. Can you ever forget your only sister? How then can you forget seven, each equally beautiful? Equally graceful, and expert with the ladle?

What is required is a heightened vision for the region. The peoples of the North east need to be enabled and empowered.

The North East is therefore a unique area of India - diversity abounds in all matters: temperature - physical and mental, tempers and timbre. Not separate from India, yet they are different. North East is very modern - all the latest amenities are available, and at much cheaper cost than elsewhere.

People do not tend to congregate and settle only in the capitals as in the plains; they prefer their own areas, hills, and hilltops. They like their patch of land, their kin, and stick firmly to their language.

The percentage of literacy in all these areas is high, certainly above the national average. By whatever standards you reckon it - literacy in the conventional sense in terms of the three Rs. But that has to be changed now. Literacy has to be redefined, digitalized. Therefore, these people are good at digital literacy, computer literacy, and whatever else we may think about in the world that has grown flat. And as an computer expert remarked the other day while recruiting apprentices for famous Indian software companies, the people of North East, specially girls, have very nubile fingers, and sharp eye sight, a great combination for IT professionals.

Further the teachers in the North East work faithfully as teachers performing their duties with dedication and service, the smile constantly on their faces, the frown at the back, reserved for the home perhaps (?), I am not quite sure, certainly wrong I can vouch. Moreover teachers here are regarded as representatives of the society and work for its good, be it construction of road, that of a village hall, a prayer room, cleaning of the surroundings, raising funds for a cause, or for a needy individual.

Most of the roads in the region are maintained by the BRO – Border Roads Organisation, an organisation of the Indian Defence. Communications being a great factor in the defence of a country the roads and bridges have to be always in excellent condition whatever be the weather – landslides, cracks, diversions that are not infrequent. Therefore driving to any of these areas is a dangerous pleasure provided you can manage the U-turns, the S-turns and the hilly terrain. Close

your eyes on the curves, smile if you survive. The nut behind the steering wheel drives a car, and these people see that all their nuts are in proper shape and health! In geographics like these, leave it to the better known who knows the turn of the road, turn of the wheel.

An interesting linguistic factor is the boards put up along the road as Cautions. Sample some:

- Caution on Curves
- This is neither a rally nor a race, Drive carefully with grace.
- If married, divorce drinking with driving
- This is a highway, not a runway

Earlier, the trucks had signs at the back saying Horn Please.
Now they have changed to

- Sound Horn,
- Blow Horn,
- Horn Pliz, (Mizoram)

and Hindi is gradually taking over with

- Awaz Karo
- Awaz Do,
- Awaz Sunao
- Awaz suno
- Awaz de do (Nagaland)

Incidentally, Nagaland is the state in India where the road tax is cheapest..

Uncertainty is North-East's hallmark. Electronically it is cut off quite often. In no case is this intentional.

I realized this when I landed up in Guwahati a couple of days back, screamed and scrambled around at the Lokenath Gopinath Bardoloi Airport, to no avail. Taxi, hotel, owner recognized me after years, no problem. Next day when I went to the government offices, they said their staff had been present, placard and all. How could they recognize a person for a flight they had been informed about, but who landed up by a flight hitting terra firma earlier? My mistake, but henceforward, no holds barred, in their hospitality. This is entirely true for not only one state but also all the seven cousins. The people of the North-East will see you to your utmost satisfaction before they leave you to rest in peace.

There are many cobwebs in the minds of the plains people that have to be removed. The NE food habits are one of them. Being non-vegetarian does not mean they eat all kinds of meat. Much depends on the availability, and natural is the desire for survival. As in Rajasthan, and other arid areas, people make do with all kinds of vegetable products including roots and leaves, shoots, seeds and kernels. So also in the mostly non-vegetarian North-East where fish, flesh or fowl make the table. Tastes, of course, differ and have to be cultivated.

Similarly that these areas are on the seismic zone where only wooden houses are constructed needs a change. Prefixed earlier the note on technologies makes it clear that times are changing, construction activities are taking a look-over. All over concrete high rise structures have come up and the view becomes breathtaking specially at night when through the valley, the fog, and the mist, the electric bulbs twinkle like little stars.

Most of the people of the North East states are good in the martial arts. Judo, Karate are learnt by toddlers along with letters of the alphabet. You graduate with *taek won do* to become a black belt,

and as you open up other people's belts, the colour of your belt gets darker and so even though these people may look lean and thin, they are complete muscle and bone, mighty strong and god forbid you are found in the wrong company. Asking for time would invite a chop and send you straight to your hotel room, plastered and bandaged.

Being sensitive areas, having international boundaries, the presence of defence forces is high. Veritable. You can hear the rhythmic stomp of boots even in your car. And wasn't I glad to see that most of the military-green trucks bore the logo of Vehicle Factory, Jabalpur, my home town! The defence people themselves are very helpful in any emergency, in any area. They can fetch you out of a stranded situation and will see to your comforts till the ordinary civilian gives them leave to go. I am proud of the fact that I was on the staff of the National Defence Academy, Kharakvasla. When I resigned from that post, out of the 33 people who turned up to see me off at Pune railway station, 32 were of the Air, Army and the Navy. Also I do belong to a tradition of defence forces with my cousins being fighter pilots, mustachioed generals, my father being an army captain and my uncle as tahasildar of Chandrapur being killed in the riots just preceding the Independence of India.

Throughout the North-East people invariably always have an aroma (?) about them. Perfume, and talc are passé. Like the paan shops that dot the length and breadth of India, in the NE they are known as *dukans*, lifted bodily with pronunciation from the Hindi word. These people prefer the tambul - raw betel soaked in water, and covered with its hard skin, complete with bristles. It is a pleasure watching someone waiting for the bus and trying his or her best to get at the kernel. Having done that, in goes the hand in the waist pocket and comes out a nut-cracker with which the tambul is shaped into edible pieces. Suck on it a long time. Improves your breath, colours your lips red, gives you a bit of a kick in the head, and prepares you to face the man or your maker.

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