



## INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AMONG THE SINGPHO TRIBE OF ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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### ABSTRACT

Religion is an indispensable component of cultural life a community. Every tribal have their distinct religious belief which is inherent from ancestor. The Singpho tribe lives in the range of Patkai Bum or Singpho hill (known as Patkai Hill) have their own belief and religion in worship of *Nat* (spirit). They treat all the objects of nature as their *Nat* and also believe that *Nat* is responsible for any phenomenon of the society and even the rising of the sun, the moon, the season, natural phenomena like storm, wind, fire, rain, shine, decease, death, sorrow etc. *Nat* is basically two types i.e. good and evil. The former is for social welfare and the latter normally causes harm. There are some important *Nat* whom the Singphos worship and offer sacrifices. However, the Singphos follower of Buddhism still they retain their indigenous religion. In this paper an effort has been made to trace the indigenous religious of the Singphos. The study is based on field study of Singpho habitant villages of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is noteworthy to mention that with the spread of modern education, occupational diversification, assimilation of the Singpho society with the outside world changes the attitude and thinking of the Singpho society. As a result indigenous religion and practices are edge of tradition and modernity in the Singpho society.

**KEYWORDS:** Singpho, indigenous, religion, spirit

### INTRODUCTION

Humans have been adored of their belief or super natural power from the beginning of the civilization. There are various beliefs which have been congregating since time immemorial and human are very keen to satisfy them to harmony between man and nature. In this aspect the Singphos are not exceptional. Despite impressive socio-economic changes have been taken place among the Singphos still retain their pristine elements of age-old belief.

The Singphos are one of the frontier tribe inhabited in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh adjoining the Patkai Bum (hill). All together 7958 Singpho people with 3999 males and 3959 females are living in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Census 2011). Moreover their kin are live in China (Yunnan Province) known as Jingpo and Kachin state of Myanmar (Burma) called Kachin (Machey, 2013). Although they live in different countries they retain same language, culture and tradition.

They mostly inhabited in Tinsukia district of Assam and Changlang, Lohit and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, small sizes of the Singpho speaking people are living in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam (Machey, 2013).



The Singphos are now Theravada Buddhist but simultaneously retain the indigenous religion of naturism and worship of *Nat* (spirit) (Borah, 2006). They treat all the objects of nature as their *Nat* and also believe that *Nat* is responsible for any phenomenon of the society and even the rising of the Sun, the Moon and the season, natural phenomena like storm, wind, fire, rain, shine, sunshine, decease, death, sorrow etc. With this backdrop, it is very imperative to study about their indigenous religion and practice.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The prime objective of the study is to inquire indigenous religion of the Singphos.

### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is based on field study of the Singpho villages of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Qualitative data were collected through interview schedule and focus group discussion.

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a renaissance in Singpho religious life. The Singphos have been highly influenced by Buddhism since the last two decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century. As it is said, a monk named *Dingla Chrado* who came from Hukong valley of Burma was the first to introduce Buddhism among the Singphos.

The Singphos bear the faith that after the creation of the Sun and the Moon by '*Mathun Matha*' (the creator of the universe), the earth bloomed up with flowers and fruits and become a posture ground for all creatures (Ningkhee, 2008).

The Singpho people accepted the non-violence principle of Buddhism but most of them are still adherents of traditional religious belief and practises of *spirits* and *deities*. The Singphos have no regular priesthood, however, they have village priest called dumsawa. On the other hand, they have not given up their shamanistic beliefs. A number of spirits (*Nats*) and deities are considered as malevolent and responsible for causing miseries to human being and therefore such spirits and deities are worshipped on a number of occasions by sacrificing bulls, pigs, cows and chickens.

There are some important *spirits* and *deities* whom the Singphos worship and offer sacrifices. These are:

**Natkun (Abode in the village):** The Singphos believed that the *Natkun* protect family members from the malice of the malevolent spirits. The *Natkun* is considered as the guardian of the family. Therefore, for the welfare of the family or an individual the spirit of the *Natkun* is worship by sacrificing a fowl.

**Smathi (Abode in the house):** When family member suffer from sick for long time then the head of the household or Dumsa (village priest) offer meal to the *Smathi* to cure from ill.

**Ga Nat, Kha Nat and Cithang Nat (Spirit of soil, water and forest):** The Singphos believed that a good agriculture depends on the blessing of the spirits, so they perform rituals and act for bless of the Ga Nat, Kha Nat and Cithang Nat by offering sacrifices of a piglet and five fowls.

**Namsang Chote (The Jungle Deity):** When the paddy is damaged by insects or for any other reasons, the Singpho tribe performs a ceremony called *Numsang chote*. It is performed village wise after performing divination and offerings are made to *Numsang*. To perform the ceremony they collect donation of money from the village as well as pigs and chickens. The



ceremony lasts for three days and after completion all the village paths are closed for one day to prevent coming of outsiders. Before opening the paths the village priests offer some grains of rice to the jungle deity. The priest starts the incantation from the evening and last for three days. On completion of three days sacrifice animal and cooked heart and liver separately to offered the deity by the priest. The Namsang Nat would bless the villages with a bulk of crop (Baruah, 1977).

**Soanjo:** Rice people perform a ceremony called *soanjo* one or twice in a year after plantation of the seedlings or after harvesting. In this ceremony they sacrifice four chickens or one pig.

**Tisam Nat:** During the fifth month of pregnancy a religious ceremony is performed sacrificing a female pig and a male chicken in the name of *Tisam Nat*, a female deity. There are two *Tisam Nats* one is mother and the other daughter. The pig is offered to the mother and the chicken is offered to the daughter. This deity is propitiated for the welfare of the expectant mother as well as the child in the womb.

**Birth:** The Singpho believe that birth is give of God. If the accouchement is successful everybody feels happy. If however there is much labour it is believed that some spirits (*Nats*) are at work and the priest is informed immediately, who sit down to perform the necessary divination and the remedy there of, which is then performed accordingly.

**Naming:** A chicken is killed in the name of *Natkun* the household deity or guardian Nat, the *Laruwang*, the spirit responsible for name giving. The village priest performs the ceremony. On completion of one month the women can go to the fields and perform all the works as well as usual.

**Death:** The Singphos do not attribute the causes of death to the evil actions of any spirits or deities but they consider it as bad luck *marna* and think that the person has no luck to enjoy the earthly happiness anymore and hence died. They believe that man is mortal and is destined to die one day.

**Nimon:** Nimon a female spirit and she causes fever at night. To satisfy her family offers a pig, a chicken and articles used by a woman.

**The Idea of the Soul:** The Singphos believe that the soul exists for ever as an imperishable substance. But they conceive the soul as of two kinds, good and evil. The good souls are destined to go to heaven and the evil souls to hell. Further, the evil souls may turn into evil spirits, who roam about on the earth without any shelter and do harms to human beings.

## CONCLUSION

The religious belief is the part of culture and every society has own religious belief and practices. In this respect the Singpho tribe of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has been practicing their traditional religious belief from the time immemorial. Hence, it is noteworthy to mention that the Singphos have a very rich indigenous religion which still adheres although most Singphos are today are Buddhists. In every Singpho villages they practices traditional religion to satisfy the spirit and their ancestors in conjunction to Buddhism.

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## AN ENQUIRY INTO THE RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S VIEW ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore had a great outlook that the progress of the nation could happen when the development became the way of rural inhabitants. He expected that feeling of self-confidence sprit of self-help; adoption of the principles of co-operation could arouse sensibility to solve the problems of the rural poor. In his economic thought Tagore stressed on co-operation farming as he believed that co-operation could break inertia and lethargy of the people and develop their self confidence and initiative. Tagore wanted to bring a regeneration of village, a total change of social relationship, a complete self-independent village. He emphasizes in a decentralized economy with the development as its objective and village as its units and individual's well being. His thought was guided by a philosophy of creative unity which sought achieve harmony and balance among the different components that constitute the rich and complex society of India. The study is based on secondary sources and the paper brings light on Rabindranath Tagore's view on rural development which is relevance in the present socio-economic scenario.

**KEY WORD:** Tagore, self confidence, co-operation, decentralization, rural development

### INTRODUCTION

Tagore is considered as pioneer of rural development programme in India. He emphasized on self-confidence sprit of self-help; adoption of the principles of co-operation among the rural poor for socio-economic development. The mobilisation of self-help and co-operative effort among the villagers has found expression through the creation of co-operative granary society by the village women (Mukherjee, 1952). Tagore propounded restore to the villages the power to meet their own requirements. Tagore believed that nation's development lies in upliftment of rural poor. So that he developed rural development model pointing two dimensional strategies- programmes such as economic, education, information and communication, health, village organization, research and training and implementation. Tagore advocated in favour of modern agricultural practices. Tagore's economics thought on rural development is based on co-operative, self confidence and initiative (Roy, 2008). The most distinctive feature of Rabindranath's rural reconstruction programme was the introduction of co-operative farming (Roy, 2015). Tagore initiated and implemented his rural development model in Sriniketan and it became excellent development model for India. On this backdrop this paper an attempt has been made to discuss the Tagore's view of rural development.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To enquire Tagore's view of rural development.
2. To examine the relevance of Tagore's idea of rural development in the present context.

### METHODOLOGY

The present paper is predominantly based on secondary data. Tagore's rural reconstruction model is prime source of the study. And this paper is descriptive in nature.

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Tagore laid emphasis on economy, education, health and village organization, research and training and also on different methods in knowledge communication mainly based on traditional folklore of Bengal (Ray, Biswas and Sen, 2005). Tagore stressed on co-operation farming as he believed that co-operation could break inertia and lethargy of the people and develop their self confidence and initiative. Tagore wanted to bring a regeneration of village, a total change of social relationship, a complete self-independent village. He believed in a decentralized economy with the village as its units and individual's well being and development as its objective. His thought was guided by a philosophy of creative unity which sought achieve harmony and balance among the different components that constitute the rich and complex society of India. Tagore believed that education is the key for widening horizon of thought. He advocated the balanced growth of a national economy in which machine-based large-scale industrialization works hand in hand with the development of small and cottage businesses is consistent with the ideas (Goswami and Vyas, 2022).

## TAGORE'S THOUGHT ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCENARIO

### TAGORE'S MODEL OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

Programmes	Implementation
Economics	Social Work
Education	
Health	
Village Organization	
Information and Communication	
Research and Training	

Source: Ray, P.P., Biswas, B.C. and Sen, B. K. (2005)

**Economic Programme:** Tagore stressed on various economic programmes for development of rural poor. These economic programmes are industrial activity, agricultural activity, formation rural cooperative bank, dairy and poultry, tree plantation and cooperative food store.

**Education Programme:** Tagore believed that for development of any society educational play a vital role. Therefore he emphasized on education of rural poor and he suggested establishment of night school, sikshashatra and charcha and loksikshasansad. In the present day context too education is the foundation of development of any society and a country. Education boosts the level production, efficiency, quality and specially a rational society. Tagore said “..... educational institutions in our country are India's alms-bowl of knowledge; they lower our national respect; they encourage us to make a foolish display of decorations made of borrowed feather ....” (Bhattacharya, 2013). He believed that education should help an individual to attain complete manhood, so that all his powers may be developed to the fullest extent for his own individual perfection as well as the perfection of the human society in which he was born (Aggarwal and Chaudhary, 2015).

**Health:** Health is basic for a decent life and key element for work force participation. To a good health at that point of time Tagore propounded for anti malaria activity such as vaccination, establishment and functioning of public health work for the well being of people which he term 'Welfare'.

**Village Organisation:** Tagore propounded on village organization for upliftment of rural people. He advocated for the establishment of women's society, yuvasangah, child organization, jatra club. He realized that through these organization the behaviour and attitude of the people toward the logical society, equality, opportunity and participation in decision making process could be possible.



**Information and Communication:** Tagore laid emphasis collection and dissemination of information. To him information and communication were the part and parcel of development engine. Information and communication could be made through seminar, feeder library, village fair, recreation, celebration of festival and mobile library.

**Research and Training:** Research and training are endurable part of development of a society and the nation as a whole. Tagore emphasizes research and training through rural survey, agro-economic research, training for village women and midwives, social work residence, vocational training, land tenure and teachers training. He believed that development took place through wide spread research and training in different dimension of individual and societal life.

## CONCLUSION

After discussion it can be concluded that Tagore's view of rural development and his model of rural reconstruction is very much relevant in day scenario. Tagore wanted to bring a regeneration of village, a total change of social relationship, a complete self-independent village He emphasized rural development through formation of Youth Organization and Mahita Samity, Health Society along Self-Help group with different socio-economic programmes. This ideas are very relevant in the present day scenario.

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