

COMPILED BY THE KOOTNEETI TEAM



অসম চৰকাৰ



सत्यमेव जयते

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

THE ENLIGHTENMENT FROM

ARUNODOI

A COMPILATION OF ARTICLES
CONNECTING THE NORTH-EAST INDIA
TO THE WORLD

KEYNOTES

THE AWESOME QUOTES BY FINEST LEADERS



North-East is a powerhouse of talent. The region has abundance of resources. Our youth must take the responsibility to give a renewed momentum to its inherent potentiality and to bring Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of North East as India's Ashtalakshmi to fruition

-Shri Sarbananda Sonowal
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam



We always take North East as a single entity but will take a long time to explain its potential, diversity, culture and mesmerising beauty.

-Shri Gen. V.K. Singh (Retd.)
Union Minister of State for External Affairs



If we will be able to move forward with the plan that we have envisaged for ourselves, the day is not far when the North East will become a favorite destination for young start-ups from all over India

-Shri Jitendra Singh
Minister of State (I/C) for Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER)



introduction

North East India is the part we always felt as the potential Scandinavian region of India and made plans to visit, whether taking a sip from our Assamese Tea or wearing a pure silk from Assam or reading about cherapunji. We weren't aware that North East was coming more closer to us. We witnessed the event Arunodoi (September 16 & 17) marking itself as one of the great & magnificent moments of our life.

This was the first time we actually felt much involved into any of the events, it made us closer to the North East India with enriching sessions describing the challenges faced by the populace there, recent developments, the vibrant and dynamic culture which made us feel as we belong to North East too.

We decided to Prepare an Ebook which could describe the lucid speeches by the speakers and the views of students who are from North East India. Hope this short compilation will be a good learning tool and reach our readers which include the Overseas Indian Communities and students from different parts of India.



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**ACT EAST: OFFSETTING
THE COST OF
EXTENDING ARMS**

Ronit Hazarika

**ORGANIC FARMING
AND THE NORTH EAST**

Megh Nidhi Dahal

**FIVE IDEAS FOR A
DEVELOPED NORTH
EAST BY 2030**

Rashmi Baruah | K Yhome |
Pradip Phanjoubam

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	Introduction: Arunodoi Book
7	An Appeal: Dharanidhar Boro
8	The Kootneeti Editorial
11	Connecting North East
13	The Tradition of Barter: Jonbeel
15	Five Ideas for a developed North East by 2030
24	The Organic Hub of India
27	Act East: Offsetting the cost of Extending Arms
30	Vibrant Dances from the North East

Team

The people of North Eastern region must look forward to the growth and develop emotional, political, economic affection towards each other consented on Regional Planning, Integration & Development. Only then we will emerge as one of the most prosperous regions of India

-Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma

Minister for Education, Health and Finance- Assam

ARUNODOI BOOK

INTRODUCTION



The basic motive of this compilation is that of representing everything that one needs to know about the North-East in a detailed way and most importantly in a single volume. If one turns the pages, one could get glimpses of articles on Dalai Lama's epic escape, Arunachal tourism, Srimanta Sankardev, Lou Majaw, Papon, ULFA, Tripura's literacy drive, Assam Agitation, Cyber security of North-East, Matriliney in Meghalaya, Naga cultural renaissance, Hornbill festival, Mizo identity, Universal Healthcare in Assam, Japan's developmental aid to North-East, Imphal as nucleus of trade in Southeast Asia and many more.

-Subhrangshu Pratim Sarmah*

Arunodoi is the souvenir of the Arunodoi: Northeast Students and Youth Summit, 2017. However, to any reader, this compilation doesn't appear to be a mundane souvenir stuffed with messages from politicians, random stories, articles and poems. Rather, it's a comprehensive compilation of 77 detailed write-ups on issues like Act East Policy, World War 2, Ethnicity, Culture, Insurgency, Trade, Tourism, Environment- pertaining to the North Eastern region of India. The book has been compiled and edited by Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, Subhrangshu Pratim Sarmah and a team of students who have sought to represent diverse voices across the ideological spectrum in this volume. Dr Shashi Tharoor, Jairam Ramesh, Dr Hiren Gohain, Subir Bhowmik, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Wasbir Hussain, Patricia Mukhim, Mrinal Talukdar, Samudragupta Kashyap, Mitra Phukan, Brij Tankha, Rajat Sethi are some of the prominent names among the contributors of this volume which also features write-ups by students, academicians, lawyers, singers, journalists, scientists etc..

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***Subhrangshu Pratim Sarmah is a third year student of Department of Political Science in the Hindu College. Mr Sarmah has worked extensively with the international youth forums, The Ministry of External Affairs, the office of Lok Sabha MP from Assam Shri Kamakhya Tasa to name a few**

AN APPEAL

*Plant More Trees
To Get More Oxygen In Free
Get Human Life Disease Free
Make The Environment Pollution Free
Make Human Life Tension Free
Brothers And Sisters, Come Out Together
To Stop Woodcutter
Everyone Should Utter
To Save Our Bread And Butter*

*Ladies And Gentlemen
Come Forwards Together
Stop Destruction Of Nature
For Our Coming Grandson And Granddaughter*

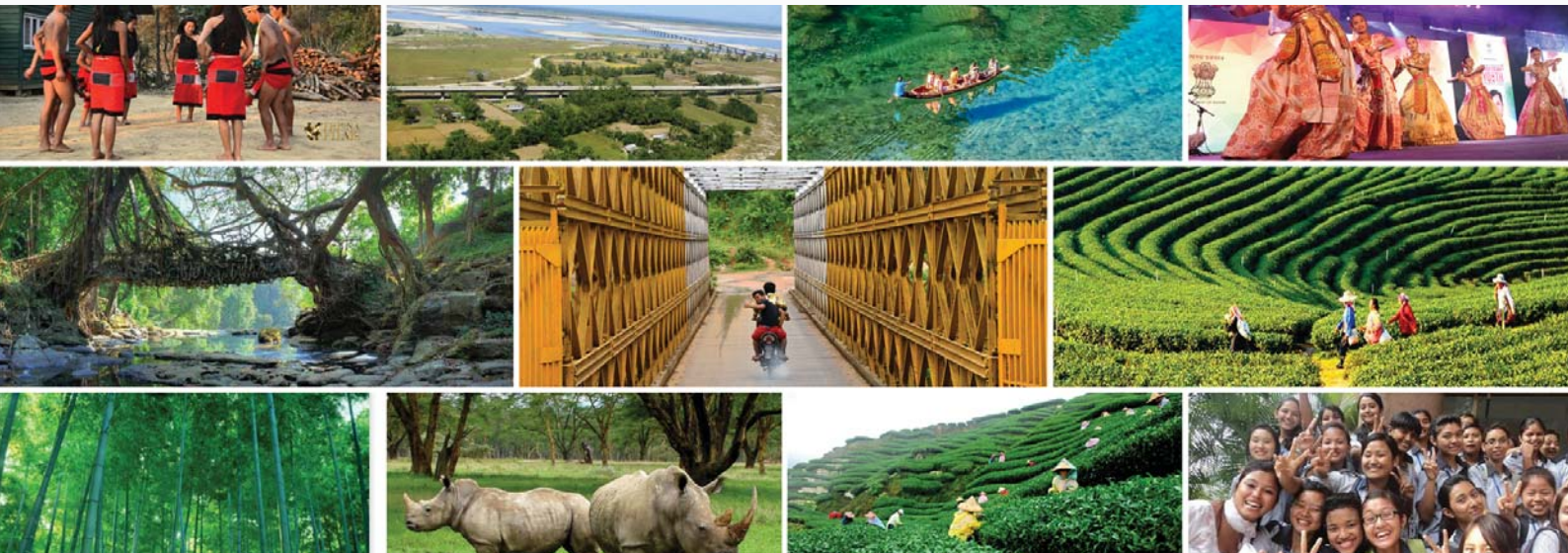
*Young Energetic/Educated Boys And Girls
Be Courageous
To Save & Protect The Forest & Wildlife
We To Be Here On This Planet Earth
To Live In Peaceful Harmony
For All Creatures*

*Respected & Responsible Citizen
Be Nature Lover
Stop Destruction Of Nature
So That Homo Sapiens/Human Beings
May Survive Another
Thousand & Thousand Years*

*-Dharanidhar Boro
Kaziranga's Most Experienced Forester*

THE KOOTNEETI EDITORIAL

PART OF SERIES: INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND TRIBES OF NORTH-EAST



Available ancient texts reveal North East as a part of the country known as Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa. Pragjyotisha is found in the great epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and also in some of the Puranas. In the Mahabharata it is mentioned that the boundary of Pragjyotisha extended up to the Bay of Bengal in the south and Karatoya River in the west. Some parts of Nepal and Bhutan were also included within the territory of ancient Pragjyotisha.

North East comprises of seven states, often called as the Seven Sister States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura). The state of Sikkim is also considered to be a part of North East. The Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with a width of 21 to 40km connects the North East with rest of Indian heartland, and separates Sikkim from the seven sister states.

North East makes up one of the richest single linguistic region with about a whopping 220 languages in multiple language families (Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic) that share common structural features. Assamese is the most widely spoken language in North East as it is easily understood by Bengalis too. The language is spoken mostly in the Brahmaputra Valley, developed as a lingua franca for many speech communities. Assamese-based dialects have developed in Nagaland (Nagamese) and Arunachal (Nefamese), though their use has been on a decline in recent times. The Austro-Asiatic family is represented by the Khasi, Jaintia and War languages of Meghalaya. A small number of Tai-Kadai languages (Ahom, Tai Phake, Khamti,) are also spoken by tribes. Sino-Tibetan is represented by a number of languages that differ significantly from each other, some of which are: Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Mising, Tiwa, Deori, Biata (Assam); Garo, Biata (Meghalaya) Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Konyak (Nagaland); Mizo, Hmar, Chakma (Mizoram); Hrusso, Tanee, Nisi, Adi, Abor, Nocte, Apatan and others. Meitei is the official language in Manipur, the dominant language of the Imphal Valley; while Naga languages such as Poumai, Mao, Maram, Rongmei (Kabui) and Tangkul, and Kuki languages such as Thadou, Hmar and Paite predominate in individual hill areas of the state.

Image: Nagaland's Hornbill Festival | Insight Assam



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Northeast India has over 220 ethnic groups and equal number of dialects in which the Bodo form the largest indigenous ethnic group. They are recognised as a plains tribe in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa, Sonitpur, Goalpara, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Kokrajhar of Assam are considered the centre of the Bodo People.

Available ancient texts reveal North East as a part of the country known as Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa. Pragjyotisha is found in the great epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and also in some of the Puranas. In the Mahabharata it is mentioned that the boundary of Pragjyotisha extended up to the Bay of Bengal in the south and Karatoya River in the west. Some parts of Nepal and Bhutan were also included within the territory of ancient Pragjyotisha.

North-East is the homeland of several ethnic groups of the Indo-Mongoloid origin with multiple dialects. The topography and ecology of the hilly plains and hills have influenced almost every sphere of the life of the people. The lifestyles of the people living here get reflected in traditional art forms through the representation of indigenous games, hunting agriculture and fishing styles. The tribes were very innovative with their unique objects made of bamboo, cane, clay, stone, various headgears and other items for regular use even in ancient times. India is a country of traditional music and music has been important in people's lives. North East too has their unique form of music. The rich textile of the region has been exhibited through the folk narratives of the paintings by native artists. Besides, the role of women in shaping the culture of the region from domesticity to contribution in small scale industry to freedom movement of the country is noteworthy..

Children and women generally are taught to be self-independent from a very young age. In Meghalaya and Nagaland, there are societies that are matriarchal which is a rare phenomenon in patriarchal India. Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia are the three major tribes of Meghalaya. The Khasi and Garo people practice matrilineality. In a matrilineal society, the women of the family inherit all the ancestral property. It is indeed a contrasting culture to be seen in a male dominated country like India. Indeed it is something the whole country should follow in the wake of increasing crimes against women and trends like #metoo which reinforce the harsh reality of women abuse.

The craft making of North-East is rich and comprises textile weaving, wood work, pottery making, mask making, doll making, and cane and bamboo products. Metal craft is also exclusive to some of the groups in the region. Assam silk is a famous industry in the region.

The tribes here mark their festivals and rituals with their inherited dance and song forms. Maut songs, nature-songs, Bhatheli festival, creation of myths, landscape in art, songs of seasonal and agricultural festivals and others.

Sattriya (from Assam) and Manipuri dance (from Manipur) have been listed as classical dances of India. Besides these, all tribes in the region have their own folk dances associated with their religion and festivals. The tribal heritage in the region is rich with the practice of hunting, land cultivation and indigenous crafts. The rich culture is vibrant and visible with the traditional attires of each community.

The art of tattoos spread more in North East than in rest of India. In the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, young girls were tattooed to make them unappealing to the rival tribes of the neighbouring districts, who could otherwise abduct their prettiest women. Tattoos also helped in establishing tribal identity in the region, besides enabling recognition after death in a war or fatal accident.

Northeast is also the home of many intriguing Living root bridges which offer breathtaking walks. In Meghalaya, these can be found in the southern Khasi and Jaintia Hills. They are still widespread in the region, though as a practice they are fading out, with many examples having been destroyed in floods or replaced by more standard structures in recent years. Living root bridges have also been observed in the state of Nagaland, near the Indo-Myanmar border.

Connecting North East

PART OF SERIES: INTEGRATING NORTH-EAST WITH MAINLAND



North East presents a huge potential in terms of the contribution it can make to the country. However, historically, and unfortunately even since independence, the region has been administered in relative isolation. Further, this region shares international borders with four important countries – China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

-Debdeep Mukherjee*

In January 2014, the death of Nido Taniam, son of an Arunachal Pradesh legislator, had attracted widespread attention. The then BJP Prime Minister designate, Narendra Modi, had met students from the North East and had said 'Students, I assure you that your pain and grievances are our pain and we will do all possible to help you in any issue'.

While the racial mind-set itself, may be more prevalent than being only against North Easterners but, all of these incidents do point at the consistent failure of India to integrate the 8 sister-states with the national main stream.

The region also suffers from a poor digital infrastructure with unreliable tele-connectivity. As of August 2013, BSNL was planning to improve Internet connectivity in the North East by connecting Tripura with international Internet gateway through Bangladesh.

North East presents a huge potential in terms of the contribution it can make to the country. However, historically, and unfortunately even since independence, the region has been administered in relative isolation. Further, this region shares international borders with four important countries – China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Image: North East Cultural event at New Delhi |Insight Assam



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The physical and administrative isolation, coupled with poor awareness of the rest of the country of the North East is one of the big challenges. This is also one of the reasons why we have seen an uneducated attitude of Indians towards Northerners. This too needs to change immediately with people being educated of the Geography, History, and Society of this part of our India as well, and that too right from schools.

No matter what has happened in the past, the present NDA discourse under PM Modi has very clear intentions to make NE gain access to infrastructure and all other due opportunities. Encouraging the students with Arunoday like events to talking about

He has termed North East as the new engine of India's growth and announced the launch of a Rs 60,00-crore scheme, 'Sampada', to promote the agro and food processing industry. The warmth was equally evident when he inaugurated the Dhola-Sadiya bridge across the Brahmaputra and named it after the legend Bhupen Hazarika. The government has adopted five paths to take India's ashtalakshmi (the eight Northeastern states) forward. These involve highway, railway, waterway, airway and information way (optic fiber network).

Attracting tourists to North East is also on the government agenda as if more tourists keep coming in, the integration would be easier as the meetings would ease the gap between communities. Religious tourism can play a big role in this. After all, the Northeast is today's our biggest natural resource to attract tourists from all over the world.

**Debdeep Mukherjee is editor working with Daily Mail*

THE TRADITION OF BARTER – JONBEEL: A CONFLUENCE OF MODERNITY AND HARMONY

PART OF SERIES: THE CULTURAL NORTH-EAST



Markets get ready on the second day of the festival and taking a stroll through the fairground and crowded alleys one would get a sense of the measures of the barter system. Measurements were made with bowls and hands and both parties decided how much each should get. Items were sold without the use of weighing scales, as was the practice in the olden days. The market stalls were unique. People from the hills make their own bamboo tents and not only do they trade but also sleep and cook their food there.

-Samikshya Madhukulya*

Every cultural festival is linked to its traditional roots, a unique example of this is the Joonbeel Mela. The three-day fair which takes place every year on the weekend of Magh Bihu is organized by the Tiwa Community at Dayang Belguri in Morigaon district for over five centuries now is a unique example of how traditions continue even at the time where modernity and lifestyles are still changing. The practice of trading without money-The Barter System of Exchange can be witnessed here. The exchange takes place mostly between tribes from the hills and plains of Assam and Meghalaya. People from different ethnic groups like Tiwa, Khasis, Jayanti as and Karbis participate in the barter exchange.

“Jonbeel” the name has a significance. The word Jon means Moon and Beel mean Wetland in The Assamese language. The wetland is called as Jonbeel as this large natural wetland is shaped like a crescent moon. The fair taking place at the side of this Jon been therefore called as the Jonbeel Mela.

The origin of the fair can be traced back to the 15th century, when Gobha Raja, the King of the Tiwa, Lalung tribe, held political meetings with the Ahom King near the Jonbeel. Many people used to accompany the King and people from different communities would trade among themselves without the use of any kind of currency notes. Though the kingdom is no longer in its original form, the King still remains, who is a descendant of the actual kings and so remains the deeply rooted tradition.

The festival starts off with Agni Puja – paying homage to the “God of Fire” and then community fishing comes in together to the Jonbeel for fishing with traditional fishing equipment namely the Jakoi. The purpose of the fishing activity is not merely to catch fishes but to celebrate brotherhood, harmony and love among different communities. The feeling that-“Each of them shares the same water, same land and are the same.”

Image: Jonbeel Mela | Insight Assam



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Markets get ready on the second day of the festival and taking a stroll through the fairground and crowded alleys one would get a sense of the measures of the barter system. Measurements were made with bowls and hands and both parties decided how much each should get. Items were sold without the use of weighing scales, as was the practice in the olden days. The market stalls were unique. People from the hills make their own bamboo tents and not only do they trade but also sleep and cook their food there.

The tribals not only welcomes everyone with a big smile but also gives one the rare opportunity to peep into their lifestyles. The stalls displayed many items produced in the hills –ginger, turmeric, black pepper, cinnamon, yam and these were exchanged for beaten rice, rice flour, fish and traditional sweets that were made available to them by the people from the plains.

Apart from these ones also gets to taste some ethnic dishes as well as the culinary practices of the hill as well as the tribes of the plains. One such example worth mentioning is the unique way of cooking pork in a bamboo tube and the way dried fishes being hanged and cooked. Apart from these stalls of clothes and fun games were all set up.

Traditional games for example like the Cock Fight etc. were held. Merry-making, teasing, music and dance increased the enthusiasm of the people. Conversation with the people there reflects the simplicity, humbleness and hospitable nature of the people.

Apart from being a fair well known for the demonitised market, this fair also promotes ideas of friendship, support, harmony and oneness among the tribes in the region. Every participant addresses the other as “MAMA” “maternal uncle” and “MAMI” “maternal aunt”.

In a demonetised age where cashless transactions are being portrayed as the country’s stepping stones to a bright future, this festival is a must to visit the event to experience the veritable blast from the past. Jonbeel Mela sets an example of how traditional norms can still exist and fit into the modern norms of the society till date.

****Samikshya Madhukullya Director of Adhayan (Competitive Exam Coaching Centre) and Aakriti School on Handicrafts and arts and working on the handicraft & cultural preservation of North-East India. She holds a Post-Graduate degree in Cultural Studies from Tezpur Central University. She could be reached at shreyosmita@rediffmail.com***

FIVE IDEAS FOR A DEVELOPED NORTH EAST BY 2030

PART OF SERIES: DEVELOPED NORTH-EAST



Agriculture is the mainstay of the North-East economy. This sector accounted for close to 30 percent of the region's National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) and is a major source of employment and livelihood for around 50-70 percent of the population

-Dr Rashmi Baruah*

GDP calculations entail calculating the contributions of three inputs of production: Labour + Capital + Land.

Land is limited in supply in the North-East, as it is mostly under forest cover. The forest cover in the region constitutes 52 percent of its total geographical area. Limited availability of arable land, small land holdings in the plains and lack of irrigation in the hills limits the scope for land-intensive production of agriculture or mechanisation of agriculture in most of the states. Capital (physical, banking or others) is limited and dependent on infrastructure. So we need to focus on labour; both skilled and unskilled.

A few observations about demographics in North East:

- Substantial proportion of the population is younger than 14 years. This means, North East, just like the entire India, is expected to have a demographic dividend according to the World Bank, by 2030 India will have the largest working age population in the world. This “Demographic dividend” is expected to raise economic growth. On the other hand, in the absence of jobs, joblessness would be a challenge in the background of insurgency.
- Sex ratios are high relative to country average reflecting the better status of women. Thus, we can leverage on female participation in labour force.
- Agriculture is the mainstay of the North-East economy. This sector accounted for close to 30 percent of the region's National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) and is a major source of employment and livelihood for around 50-70 percent of the population.

Image: Education in North East | Insight Assam



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With this in mind, the focus of development over the next decade needs to be on labour. In particular, the development strategy must focus on (i) more economic activity that will increase the demand for different types of skills; and (ii) human capital development, i.e. investment in both quantity and quality of education that will ensure employability of skills.

The five ideas for economic development in the North-East by 2030 would include:

1. The mobility of labour from low-productivity towards higher-productivity jobs both geographically and across sectors. Hasan et. al., decompose aggregate productivity growth into a component that measures within sector productivity growth and another that is due to reallocation of labour from an unproductive sector to a more productive sector (referred to the “structural change” by McMillan and Rodrik (2011)). They find that states which were most successful in poverty reduction over the period 1987-2009 were also the ones to witness a high degree of structural change (eg. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh). On the other hand, states that have not been able to reduce poverty significantly, Bihar and Assam, for instance, are also the states where labour reallocation across sectors is lowest.

Acceleration in economic growth will have to come from modernisation of agriculture, manufacturing and non-government service sectors.

- Agro-processing industries such as dried flower or dried herbs and fruits (small scale doesn't require much capital.)
- Fisheries, tea, floriculture, sericulture, medicinal plants: These needs to be modernised to increase productivity, organic farming and herbal healthcare industry.
- Handicraft and handloom: Almost 96 percent of North-East is having international border and there is ample opportunity to develop trade and commerce in the region.

2. Tourism: leverage English speaking population

Ecologically sustainable tourism is a sector with a very high potential for generating income and employment. Hill tourism, trekking routes, river rafting (for instance in the Jia Bharali river where already some infrastructure has been built), adventure tourism, etc can be developed. Annual music/dance festivals, Bihu celebrations in Assam, Dusshera in Manipur, could also be promoted.

3. Female labour force participation

Nursing: While the northeast has a demographic dividend, the western world is facing a greying of population. The current global shortage of nurses in Europe, United States, United Kingdom and Australia is expected to increase further over the next few years. Since nurses from the North-East are in high demand across India, there also exists a potential of employing nursing staff abroad. Presently, nursing training is offered in several North-Eastern states, however there needs to be quality control and emphasis on speaking English.

4. Education

Quality of education needs to improve, to increase employability of youths.

Note that drop-out rates are high in the North-East suggesting that education quality is below standards. Vocational education is important, particularly in hospitality and nursing.

5. Health: Access to safe drinking water

20 out of the 27 districts in groundwater dependent Assam are contaminated with arsenic. Similarly, there are serious health consequences of iron and fluorides in drinking water. These contaminants are known to cause severe skin diseases and major illnesses including cancers and cardiovascular diseases that restrains the amount of work, an individual can productively execute. Access to safe drinking water needs to be an important domain for health policy in the North-East.

FIVE IDEAS FOR A DEVELOPED NORTH EAST BY 2030

PART OF SERIES: DEVELOPED NORTH-EAST



One can only say that the people of North East are not the only ones carrying 'geographical tags' as people from other parts of the country have tags such as 'South Indian', 'North Indian', etc. However, the issue here is not about tags, but rather about the future of North East and its people.

-Dr K. Yhome*

'North East' is a term often used to refer to the people of India's North East region. An identity that gives a sense of pride when success stories emerge of the region. At the same time, a sense of enrage bursts when the identity becomes an easy target of violence and hatred. We also fume when the identity makes news for the wrong reasons. Whatever the term may be used, there is no denying that 'North East' as an identity that resonates with a large section of people belonging to the region.

Some have however pointed out that 'North East' as an identity of people in the region may not stand the scrutiny of academic enquiry and in fact, does injustice to the many differences of the several ethnic and cultural identities of the region. One can only say that the people of North East are not the only ones carrying 'geographical tags' as people from other parts of the country have tags such as 'South Indian', 'North Indian', etc. However, the issue here is not about tags, but rather about the future of North East and its people.

For far too long a few discourses have dominated the way of thinking of people of North East as well as others, outside. As we look into the future and learn new things, it is equally important that we learn to unlearn a them. Below are five ideas that should shape our thinking and drive development of the North East.

Image: Representation of North East as a window to South East Asia | Insight Assam



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There is need to relook at the geography of North East. We have all grown up learning that the North East is a periphery and a frontier region far remote from political and economic centres. This notion of the North East is narrow in definition and framed at a time and context that does not represent the region's current potentials and opportunities.

Two developments have been transforming the geographical value of North East region. First, the North East finds itself surrounded by several dynamic economies of Asia and places at the crossroads of South, South East and East-Asia. In fact, recognising this geographical advantage of North East there have been attempts to see it as 'India's bridgehead to the East' under the 'Look East' policy. This however, brought little change to the traditional notion of North East owing to persistent policy paralysis in New Delhi. This has started to change.

Second, a paradigm shift has marked the way nation-states interact. For many years, geopolitics largely drives nations' external engagements through their frontier regions. This has changed. One of the key drivers of contemporary cross-border interactions is geo-economics. Seeing from this perspective, the North East is at the heart of several geo-economic interests and initiatives in the evolving regional dynamics. Therefore, the North East is no longer a periphery rather the periphery is now the centre. This idea should drive our thinking.

In the past, policies and initiatives originating from Delhi were viewed as imposition and with a degree of suspicion. The reasons of such suspicion emanated from lack of coordination and trust between Delhi and the North East. A good example is the Look-East policy itself. When it was first conceptualised, the North East did not figure in the policy. This resulted in voices from the North East calling for the need to "Look-East through the North East". Moreover, as Delhi's eastward drive gathered momentum, the significance of the North East in the policy played out itself. Lack of coordination meant that there was little support and participation of the North East with adverse impact on policy initiatives.

In recent years, there are attempts from Delhi to involve the North East in cross-border initiatives. As new policy initiatives emerge, the North East needs to learn to take ownership. By owning policy initiatives and projects, the North East could shape them to its advantage and ensure successful implementation.

One good thing about the North East people is that they are supportive of each other when out of the region. However in the North East, they tend to see things through the narrow self-interests and are divided along lines – 'my state versus your state', 'my ethnic group versus your group', and such bias. There is need to unite and work together.

While some level of healthy competition is desirable, we tend to compete on issues that only result in spreading negativity. Such attitudes will not take anyone anywhere. Inculcating the habit of working together for mutual benefits among the North Eastern states as well as between New Delhi and the region is critical.

One of the dominant discourses on the North East revolves around issues concerning ethnic conflicts, lack of infrastructure, limited state capacities, etc. While these issues need urgent remedy, such discourse captures only a few realities of the region. There is need to create a new narrative. A good place to start would be to focus on our strengths rather than our weaknesses.

There are several realities and it is up to us which one we want to bring up in the observation. In Delhi, people often ask—Is it safe to go to the North East? Why should there be a silly question like this when millions are going and doing their daily works without any obstruction. If we tell an investor that we have security problems, power shortages and bad roads, no investor will ever come to invest. The North East is trapped in a vicious circle, that is—there is no development in the North East because of political instability and because of instability, there cannot be any development. Somewhere, at some point this cycle needs to break because neither the North East nor Delhi can develop without each other.

Lastly, the idea that the North East needs today is to be the change. Mahatma Gandhi famously said, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” If the people from NE want to bring development to the region, there is no force in the world that can stop that aspiration. For that, we need to change. We need to think differently, we need to relearn a few things, we need to take ownership and we need to work together. After all, NE knows the best what kind of development they want for themselves.

FIVE IDEAS FOR A DEVELOPED NORTH EAST BY 2030

PART OF SERIES: DEVELOPED NORTH-EAST



The major trade routes are still the sea routes, and the percentage share of this trade the Northeast gets is still very little. If this is to improve, one of the thrust areas will have to be augmentation of road connectivity in the Northeast.

-Pradip Phanjoubam*

It is a great honour to speak to so many bright young students eager to contribute their might in uplifting the plight of their homeland, which has now known as simply the North East.

I must add that it is also a little disconcerting to confront so many young inquisitive faces at the same time, knowing very well that nobody from the previous generation can match the fire of idealism in the eyes of the younger. But, let me remind the audience that the older generation has the experience of failures and successes, fight-backs and wisdom. Failures that each of us meets in life are important. They together make a person resilient.

Let it also not be forgotten that none of the successes or failures each one of us meet, are permanent, and one must be always ready to move on from where one is at any given time. If you meet success, you are fortunate. If even you meet failure, you should pick yourself up and move on. The American poet T.S. Eliot's interpretation of Krishna's message to Arjuna in the Bhagawat Gita in his celebrated extended poem "Four Quartets" was, life motto should always be "Not fare well, but fare forward, voyager." We should follow the advice.

Image: Umngot River Meghalaya | Insight Assam



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What then are the five objectives that we must prepare to do to put our region on the track of development? In many ways, I think we have already begun Arunodoi's conclave embodies this. Let me explain.

Community

Why do I say Arunodoi has already initiated the first step?

- I say this precisely because I believe building community is vital towards development. Arunodoi by bringing together young people from all the North East states and facilitating a meeting of minds is building such a goal-oriented community.
- Of all the attributes North East shares, it can be regarded as a geographical wonder. For instance, it is landlocked, connected to the rest of India by the narrow Siliguri corridor, which has been noted so many times by so many authors, is at some point as narrow as 22km. Other than these 22km of boundary with the rest of India, North East is surrounded by foreign countries, and the statistics show 2 percent with rest of India and 98 percent with foreign countries, like China and Bhutan to the North, Myanmar to the east and Bangladesh to the south. This is unique and this uniqueness comes with a peculiar psychology. This can mean both strength and vulnerabilities. This is where the idea of community becomes important. As a community, diverse yet unified, we must be prepared to take advantage of the strengths of this predicament and also meet and mitigate the vulnerabilities.

Connectivity

This brings me to the second point – connectivity. This is related (or complementary) to the first point. When you enhance connectivity, the chances for the boundaries of individual communities and identities begin to expand. Connectivity hence is not just about diminishing physical distance between people, but also the psychological distance. But we have to be careful here, for familiarity is also known to breed contempt, especially if unequal relations result. The remedy would be to create a democratic structure with can optimise equality of opportunities. The Indian Constitution already provides a wonderful model for this. Indeed the North East Council, NEC and North East Developmental and Financial Institute, NEDFI, are showing extremely promising signs that such endeavours will reap rich results.

Look/Act East Policy

Connectivity would naturally lead to the idea of India's Look/Act East Policy without the physical road connectivity within the North East as well the regions connectivity with the rest of India enhanced considerably, the Northeast region will not be able to take any significant advantage of this ambitious government policy of connecting the Indian market with the prosperous economies of ASEAN through the North East. As of the moment, according to a study, trade with Myanmar and beyond along the border trade posts in Manipur and Mizoram is somewhat stagnated at around 44 million dollars annually. This contrasts with the overall trade figure of 2 billion dollars per annum between India and Myanmar alone. With the ASEAN the figure is in the excess of \$5 billion per annum. In other words, the major trade routes are still the sea routes, and the percentage share of this trade the North East gets is still very little. If this is to improve, one of the thrust areas will have to be augmentation of road connectivity in the region.

Value addition

A lot many people are skeptical about the viability of the Look/Act East Policy on account of the belief that the North East will end up just as a transit route and not a significant contributor or beneficiary of the policy. This, they argue is because the region has little or no unit that can be classified in the secondary sector, or manufacturing sector of the economy. It has the primary agricultural sector but in its march for progress, it missed the secondary sectors and landed straight into the tertiary sector of services. I would argue that this can change on account of many shifts in economic paradigms in the globalised age and also because of the advent of digital technology.

- In the new world economic order, the secondary sector is no longer just about factories churning out products, but also of assembly units where manufacturers outsource the last miles value addition works of their products to other relatively low wage countries. For example, American products, ranging from branded shoes, garments, toys, bicycles etc, often come with "Made in Vietnam" or "Made in Cambodia" or "Made in Bangladesh" markings. As wages rise in more developed manufacturing hubs, the trend has been for manufacturers to look for relatively lower wage region to get the value addition works of their product done and sold. If the workforce in the North East too were to be imparted appropriate skills that cater to the needs of the time, and more importantly are disciplined to suit the needs of major brands manufacturers, the region too could become the new hub for value addition for these brands, thus be rewarded with an explosion of new jobs and cash liquidity.
- The arrival of the digital technology has also flattened inequality in terms of skills and knowledge. In this new paradigm, nobody has a head-start and everybody begins with the same blank slate. The North East too, thereby does not have to be at a disadvantage from the beginning.

Tourism

The last point I want to make is the need for promotion of tourism. There can be no argument that the North East has tremendous tourism potential. It is blessed with a diverse range of cultures, cuisines, music, dances and other art talents. Its natural beauty is equally diverse and unique. From snow-capped mountains in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, to the numerous rivers and lakes, of which the mighty Brahmaputra and the scenic Loktak are some. They can come to have the gravitational pull on international tourists if given the right value addition and publicity. Tourism on its own will chip in revenue and create jobs but indirectly it is vitally important in building an economy.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to meet some important officials of the Japan Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok. What they told me was an eye-opener. They said one of the things that Japanese businessmen look for in deciding whether an investment destination is safe is whether Japanese tourists are fond of the place. The logic is, a place where ordinary Japanese families get to be fond of and visit regularly, is deemed as safe and conducive for business. In other words, tourists are in many ways the litmus tests that inform investors where it is safe to make business ventures. This being the case, the North East must be a safe and healthy place to invite bigger revenues in future.

ORGANIC FARMING IN THE NORTH EAST

PART OF SERIES: THE ORGANIC HUB OF INDIA



Northeast cannot compete with states like Punjab or those along the Gangetic plains in terms of production. In Assam despite having fertile soil, the cropping intensity is very less and agriculture is mostly monocropping. Therefore, Northeast needs to develop a niche sector for its produce.

- Megh Nidhi Dahal*

Food is the most important thing in life has the capacity to change human beings radically and thus it is important, because 'We are what we eat'. These days we all understand the need of the hour, focusing on the Organic farming is very important not just for producing food that is healthy and non-toxic and People have lost touch with the food production system, this is about removing the Petroleum by-product toxins (which are sold in the name of fertilizers) from the soil and whole eco-system.

North-East have majorly carried out farming in a traditional way. The relative geographic isolation and lean population rendered commercial agriculture unviable. Lack of commercialisation in agriculture meant non-application of "modern" methods of farming which until recently meant primarily using machines, modern irrigation systems, HYV seeds and chemical fertilisers and other chemical inputs. This meant that in the states of the North East, farming is more or less organic already barring a few pockets known for commercial cultivation.

Why organic farming in the northeast?

Firstly, Northeast cannot compete with states like Punjab or those along the Gangetic plains in terms of production. In Assam despite having fertile soil, the cropping intensity is very less and agriculture is mostly monocropping. Therefore, Northeast needs to develop a niche sector for its produce. It has developed that in terms of horticulture products like oranges, cardamom, pineapple, etc. and the easy way to develop that in terms of cereal, pulses and vegetables is by going organic.

Image: Farm Fest Sikkim | Insight Assam



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Secondly, organic farming requires a large quantity of biomass to make organic manure. With its rich vegetation, the northeast has no shortage of biomass.

Thirdly, crops are easier to sustain in the regions they originated. The gene pool of major horticulture products like oranges can be traced to the northeast. Horticulture in India uses 10% area and contributes 33% in value. Having such high-value crops which are already grown organically in the region is a boon to the northeast. All that is needed is branding and certification to fetch a premium in the market.

Further, organic farming can be linked to a variety of concepts like wellness tourism. Northeast can be a hub of wellness tourism.

What needs to be done to promote Organic farming in NE?

Firstly, NE must be recognised formally as Organic Hub. Recognition of Sikkim as an organic state, for instance, has made it easier for entrepreneurs to venture into high-value organic product marketing. The farmers must be made aware of the value of their products and other positive effects organic farming has on health, wellbeing and ecology.

Transportation and storage infrastructure needs to be strengthened. To do so, government alone cannot be held responsible and there is a significant role to be played by the civil society as well.

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OFFSETTING THE COST OF EXTENDING ARMS

PART OF SERIES: ACT EAST



Connectivity, Commerce and Culture are the ‘three C’s’ of the Act East policy (AEP), for which the Indian state is expending such effort. However, a rise in all three C’s will be severely bottlenecked, if the law and order situation of the North-East, which is absolutely central to AEP, is ignored. I am referring to Narco-terrorism and insurgent groups in the region.

-Ronit Hazarika*

India’s Act East policy seems to be on a war footing. This was made abundantly clear when the decision was made to invite the leaders of 10 ASEAN countries as chief guests for the 2018 Republic Day celebrations. India has recently seen a flurry of activity in bilateral dialogue with Asian nations, particularly Japan, Vietnam and Myanmar. The ASEAN-India summit in Laos was a success, and Modi’s state visit to Vietnam was received well by southeast Asia. India’s relationship with Myanmar is seeing a new dawn, and mutual visits of leaders between the two countries are becoming a frequent and welcome affair for the two states.

Connectivity, Commerce and Culture are the ‘three C’s’ of the Act East policy (AEP), for which the Indian state is expending such effort. However, a rise in all three C’s will be severely bottlenecked, if the law and order situation of the North-East, which is absolutely central to AEP, is ignored. I am referring to Narco-terrorism and insurgent groups in the region.

Connectivity is a goal for AEP. But connectivity has a dynamic and robust relationship with insurgency. On one hand, greater connectivity leads to greater cross-regional crime and extension of antisocial networks. On the other hand, connectivity suffers disruptions at the hands of crime and insurgency. As an example of the former, because of rise in drug abuse, HIV rates from prevalence of intravenous syringes had skyrocketed around the time of liberalisation of the Indian economy. As an example of the latter, trade in the northeast suffers severely from border blockades, as well as extortions and rent-seeking by insurgent groups such as National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang division), United National Liberation Front and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Songbijit faction).

Image: 14th ASEAN-India Summit | Insight Assam



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Thus, it is extremely important to deal a death blow to insurgency and organized crime in the region, firstly to offset a very probably expansion of terror and smuggling networks benefitting from better connectivity and greater trade, and secondly, to realize the full potential of connectivity, unhindered and unburdened by insurgency. We must not forget that India sits immediately to the left of the Golden Triangle – the region shared by Myanmar, Laos and Thailand that produces over 70% of the world's total opium. The golden triangle is the centre of much of the world's drug smuggling and arms trafficking operations, and increased connectivity with this region could spell disaster for India if countermeasures are not taken against cross-border crime.

The Indian border with Myanmar has Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the Indian side, and the Chin state, Sagaing Division and Kachin state on Myanmar's side. Since 1994, border trade has been taking place through various border custom posts, called Land Custom Stations (LCS). Currently there are four LCSs with Myanmar - Moreh in Manipur, Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh, Avangkhu in Nagaland and Zowkhathar in Mizoram, connected to Tamu, Pangsu, Somara and Rhi posts respectively in Myanmar. These are major stations for smuggling of arms and psychotropic substances. There are extensive value chains of drug production both going out of and coming into India. Urea and Acetate Anhydride, used in heroin refining process, finds its way into Myanmar through Moreh and Churchandpur in Manipur, as well as Champai in Mizoram. There are at least major 30 heroin refineries in the golden triangle, of which 20 are known to be in Myanmar. 15 heroin labs are situated near the Indo-Myanmar border. The Indian pharmaceutical industry is also a source of illicit ephedrine, used in the production of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS). The most popular ATS is methamphetamine, commonly known as 'meth'. In recent times, due to low productivity of poppy harvest, meth is gaining popularity. There are at least 60 meth processing labs in the Shan state of Myanmar alone. These labs receive the protection of the Shan State Army insurgent group.

This processed meth and heroin finds its way back into India through several routes. Heroin from Mandalay (which is expected to be a major centre of trade as part of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway) makes its way to Kalewa, from where it is smuggled to Moreh in Manipur or Champai and Rikhwadar in Mizoram. Heroin from Tmanthi and Homalin makes its way to Noklek and Kohima respectively in Nagaland. Drugs are smuggled into Arunachal Pradesh through the Pangsau pass from Maingkwan. Once inside India, these shipments go to Shillong or Guwahati, from where they are transported to major cities such as Kolkata and Delhi in mainland India. Brown sugar smuggling takes place through the Petrapole-Benapole route between West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Arms smuggling involves routes often extending up to Cambodia and Thailand. While arms were historically smuggled from Yunnan province in China through Arakan in Myanmar, Chinese arms have in recent times overtaken the south-east Asian producers. The United Wa State Army in Myanmar acts as middlemen between Chinese suppliers who trade through Ruili in Yunnan, and Indian buyers such as NDFB, ULFA, Kuki National Army, NSCN-K, which then sell some of these arms to naxalites in the Red Corridor. The fishing port of Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh has a 130 km long beach, and is thus a major logistical centre for arms smuggling carried out over seas. From Bangladesh, arms quickly find their way into Tripura, Meghalaya and West Bengal. With an extension of trade links, Cambodia and Thailand will get better access to the illicit arms market in India.

In India, suppliers, middlemen and supply routes are protected by major insurgent groups. Insurgent groups depend upon the huge margins of rent derived from arms and drugs smuggling to sustain their activities, and abundance or shortage of these revenue lines do affect their operational capabilities. Smuggling and trafficking are extremely lucrative businesses, so much so that some dub this business as 'Dial-An-AK47'. It is no mere happenstance that Manipur has over 30 insurgent groups. It is trafficking and smuggling that rake in the moolah for these terror rings.

There is a very discernible chain of causality here. Increased connectivity leads to increased smuggling, which increases the power and influence of insurgent groups. Thus, if an enhancement in connectivity is not accompanied by safeguards, it will empower terror groups. Besides, insurgent groups act not only as facilitators of trafficking, but often as producers. Indeed, India has become the world's largest producer of methaqualone – known in the market as 'Mandrax'.

Insurgents also hold the power to directly affect and control the volume of trade. They do this by extortion from traders, as well as rent-seeking and blockades on highways. NSCN-K often preys upon trade routes like NH-39 going out of Manipur. NDFB has a stranglehold on Kokrajhar, which is an important buffer between the northeast and the rest of India.

One could argue that since trade is vital to the revenue streams of insurgents in the north east, these insurgent groups will not impede trade. This argument is problematic and does not capture other grave dimensions of arms and drugs smuggling. Firstly, the argument is simply not true in and of itself because of what is called 'tragedy of the commons' in economics. Insurgents will only allow unhindered trade as long as and as far as the benefits of unhindered trade outweigh the costs. Secondly, while insurgency may not impede fruitful trade routes, they will still have the incentive to interrupt and leech off other peripheral businesses. Thirdly, even if insurgency decreases in the north east, higher supply of arms will enhance extremism in other regions, most notably armed Maoist rebels. Fourthly, small crimes and drug use will surely rise, due to higher supply and lower prices of drugs and small arms. Lastly, revenue is not the sole goal of insurgents; politics is an important frontier too. Bandhs are often enforced by insurgent groups even though they hurt businesses, which indirectly hurt insurgent groups.

Thus, there are three obvious benefits of dealing with insurgency in time before full operationalisation of projects under AEP. Firstly, a rise in supply of small arms and drugs will be prevented by rooting out the smuggling networks and middlemen. Secondly, we will have prevented a situation where insurgent groups grew too powerful from the huge increases in profit margins from smuggling. Thirdly, the fruits of AEP will be maximally enjoyed by citizens without any hindrances or leeching, and the north-east, and likewise the rest of India, will be seen as a stable and attractive business destination.

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THE VIBRANT DANCE FORMS OF ASTHALAKSMI STATES

Every region in India is known for some specialty. Be it cuisine or culture, every sphere has something unique and classy to offer. Similarly, North East India is known for its distinctive culture and cross-disciplinary dance forms. Folk Dances of North East unambiguously represent the natural, cheerful and spontaneous life of the common people.

The rich diversity in culture offers vibrant dance forms originating from all these states which for decades have left the audience mesmerised in India and abroad.

The popular North East dance forms can be categorised as:

- Bihu of Assam
- Hojagiri of Tripura
- Nongkrem of Meghalaya
- Dhol-Cholom of Manipur
- Laho and Cherau of Mizoram
- Thang Ta of Manipur
- Chang Lo of Nagaland
- Bardo Chham of Arunachal Pradesh

BIHU OF ASSAM

Bihu is the popular folk dance form of Assam. The Bihu dance is an integral part of the Bihu festival of Assam which takes place in mid-April, during the harvesting time and lasts for about a month. Young men and girls perform the Bihu dance together along the tunes of drums and pipes. The dances are performed in circles or parallel rows. All dancers dress in the traditional and colourful Assamese clothes that attach charm to the complete dance.

Rongali Bihu is also celebrated. It is a fertility festival, where the Bihu dance with its sensuous movements using the hips and arms by the women call out to celebrate their fertility.

The Zemis, Zeliangs and several other tribes of Assam have a number of folk dances. Most of these folk dances are performed during the harvest period.



BAGURUMBA OF ASSAM

Bagurumba dance is a folk dance practiced in the Assam state of India. The dance is also called as the “butterfly dance” due to its motion that resembles butterflies. The Bagurumba dance is usually performed during Bwishagu festival of the Bodos in the Bishuba Sankranti or in Mid-April.



BARDO CHHAM OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Arunachal Pradesh is highly dominated by Buddhism. Around 13 percent of the population in Arunachal Pradesh follow Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is practised in Tawang, West Kameng, remote regions in close vicinity of Tibet and near the Burma border. Many dance and songs are performed, based on the stories of Buddha. The performers of these folk dances wear masks of demons or animals, inspired from Buddha stories. Most of these folk dances are performed in Buddhist monasteries during festivals.

Locals of Arunachal Pradesh believe that there are good and evil in every human being, which clearly is seen in their dance form named Bardo Chham. The tribal dancers perform a dramatic flight between these two entities to bring joy and peace, wearing colourful masks. Men and women take part in this Bardo Chham to represent the people’s close interaction with nature.



DHOL-CHOLOM OF MANIPUR

One of the instruments that dominate Manipuri dances is the drum. Dhol Cholom, a drum dance is one of the dances performed during Holi in Manipur. The Thang-ta dance of Manipur was evolved from the martial arts drills promoted by the kings of Manipur. The dance is exciting and is performed by young men holding swords and shields.



LAHO OF MEGHALAYA

During the Behdienkhlam festival in Meghalaya, people of Meghalaya, especially the Pnar Tribe, takes part in Laho dance with colourful attire. Two men stand in both sides of a woman and perform in particular steps. There is a comedian who can spontaneously do humorous recitation with the dance to entertain the audience.



NONGKREM OF MEGHALAYA

'Nongkrem' is an important folkdance of Meghalaya. The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya also celebrates the ripening of paddy for threshing, by dances and songs.

In Khasi Hills you shall come across this magnificent fiesta that is celebrated with tremendous pomp and grandeur. It is a grand carnival that witnesses tremendous overflow of wealth; sacrifice of animals; and an overall religious fervor that seems to grasp the entire state.



CHERAW OF MIZORAM

Cheraw dance is a ritual dance performed in Mizoram, India, consisting of four people holding two crossed pairs of bamboo staves. It is one of the most famous dances in Mizoram, and a center of attraction during festive occasions. Similar dances are found in the Far East and in the Philippines, where it is known as Tinikling.

It is characterized by the use of bamboo staves, which are kept in cross and horizontal forms on the ground. While the male dancers move these bamboo staves in rhythmic beats, the female dancers perform by stepping in and out of the bamboo blocks. Recognized as one of the oldest dances of Mizoram, the Cheraw dance has become an integral part of almost every festival of Mizoram.



CHANG LO OF NAGALAND

Chang Naga tribe / tribal warriors / men in traditional dress tribal jewellery and handloom textiles singing and dancing at Moatsu festival of sowing, Chuchuyimlang village near Mokokchung, Nagaland. Probably named after the Chang tribe of Nagaland, chang lo dance form is a very popular dance of now-a-days. It is often called 'sua lua' and performed during three days of Poanglem festival. History says that chang lo used to be performed as a victory of a warrior. That is why male dancers put on a warrior costume of naga tribe displaying war tactics of ancient Nagaland. Female dancers wear beautiful and colourful costume in contrast.

The Naga tribals too have their harvest dances and celebrations. "Khamba Lim" is one such folk dance and is performed by two groups of men and women who stand in two rows. Another popular Naga folk dance is "Akhu".



HOJAGIRI OF TRIPURA

Hojagiri is a famous folk dance of Tripura. Hojagiri dance is performed by young girls who display a series of balancing skills and instruments of their kind. In Tripura dances are a part of people's efforts and ceremony to appease the goddess Lakshmi. It is to ensure good harvest. Tribal people of Tripura and other adjoining states make use of the compounds of their own houses as dancing grounds during main festivals.



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