

## **State and Indigeneity Interface on construction of Historical Identity: An Ethnographic Study in Arunachal Pradesh**

### Abstract

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This is an ethnographic account based on fieldwork and documentary evidence on a first centenary celebration of colonial town Pasighat (2011) of Arunachal Pradesh, India. This study locates the state and indigenous people's interface in perceiving centenary celebration and locates indigenous intellectuals' apathy to incorporate colonial intervention experience within their history of celebration (festival) as part of heritage. In fact the establishment of colonial government and establishment of colonial post in Pasighat happened after British defeated the indigenous people in the same year 1911. That year is earmarked as the year of establishment of the town of Pasighat by tribal state government. The colonial town of Pasighat established around administrative centre which was altogether a very new concept in culture to the then indigenous communities stayed in that region. Therefore, the very idea of

town emerged as Pasighat using British administrative centre as well as military post within the cultural ecology of the Pasi, Padam and Minyong communities. Those communities mentioned here are known as 'Abor' tribe in colonial literature and by neighbouring communities of plains and categorised by the Government of India as Adi, as one of the scheduled tribes in independent India. The growth of the town of Pasighat in one hundred years transformed demography of Pasighat and social relations of the neighbouring communities as well as identified as a centre for modernity in the region. In this backdrop the present paper locates different dimensions in perceiving history by the people on the hundredth year age of the town and influence of differences of opinion across the communities.

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## **The Making of Lubro Tower**

In the year 2011, the administration of Pasighat town, District East Siang, Arunachal Pradesh, India, officially announced the news of centenary celebration year of birth of Pasighat town. The theme of the Pasighat centennial was “Honouring the past, visioning the future” (Rehman 2011:116). The department of tourism of that state ardent to celebrate the occasion by attracting tourist to the Pasighat town from inside and outside state and a gala was planned to attain grand success. Accordingly, district administration, Forest department, and Tourism department started works for celebration. Officers of all departments under the leadership of District Commissioner took preparation. They had finalised dates in second week to conduct a few days programme in the month of January.

Advertisement of programme published. The infrastructural setup for celebrating programme was made. That includes big temporary stage in the main ground decided as the main venue for celebration, galleries for exhibitions, Food Stalls and covered space for dining. Since the beginning of the month January administrative staffs of the town, NGO members, political workers became very busy to organize the celebration program. Engineering departments apart from making temporary constructions in different points constructed The Lubro Tower nearer to the market at a park to mark the first hundred years anniversary of the town. Public Works Department repair all pot holes of the roads and highways to reach the town and around that oldest town of that new tribal state with care. Black top roads started shining and looking fresh as the beautiful landscape of the town. The mighty Siang adjacent to the town with its divine beauty received a garland that is a newly finished bridge took nearly more than two decades to be completed. Government buildings white washed add the new look to the town. Hoardings and Posters, which were displayed in and on the way to town announcing nature of events including rafting competition in the river, and list of other activities. People in the town were discussing names of famous movie actors, and singers were invited for the show. All the way to Pasighat was equally attractive for its geographical location in the foothills. Wide pale yellow rice

fields skirted by different shades of green scenery and perennial water sources, makes any traveller happy. Entire stretch hills near and far guide the road. Inside the town and way to Pasighat, every corner of the cultural landscape was indicating agricultural prosperity of the people.

On 13<sup>th</sup> January, our place of staying was very uncertain still morning. This was a team of seventeen students of Anthropology with one faculty member and one Helping Assistant. Rajiv Gandhi University had provided bus that drop the team to the destination that is Mirbuk Musup (the word Musup means youth dormitory) in the evening. Only the previous evening Subas Mibang one of the students could settle this place for our stay because district administration was not able to give any accommodation to us. From November 2010, I tried to get lodging, anywhere within the town targeting that our students will do field studies on the 'Cultural Dynamics of the place, on the eve of centenary celebration. At first the Principal of Jawaharlal Nehru Government College, Pasighat was contacted. The first college in the region has residential facilities. In the first week of January he expressed his inability to provide any accommodation for us and sent message that the District Commissioner of Pasighat town, earmarked all places for lodging for forth coming program. Therefore, the Principal

won't be able to accommodate us in his college campus. We were eager to participate in the celebration program, too.

The first evening in Musup was quite exciting. Traditionally the Musup was heart of Village administration, security and a centre for education for men. Hundred years back these Musup(s) were places to organise meetings (Kebang) to plan for any social activity to village development, Training to young boys, and to decide secret strategies of wars. In words of Oyin Moyong the kebang political organization of the Adis was "Citadel of Wisdom". He adds that philosophy of the Kebang, the oral narratives reveals that since the nomadic way of life "might was right" and "survival of the fittest" exist". Gradually people came together as a result they established villages. Need of security to property and for welfare of the village Kebang was emerged. Kebang also educated the people to take care of language used in the Kebang. Everyone was restricted to use un-parliamentary word in Kebang. Norms of a village Kebang was to train each member a responsible person in society in his future. Kebang membership (Moyong Ibid) started from "MUSUP\DERE KO" (teenage membership). As a member of "MUSUP YAAME", he must attend kebang (Musup) regularly at night to learn discipline and responsibility. Full-fledged and active member of village Kebang was "KEBANG MILUM" After MUSUP YAME one became KEBANG MILUM, and took greater responsibility, participate in judicial decision making on disputes. Moyong (Ibid) states on the rituals connected with the kebang. Ritual of the village is performed on a community basis; hence ritual, which are directly connected with it were, *Pator* (means defence gate): during *Pator* festival a traditional defence gate is constructed at the main entry/exit point of every village by the Gumin Soyin Abu. It is believed that the gate drove away or did not allow entering any diseases in the village.

Another ritual was Peki (verbal trial of truth) is conducted on the object of dispute. It believes the solid witness of DONYI-POLO is invoked to prove the truth and falsehood of the disputing parties. But in changing definition the place is redefined as community hall, with its traditional appellation, and some of the activities. At present, this Musup building is made up of cement, bricks, and tin is used as roof.

After reaching there we received warm welcome of Ms. Oimang Megu and Ms. Radhe Yampi. The former young lady is my research scholar and a resident of that village. She arranged firewood for us. After reaching to the place and entering to the Musup, I could presume that my students shoulder a great responsibility to arrange the shelter. The first visitor to us was an elderly lady came to welcome us. Next was a young man informed that we could purchase chicken from him if required but he would love to donate chicken for our next day lunch free of cost. In the meantime, Oimang whispered me that there was meeting going on in the village in which residents will settle a date for an urgent religious program and we have to leave the Musup before the religious program. I agreed to her. After more than hours in evening village level Secretary and other members came to meet us and uttered the same thing. I assured them not to be worried. I was confident that some or other lodging will be available. But at the same time

I felt grateful to my Adi students who made this arrangement at least for the first night. Firstly, I was nostalgic too for the reason that we were staying at Musup (Youth dormitory). Now, women have access to this building. This must be a step to gender equality because earlier women were not allowed to step in the Musup for decision making.

I was quite relaxed on the first evening because Professor Tamo Mibang arranged an alternative housing for us outside of this town in a residential school at a distance of more than twenty kilometres. Just after our dinner is over his son Mr. Goutom Mibang came to see me. I was excited to meet Goutom after a long time. He was a student of our university studied History and at present is District Supply Officer of East Siang.

Otherwise he is inhabitant of this town as like as his parents. He rescued us on the next afternoon, and we get an accommodation in the St. Francis School in the Diking Village. That is a Missionary residential school. The school compound was located backside of the Mirbuk and Mirku village and so the rest days in Pasighat were remarkable for many reasons. Goutam Mibang not only settled us there, but supplied first round of firewood. A jeep trailer fully loaded with wood from an unknown saw mill reached to us. The driver asked us whether we are from the state's only university and he replied, "That was the reason of taking extra care by our sir (Goutom Mibang), because you belong to his father's university". Indeed, I felt privileged. Our cook started using firewood lavishly, and within four days we had to make an enquiry for firewood and we came to know that all saw mills are closed as per instruction of the local administration. In fact all schools and colleges were also closed, when we reached to that town. We were told that district administration instructed school administration to keep schools



closed for centenary celebrations as the former expecting huge number of guests from state and central Governments, security persons plus tourists. That was a small town do not have many hotels and they planned to use school, college buildings and hostels to accommodate guests.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> January morning we went to see the town and its adjacent villages in the other side of the river. Crossing the mighty river Siang a straight road in the valley dissecting forest lines reached us to the village Mebo, century's old famous village and at present is known as 'Rice Bowl' for whole region. It's a large area mostly surrounded by rivers, at lower side of hills. We met a few officers and local level political leaders in the courtyard of the Mebo Inspection Bungalow, which was referred by one of our students as haunted house and we could not plan to stay there.

On that Sunday, in the main celebration ground of Pasighat town, people were very busy in different works. While labourers, government officials, supervising staffs, members from N.G.O.s all were involved in their work, a good number of school children get engaged in dance rehearsals. We met engineer Mr. D. Padung and his team members on that field. We took a lot of photographs, on the preparation for celebration and came to know about 'Lubro Tower' from Mr. D. Padung. He gave a pamphlet that describes the tower in following words;

“Lubro” is the traditional war hat of the Adi. A headgear with two wild boar tusks on the forehead and a beak of a hornbill with blood red hirsute atop symbolises aspiring philosophy of glorious joist with high ideologies of rich traditional culture and practices. Worn during dire eventualities of war and feuds, it is also a representation of ultimate human aspiration. “Rayi”, the two tusk of wild boar on the forehead is symbolic representation of the dare delivery to stand against any misfortune and unheeded circumstances. Gangku, the beak of a hornbill is a message of lofty ideals to humanism and its continuity. “Baaling” the blood red hirsute atop is toward-off any evil thought processes.”

In fact, Symbols like War Hat (Lubro), Hornbill’s Feathers, and beak, teeth of wild boar were tangible manifestations of culture of the place that chosen for celebrations, depicted through bamboo crafts, wood crafts and in constructing centenary tower. Those symbols were visible in roof structures of exhibition galleries, food stalls, dining spaces, and on pillar roofs. Use of bamboo for constructing temporary stage and other places showcased innovative architecture, around the main ground. The stage was made up of Bamboo and wood. Different species of bamboo was used to make the stage architecture and to give a special look of the stage as well as to create a connotation with the cultural surrounding.

15<sup>th</sup> January onwards while our students started going to government offices for collection of basic data on the district as well as on celebration gradually it was clear that the date of celebration postponed. It was apparently political and strong rumours were that the then Education Minister (who was a resident of Pasighat) of the state was not getting appointments of VVIPs from Central Ministry and not getting them at a time. Local rumour was for all central ministers program was postponed. In the meantime, we tried to meet the District Commissioner and failed to get an appointment. After a week we met a students' leader in a house warming program. He argued on the name of the newly constructed bridge and expressed his agony that politicians will hijack the name of bridge by inaugurating it during centenary celebration. He added that the local people and their history and sentiment will hardly be manifested in the naming of the bridge. The naming of the bridge created differences in opinion within inhabitants. Gradually, we get exposed to different opinions of Civil Society members. The government employees, who so ever asked about the celebration and reasons of delay, expressed their ignorance. A section of Social Workers felt that the program is not notified well in advance. A section of intellectuals, retired IAS officers had feeling that it may termed as a celebration of hundred years of colonial history when British administration defeated tribe (their forefathers).

## **Year 1911, “Matmor Jamoh: The Legend and the Patriot”**

In Pasighat, 1911 was remembered through two topics in 2012. The war happened at Kekar-Monying, in which the brave forefathers of the Adi people fought against the British colonials. Secondly, how Matmur Jamoh, protested the British by killing Assistant Political Officer and a Tea garden doctor in Komsing village. In the book *Songs of the Siang*, Igul Padung one of ethno historians writes (2011:27-31), “Matmur Jamoh, a legendary figure in the Siang Valley, played a pivotal role in the assassination of Noel Williamson and his party at Komsing and Dr. Gregorson and his party at Pangi, on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1911. He was the Kebang Abu, the headman of Yangrung village.” Author quotes Oshong Ering, “as told by his father Adul Ering, who happened to have seen Matmur Jamoh”, When Adul was a young boy. “Matmur Jamoh was middle aged with medium stature figure and was appreciably a good orator. He had an adamant attitude and was determined to stop the advancement of the Milun (British) into the interior of Adi Lands.” Padung adds, “Matmur Jamoh was convinced and considered futile the services rendered to the British touring parties to interior Abor Hills. For him the people’s labour as path cleaner, load carrier as well as ration supplier to the touring party was wastage of time,

energy and wealth. He disliked the English behaviour of the superiority meted out to his folks. As free man he liked the British on equal footings, not as rulers. This feeling of patriotism and humiliation meted out to him, personally and to his people, resulted in the assassination and massacre of Mr. Williamson and his party.” In 1909 during one visit of Mr. Williamson and his touring party to Matmur Jamoh’s village Yagrung, villagers were found not prepared to welcome miluns (local word indicates whites). For that villagers and the headman were summoned and being headman Matmur Jamoh reached their carrying some gifts of poultry and ration to appease the *Milun Migom* (British important man). This gesture of Matmur Jamoh disappointed Mr. Williamson, who felt that the headman didn’t follow his instruction and there was no arrangement for them. Williamson lost his control without giving any chance to clarify the misdemeanour. He shouted at him using dirty words and trashed him right and left in presence of many people. This ... act aroused the manliness of hill men. They decided to do away with British interference to their life under the leadership of Matmur Jamoh.” (Ibid: 28). Padung writes about the initiatives took by Matmur Jamoh to organise people of different village to reply misconduct and arrogance of Mr. Williamson. Padung writes the detail plans and supports of Matmur Jamoh from Kebang Abus and his planned activities in the Komsing

village including sudden attack of his team to finish white men, his associates and porters in remote Adi Areas Ibid: 30).

On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2011, we received an invitation from Kasturba Gandhi Middle School for Girls', situated at village Yagrung, native village of Matmur Jamoh. The principal of that school Ms. Miti Gao my former student invited us on the birth day of another patriot of Indian Nation state, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The popularity of this unsung hero is understood in India for replication of his name given to the new born after him and for his birth day celebration. There might be hundred thousand Subhas in India. The word 'netaji' which is a popular title given to him means 'honourable leader'. We reached the Kasturba Girls School before 9o'clock at morning to celebrate the program. This is a residential middle school for girls. Students made speeches on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Miti Gao said on the relevance of Gandhi, who spear headed the concept peace following the path of Buddha. In fact, Netaji Subhas is still perceived in India as a patriot of the nation India, who had followed the path of war against the colonisers. So, Gandhi is always found relevant to speak on Subhas by intellectuals in India. Thus came my turn, I felt that the visit of us to the village of Matmur Jamoh and meeting his great grand-daughters in the school is something remarkable. Therefore, I add information on Netaji Subhas and revealed that the year 2011 is noteworthy after hundred years, for Matmur Jamoh,

born in this village, and fought for freedom of the people of this region. While I spoke I felt that somewhere Subhas and Matmur received the similar fate in the history, as antihero, because both of them took up weapon in their hand for the struggle of freedom and while officially our national history celebrates 'Satyagraha' and 'non-violence' of Gandhi. In the record of colonial history Matmur and his associates were nothing but 'killers'. After the school's program was over we went to see his house in the village. Nobody was there in the house and probably like other villagers went to attend a marriage party in the same village, as that was told to me by Miti Gao.

Sarit Chaudhuri, my husband went for a study on Matmur Jamoh in 2004. The objective of the study was to understand Matmur Jamoh from the collective social memory. He visited villages, Komsing and Kebang, where killings of Williamson and Dr. Gregorson happened. His journey was ended by meeting members of present generation in Matmur's family in Yagrung village. He shared following information from his memory, I quote, "I interviewed about fifteen persons in the Komsing village and five persons of Kebang Village including members from Darang family whose grandfather also associates of Matmur. I experienced popularity of Matmur while interviewing them. Even old women through actions and mime narrate the incident of reaching of Matmur to their village and killing Miluns (white man)". He adds further, "The present heir

of Matmur Jamoh is also Matmur Jamoh. He is named after his great grandfather.” He submitted a report of that field study to the Principle Investigator Stewart Blackburn of a collaborative project of SOAS, London and Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh (erstwhile known as Arunachal University).

Among four Anglo-Abor wars (1858, 1859, 1894, 1911) the last one was happened in Kekar-Monyang. Oral history maintains memory of the war(s) as ‘Poju-nimak’. Centennial celebration of Pasighat geared up memories, and latest seminar is proposed, “Lelam...”, which in the Adi language means “foot print”. The news is published in the newspaper ‘Arunachal Times, dated 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 that a seminar on Anglo-Abor War and after will be held in the village Kebang. This is the moment of writing (History) going down the memory lane; in the article of Osong Ering, “When Time Fades and Memory Returns” he says the Adis were not accustomed to foreign rule. So sporadically, they conducted guerrilla attack on British subjects in Assam. This led to Anglo-Abor conflicts during 1800. Some punitive expeditions were launched by the British by the land of the Adis, but it did not have much impact on the Adis. In 1911...(U)nder leadership of Matmur Jamoh, the entire touring team was massacred at Komsing village on 31<sup>st</sup> March. This gave a shocking signal to the British administration...(S)ometimes in winter 1911, the main



expedition column arrived...(A)ssitant Political Officer was posted to look after day to day administration of Pasighat area. Since then Pasighat town has completed a hundred years of existence today (Ering 2011:49-50). In 2011, Rukbo writes “Pasighat is synonymous with her worthy sons and daughters of the soil like late Daying Ering, the visionary politician, Bakin Pertin, the great parliamentarian, Talom Rukbo, the founder of the Donyi-Poloism, Bote Moyong the freedom fighter, Lummer Dai, the acclaimed writer, and Padmashree Omen Moyong Deori the social worker, to name a few, who have contributed immensely in their lifetimes to the welfare and wellbeing of the state. These names too deserve a respectful remembering as each day the Pasighat bazaar, in the centre of all this history, wakes to the rhythms.” (Rukbo 2011:60)

### **The War of Kekar-Monyang**

“Kekar Moning has great significance, which cannot simply be exaggerated so far as the history of Arunachal is concerned. The massacre of British touring party in the Abor hills caused a great turmoil ending in annexation of a vast area to the British Indian Empire, and a solution, if temporarily, the international relations involving Great Britain, Russia, and China.” (Padung 2011:31). Author further writes that Kekar Monyang was the battlefield reflecting the British policy in the northeast for acquiring this area. Since 1875 the British India government firmly decided to

push the outer line further north. At the turn of the century the process was rapid and last opportunity provided itself in the massacre of Williamson and his party. Author quotes Lord Harding, the viceroy, to justify the British interest to occupy the territory between Tibet, India and China. Author says that despite of giving strong opposition the freedom loving ancestors of tribes had to accept defeats. He writes, “The fall of Kekar-Monyang sealed the fate of the Abors and along with them the fate of all peoples of Arunachal Pradesh. The British government claimed to have broken the backbone of the Abors after the fall of Kekar –Monyang stockade. For the tribes men did not get another opportunity to defend their country.

### **Birth of the Town Pasighat (Padung 33-35)**

Mibang (2011) writes the “Pasighat town is undoubtedly oldest town of Arunachal Pradesh. It is today the headquarters of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. In 1914 Pasighat was declared as the headquarters of Abor hills by the British administration. The Balek village became regular signalling station where near about two hundred soldiers were posted and Assistant Political Officer was appointed as in charge.

### **Society of Pasighat: 1911-2011**

In hundred years nature of inhabitants is changed. According to Padung (2011: 21-40), the river side, where British made their

post was not inhabited by any people. The villages both the sides of the river were nearer to hills. The Pasi was inhabited at both the sides of the river other than them the Minyong were habitat at left bank and the Padam were at the right bank of the river. After establishment of British post of administration and since 1914-1955 the place was headquarters of Siang frontier division significant alteration happened. Around 1930 Pasighat became destination for school education attracted parents as well as students. Pasighat market was established and traders' family from adjacent Assam and other places of India settled in the administrative areas of Pasighat. There are people of Nepali, Hindi speaking communities, whose forefathers settled in this town 2-3 generations back. The village Banskota adjacent to the administrative area of Pasighat is the settlement after the name of a Nepali man. Tarak Mije (2011: 76) writes, Banskota "is believed that the first person in the region rear cattle and supplied milk to Assistant Political Officer and Commandant. In course of time he cultivated potatoes and various other vegetables. He ploughed the land with his bullocks and in fact the person who taught the local people how to do so. Not only that, he also introduced the local inhabitants to the practice of Wet Rice Cultivation. In his honour, the place of his residence was named by the locals as Banskota Basti."

Pasighat as the first sit of administration in the easternmost frontier hills of Himalaya, seat of education, market facilities

attracted people from different tribes and caste groups. Older generation of Pasighat, who was in school and college during 1950s remember natural calamities like earth quake and flood that changed the geographic location of the town and pushed it further towards hills and eastern side. Not less important is the lesson people learned from disasters happened during 1950s and decided to maintain forest line alongside the river sibokorong almost divided the town in two parts (Rukbo 2011, Mije 2011).

### **The Cultural History of Pasighat, Birth Centenary and the Civil Society**

The Pasighat centennial celebration committee published the anthology, entitled, *Songs of the Siang* (2011:7), and its editors Bandhana Deori and Moji Riba writes, “When a township completes a hundred years and more its existence, there emerges almost an equal number of stories that call out to be told. Personal histories, official records, archival images, and memories became miniature windows through which life’s rhythms get reflected. Consequently, editors introduce the book to readers and that says, “Thus began the Journey of a thousand words, if we call it so. The contributions that have been included in this anthology came from a wide spectrum of people; persons who had have a deep sense of attachment to the township that

today we know as Pasighat. Extracts from the doctoral thesis (unpublished) of Igul Padung (2006: 189-190), reflects sentiments of the people and quotes a song composed by Oyem Yomso,

“Adike sisangko kennam pasighat no

Arunachal Baddak lok kenname pasighat no.

Sodiake Myobo Obue Anggino.

Pedong konkue bote takame

Tadii gone yitko eloge

Kamme manne sikol eloge

Irmin darie iirtu derie

Nita betua lelene

Nebi kuai

Daddi takame dedue gegunamkuai

Riine piirbe pete nakope

Melo konno dadideto

Nom pasighat nom

Nom...

Siloke bomonge dikso

Ane gite nom

Tatii dilunge diibii dakku

Bangko gerlongem gorbidakku

Doyinge gangginge dikoso

Ane giite nom

Totu diilunge diibii dakku

Bangko gorlongem gorbidakku

Doyinge ganggine siring kope

Gitte pirgiinge eding langkuka

Adike sirang

Arunachal”

English rendering of the song (Padung, Ibid: 190) says, “Every Adi knows Pasighat from the date of his birth. Pasighat is well known all over Arunachal. It is considered to be the first son of Sadiya as well as Shillong. It is the oldest town and centre of trade and commerce. Even the fertile land of the Khampti land of the eastern border, once considered to be the trade route towards the southeast, is no match to Pasighat in terms of economic development and prosperity. All the people are proud of it and its roots are very strong, its branches are dignified with fruits like that of a hillock tree. Oh! Pasighat, you are really very great. Today we pray for you, we are planting totii (a sacred plant available in the outskirts of village used for massaging to relief pains of the body as well as to cure fractured bones) and

bangko (a plant grown in kitchen garden as vegetable, bitter in taste, and used for curing stomach trouble) trees around you to strengthen your root and growth. Oh! Pasighat every Adi knows you from the date of your birth.” Padung (Op.cit 2006: 191) mentions that this song is sung during important gatherings. It inculcates a sense of belongingness and proud to the Adis. In 1975, Talom Rukbo, the religious reformer and pioneer spiritual leader of the Donyi-Polo Indigenous faith of the Adi, writes, “ .... Pasighat is still predominantly an administrative centre, job opportunity are very limited. Unless trader, transport and communication facilities are expanded and industries are developed ...” (see Padung 2006: 222).

Igul Padung writes in 2006, “The town is cosmopolitan in character, a mini-India. In other words, Pasighat population is composed of people from all the regions of India and also Arunachal Pradesh. The mixed population, of course, poses various problems of socio-cultural adjustments. The town is in advantageous position in spearheading new ideas and spreading new ideas not only to Arunachal but also in the rest of the country” (Ibid: 222). Within less than hundred years the town has experienced birth of literary societies, who published Magazines periodically, like ‘*Arsi*’, ‘...’; Tribal as well as civil societies’ socio cultural organizations, like Adi Tosina Bane Kebang (ATBK) in 2001 (an organization for welfare of the Adi community), articulated socio cultural issues in changing time.

Taring Tabi writes that before ATBK, the Bangos and Bogung Bolang Kebang (BBK) formed to look after the welfare of the Adis to settle major issues confronting them. He mentions further that Apart from that BBK members took initiative for the formation of organizations like Adi Agom Kebang, Adi Cultural and Literary Society, Donyi –Polo Yelam Kebang.

Pasighat is not the town of Adis. Mostly, aged educated person of Arunachal Pradesh belong to any tribe had Pasighat connection either for academic reason or for professional reason. In the article, “The Long Wait”, senior journalist, Tongom Rina writes, Waiting long for a celebration is a painful moment. She writes on the wait for Chief guest from central government as “typical Arunachal syndrome to depend on others for every little need, ...even to celebrate something as important as hundred years of a histories’ town. She discussed the effort of the poor villagers, who prepare food and beverages... and she concludes that it’s rather the presence of the chief guest who takes the centre stage that matters, not the importance the event of the mass participation (The Arunachal Times, Vol.22: 228, p-1).

### **Prism(ed) Oral History of Indigenous People**

Poet and Padmasree award recipient Mamang Dai’s poem ‘The Missing Links’ breaks the silence of hundred years and beyond down the memory lane. The editors Deori and Riba (2011:7)



introduces this poem in following words, as “sharing space with rendition of oral history”. Further in the footnote for the poem writes “The Siang river was referred to as ‘The Missing Link’ by the Survey of India before it was established that the Siang; flowing through Arunachal Pradesh is the connecting channel that links the Tsangpo of Tibet with the Bramhaputra river of Assam.” (Ibid: 11), The poem,

“I will remember then the great river that turned,  
Turning with the fire of the first sun  
Away from the land of red robed men  
And poisonous ritual,  
When the seven brothers fled south  
Disturbing the hornbills in their summer nests.

Remember the flying dust  
And the wind like a long echo  
Snapping the flight of the river beetle, venomous in the caves  
Facing the night guard the hooded poison.

There are no records.

The river was the green and white vein of our lives  
Linking new terrain, in a lust for land  
Brother and brother claiming the sunrise and the sunset,  
In a dispute settled by the rocks  
Engraved in a vanished land.

I will remember then the fading voices  
Of deaf women framing the root of light  
In the first stories to the children of the tribe.

Remember the river's Voice:  
Where else could we be born  
Where else could we belong  
If not of memory  
Diving light and form out of silence.  
Water and mist,  
The twin gods, water and mist,  
And the cloud woman always calling  
From the sanctuary of the gorge

Remember, because nothing is ended  
But it is changed.  
And memory is a changing shape  
Showing with these fading possessions  
In lands beyond the great ocean  
That all is changed but not ended.

And in the villages the silent hill men still await  
The long promised letters, and the meaning of words.

Pasighat is the home town of Poet Mamang Dai and she is an Adi by birth. The book *Songs of Siang* publishes her 'Dialogue with History', the second chapter of the book is an article, in which the author asked questions and replied. Short paragraphs of this article manifest disjointed colonial history of the place-Pasighat and of its autochthones. In between the author locates her separate identity, her inner mind that hears about 'hometown' and 'homeland' and further oral history that she heard from her grandparents about 'the land of fish and stars-the lost civilizations in ... mythology of Kojum Kojia and Engo-takar'. Author recollects oral history of migration of forefathers towards south and further crossing rivers, Pasighat and beyond. She recaps donation of lands by clan elders for the establishment of British post that made Pasighat the earliest administrative centre of the region. Author makes a sketch on the characteristic features depict culture traits, like Kebang institution-that honours voice of dissent, experience of climate includes winds whirled in gorges, long summer, flooded valley during rain, hanging mist over the river like blanket, cane bridges sway and disappear over the roaring water, peoples interpretations of thunder, earth, sky, bamboo, fish squirrel and every other living things and above all the presence of that big river beside a small town that connects the Tibet in the north and Assam in the south. In this writing author feels the presence of a unknown trail of social history that live with seasons, crops, homeland and

jungle, ‘something elusive, layered, indescribable... following the migration of the sun’.

In the poetry ‘Missing Links’ words, came back with another dimension that connects failed colonial attempts to establish links between Tibet and Assam through river Tsangpo or of the river Siang of the Adis. This article in its paragraphs identifies mountains and jungles as cultural landscape depicts deeper meaning.

Osong Ering’s (Retired IAS officer) article, “When Time Fades and Memory Returns”, for the centenary publication referred to unsung hero, Matmor Jamoh and the last brave battle of tribal ancestors. He mentions glorious past of the ancestors of the Adi (Abor Tribe) and legendary person, who remained in oral history as it was in the writing of the Ethno-historian Mr. Igul Padung.

Pasighat is at present habitat of tribes and caste people of the region. In last hundred years, many Nepali, Assamese, Hindi and Bengalee speaking families get settled in that town. The demographic dynamics created new history of the town. T. Mize writes names of prominent well known personalities mentioned below: They are Bapek Jamoh, Bamut Moyong, Tagoli Jamoh, Bangkin Apum, Matbang Tamuk, Gongaying Ering, Tanari Dai, Daying Ering, Basudeo Singh, Jaynarayan Hardas, Ganga Singh, Bhimlal Banskata. They are referred by the author as illiterate,

simple and honest. They were further referred as ‘very trustworthy and unsophisticated in behaviour and conduct. They did not differentiate between tribes and communities. Political parties and dynamics had not reached them; corruption was not reached to them, a peaceful and congenial social atmosphere prevailed.’ (2011: 76).

He mentions contribution of a Nepali person, called Banskota. Mije writes, “On the west, a Nepali person called Banskota, was allowed to inhabit an area near Pane-Korong stream. His duty was to rear cattle and supply milk to Assistant Political Officer and Commandant. In course of time, he cultivated potatoes, and various other vegetables. He ploughed the land with bullocks and was in fact the person who taught the local people how to do show. Not only that, he also introduced the local inhabitants to the practice of the Wet Rice Cultivation. In his honour, the place of his residence is named by the locals as Banskota village.”

Our stay in Pasighat and enquiry on the “Rice Bowl” opened up material culture of production. Last more than fifty years under development program and on the basis of personal initiatives the indigenous inhabitants introduced many new varieties of paddy along with the traditional productions. The names of paddy are testimony of oral history of migration of these paddies.

## **History in its Interface**

This is the concluding paragraph for this writing locates multiple layers in maintaining social history of a town. At the outset a sense of sharing that appears in dialogs of organisers and practitioners of centennial celebration of the Pasighat as an inertia, which might have brought minds together. Survival necessities created new cultural complex in and around the town Pasighat even further connects life of people within and adjacent Arunachal Pradesh state, today. That colonial town promoted multiculturalism that benefitted both insider and outsider and perfect examples from tangible and intangible aspects of culture are its fame as 'Rice Bowl' in the region. Material culture around the production and use of seeds identify the economic practices as perfect examples of multiculturalism. The educational institutions created generations of intellectuals, bureaucrats, writers, political leaders, academicians, intellectuals. Indeed, the Oral History of the indigenes people was not shared at all moments for the ethnic war experiences. Even some of the historical experiences are yet to be interpreted, and all these sense of history manifested in the dissent of voices. Postponement of dates had shown interface between. That lured an idea that the program is of government, ministers, public leaders and officials not of the indigenes, autochthones and tribes. Pasighat a perfect example of cultural complex created multiple layers of history, in which every social group placing

their own experience to look at the past, differs from one to one. It may be birth place for many but it is birth place of ancestors for not all, and in the poem “Birthplace” Mamang Dai, writes,

“We are the children of the rain  
Of the cloud Woman,  
Brother to the stone and bat  
in our cradle of bamboo and vine  
in our long houses we slept,  
and when morning came  
we were refreshed.

There were no strangers  
in our valley.  
Recognition was instant  
as clan by clan we grew,  
and destiny was simple  
like a green shoot  
following direction  
like the sun and moon.” (Deori and Riba 2011)

History classifies experiences because all are not children of rain and cloud. Strangers were recognised by the followers of the sun and moon. Thus history of Pasighat town is not history of clan by clan alone.

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