CHAPTER VI

The Changing Scene

The major difficulty in our study of the Adis in particular and also Arunachal as a whole is the absence of any regular and conclusive historical evidence about origin, migration, and gradual development of this tribe. When the people first came to be known to the explorers, they had already attained some definite stage of progress in their socio-cultural life. But everything about their distant past is shrouded in mystery and nobody possesses any definite knowledge about that. From explorers, administrators, and traders we hear of them, but we can hardly get a full account of the people with dates and successive stages in the course of their development.

From the faint internal evidences supplied by their literary specimens, we may say with moderate certainty that they were a people who did considerable roamings, migrating from place to place, until they found a permanent home. Then gradually they made life more accommodating; invented the means of satisfying their needs, domesticated animals, started agriculture, built up an organised and disciplined society, with customary laws, institutions, rites and rituals and had thus fairly advanced along the road towards material progress.
For centuries thereafter, the Adis became pretty well adjusted to their socio-cultural set up. Their basic demands in life were already attained and they reached a stage of peaceful equanimity, a stage stable indeed but static, rather, in which they felt no further bothered about anything more. Their social institutions, customs, conventions, beliefs and literature went on continuing in the same way ages and ages thereafter. With the passage of time, no sign of anything new, original or different was in sight and nothing went off from the same old traditional track to usher in an era of change or advancement. For some pretty long time the Adi people, culture and society reached and continued on with a spell of happy compliance, static lull, and hackneyed repetition in every sphere.

This fact is apt enough to strike the curious notice of a keen social observer. But what can be the possible cause of this somnolence and ecological stagnation? The reasonable answer perhaps lies in the truth that a human level of existence not only necessitates a unique biological structure and a mix socio-cultural mode of life, it also needs a peculiar and distinctive kind of psychological structuralization characterised by a level of personal adjustment and experience in which a unique and complex integration occurs between responses to an 'inner' world of impulse, fantasy, and creative imagination. Constancy in the cultural world over time results in stability in the
shared characteristics of the members of a group. Unless new forces from the 'outer' world give a mighty shake to the complacency and constancy of the 'inner' world of the mind, creation of anything new and original is not possible. If a society ever reaches this stage of equilibrium and continues for some longtime with it, it is bound to become stale, unproductive, and unfit for survival in a world of constant change. Men will invariably lose talent as they do not meet any intellectual challenge and social practices and literature will obviously turn into a tedious repetition of what is bygone, past, and stale.

6:1. Forces of Change.

Some such thing occurred to the Adi society also. There came a time when the social mobility reached a stage of almost complete and total impasse. In every aspect of their culture and society they became static and ecologically balanced. In course of many centuries prior to the last, the Adi culture started, grew up and adjusted itself on the north-eastern extremity of India. Despite all primitive means of communication through their country, they had remained almost beyond cultural penetration by outside agencies. They maintained a stiff wall of isolation around them, keeping themselves aloof, away and separate from the neighbouring tribal brethren as also from the aliens and impact of all foreign matters. Even if some changes
occurred to them in the past, these have been so slight, slow and easily modified by the proud Adi nature that they failed to leave any ultimate trace whatsoever.

In course of the last century, several events occurred which apparently shook the sturdy foundation of the Adi society, penetrated the almost invulnerable exterior of the rigid Adi tribal character and made them susceptible to a series of changes that they had resisted for long. The British occupation of Assam in 1826 and the several occasions of armed clash between the British and the Adis worked a powerful change over the latter. They felt the superiority of the foreigners in every matter. A sense of inferiority and a temporary loss of the former proud self-reliance were caused in the Adis. The British supremacy had, to some extent at least, twisted their strong backbone and defiant nature which they did seldom bend to anyone else before. Some form of psychological complex cropped up in them. The void thus created by their weakened mentality was promptly filled in by the new winds of change that had already started blowing in the land and went on steadily increasing and as a result their former cultural balance was upset. The British regime ushered in the Adi land a period of transition from the former rejection of exotic culture to an eager imitation of it and gradually made them become susceptible to the new forces of change.

Even though the British did not intervene in the
socio-cultural affairs of the Axis and impose anything on them in pursuance of their policy of non-interference in tribal matters, the impact of foreign culture upon their whole mental and social set up could be strikingly visible. A section of the younger generation among them almost lost faith, at least temporarily, in the efficacy of their own cultural traditions, underestimated themselves in comparison with the foreigners, fervently acclaimed the exotic and started imitating them. Similarly, the old generation also was in a state of dilemma and could not decide whether to accept the new, rejecting the age-old tradition of proud seclusion, or maintain both old and new side by side or to shut their door totally against any infiltration of the new and stick fast only to the old. It was indeed a trying situation for the whole Adi tribe, this recurrent temptation for the smart new and this emotional inclination to preserve the old. The whole system of social values, feeling of tribal solidarity and characteristic proneness towards a gloried traditional heritage - everything got a severe shake and this jolt disturbed the social balance to a considerable extent.

We have to understand the exactness of the situation in the backdrop of our knowledge about the Adi character which is and has always been down-to-the-earth practical. In the context of British supremacy over them, a sense of rebellion was of course running below the surface of Adi society, but it had seldom burst forth with any vehemence by brushing off the tradi-
tional past completely. It will be quite illogical to expect the young folks to remain blissfully unaware of the new forces of change. It is not true to say that the Adis clung only to the old or switched on to an equally mad rush for the new. Rather, they followed both side by side with some reservations and attempted to strike a golden mean. This was intelligent indeed in the sense that it accepted the good of the new without throwing away the old. The dictates of the Kebang went on being honoured, Moshup and Rasheng continued to be as in the past, the Miri did not lose his power and influence absolutely, traditional tribal laws did not become ineffective, and the old oral literature did not become altogether forgotten or neglected. At the same time modern dress, education, laws, and other means of comfort were allowed to be utilised without any approbation.

The infiltration of the new civilization and the blowing of the winds of change started first near about the seats of government and the rate was rapid or slow, wide or on a small scale, according to the size and importance of that seat. Cheap sentiments which were absent among the Adis of old began to grip the younger generation. Unhappiness and frustration which characterize the average modern man spread among them as infection and all complications of modernity began to have their way in Adi community steadily. From these they of course recovered very timely.
After independence the government of India seriously felt the need to do something helpful and constructive for the vast tribal world of the country. The national government altered the policy of isolation towards the tribals so long followed by the British. They began to be treated as full-fledged Indian citizens enjoying all the fundamental rights, with all compensations having been granted to them for generations of long neglect and alienation in the past. Full recognition was extended to their culture and customs. The basic policy of the government towards them was guided by the spirit of friendliness, love, and sympathy. All possible steps for the progress and well-being of these people were assured. All responsibilities for their proper adjustment in the changed setting were shouldered by the Indian government in an ardent and zealous spirit of philanthropy and paternal affection. The Adis also, along with all other tribals of India, thus came under the all-embracing care and concern taken by the government for the preservation and steady development of their culture.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Nehru the government realised that full protection must be extended to the traditional culture of the Adis so that it might be saved from any loss of their rich heritage. In 1954 Nehru remarked that he would be unhappy to see them become a blind imitator of modernity, despising their rich cultural tradition which can in no way be
replaced. It was this timely caution from the Prime Minister which resulted in the formulation of the India government's celebrated Third Policy which intends to follow a middle course between the extreme policies of complete assimilation and non-intervention in tribal affairs. This policy proved to be quite beneficial for the Adis in the sense that the Adi culture was saved from the existing state of ferment which was caused by the meeting of two different cultural worlds, the vacuum of one being invaded by the rapid current of the other. Because of the opposite nature of the two cultures, one hoary traditional and the other smart up-to-date, there could be no healthy and proper fusion. As a result it caused some disruption and disturbance of the social balance, old norms, and customary values. Such a state of Adi culture got a timely check by the application of the Third Policy which saved it from all possible decay.

The policy is based on the spirit of love, fellow-feeling, understanding and aims at teaching cleanliness, spreading the ideals of justice, equality and humanity and integrating the life of the people in a smooth way. But such a policy should be followed with some amount of care and caution, because any sudden and rapid measure may frustrate the whole purpose of the government by creating psychological complex of a different nature in the tribal people.

On the material side of Adi life honest efforts have
been made by the government to make the life of the people smooth. Thus, numerous roads have been constructed in the Adi land to make communication between the people easier; in major urban areas electricity has been extended; hospitals and health centres, schools and cultural centres have been established; shops and markets have been opened by traders for easier availability of commodities; indigenous cottage-industry products have been given a boost; a number of philanthropic institutions have opened their branches for catering to the various needs of the people; regular radio programmes have been provided to popularise the artistic talents of the people; all steps have been taken to facilitate the creation of original literary works and studies on the manifold sides of social, political and artistic life of the people. What is more, the officers of the government have been made to work with and for the people through their traditional Kabang, keeping in mind the key instruction—'the tribesmen first, the tribesmen last, the tribemen all the time'. Political allegiance to Indian government, creation of a feeling of identity and integration with the greater Indian society and culture, plus an honest desire to bring comfort, development and confidence in the life of these long-neglected people were the results that the Third Policy intended to achieve. In that matter, much, much more than the expected degree of success was no doubt achieved by the government. There may be deeper and more extensive considerations about the intri-
cacies in the application of the Administration's various measures towards the tribals of Arunachal. Hence, in the next section of the present chapter, let us try to review the matter as a whole.

6:2. Emergent situation.

During the British rule the administration's principal concern with regard to the North-Eastern tribal hills regions of India had been the maintenance of law and order and it had been left to Christian missionary bodies mainly to attend to the medical and educational needs of the hill-tribes.

By the time of the transfer of power, a fair number of tribals from these areas had studied in educational institutions outside their own native hills. Apart from missionary enterprise, the government itself had also established some schools and hospitals and the tribals of some of these areas were no longer strangers to the outsider and his life-style. They were as resolved as before that there should be no interference in their customary way of life, but they no longer regarded the outsider as an animal from another world to be kept at as wide a distance as possible. Many tribals had formed personal friendship with plainsmen and until the latter began to show signs of an over-possessive approach, they were content, except for extremists amongst the Nagas and Mizos, to co-exist with them in peace and amity.
The vast, mountainous tract north of the Brahmaputra, designated after Independence as the North-East Frontier Agency or NEFA, was one of the few tribal regions that had never been appreciably influenced by Christian missionary enterprise. Two French missionaries, who were on an exploratory visit, were killed by the chief of the Mishmi tribe of NEFA in the nineteenth century, and subsequent acts of hostility on the part of the tribesmen convinced the British that these inhospitable hills and their inhabitants would best be left undisturbed.

Although, under the new Constitution, NEFA was included as part of the state of Assam, it was specifically prescribed that its administration was the responsibility of the President of India and that the President's Agent for the discharge of this responsibility was the Governor of Assam. It was further provided that, in the discharge of his agency functions, the Governor would act, not on the advice of his ministers, but in his discretion.

The Constitution-makers were aware that the northern tribes had no contact with the outside world and that their ties even with the contiguous plains of Assam were tenuous. The Assamese on their part had little experience of the northern tribes or knowledge of their culture, language or customs. They could lay therefore no special claim to their administration. More important still, the Chinese were beginning to take a belligerent stand in the regions along India's north-eastern borders. The
northern border had thus become a sensitive region and the problems of the frontier tribes were now a matter of national concern for which the central government decided they must take direct and sole responsibility.

The Governor of Assam's chief aide in the discharge of his responsibilities as Agent to the President was his Adviser for Tribal Areas. The Adviser's was a post normally held by a very senior officer in the closing years of his service. Soon it came to be considered more politic to appoint an Indian officer to this sensitive key post, where India's international frontiers were involved, than to extend the services of a British Officer. N. K. Rustomji had the credit of being the first Indian Officer to be appointed to the post of the Adviser to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas of the North-East. The NEFA tribals had no particular love for the former British government that had left them alone to run their own affairs and not been meddlesome. The new Indian government felt the need to change its policy.

The Assamese regarded NEFA as part of their domain, but realized that here they must tread more warily, as the administration of NEFA was constitutionally the central government's responsibility. There was on the other hand an enabling provision in the Constitution whereby NEFA could also be brought under the Assam government's direct administrative jurisdiction as soon as its tribes were considered ripe for the change. What the Assamese apprehended was that, as long as NEFA remained the cen-
entral government's responsibility, the climate would never be
created for its ultimate integration with Assam. It would be
administered by central government officers who had little know-
ledge of or sympathy for Assam, her people or her culture. The
centre would create a vested interest for itself in the area and
would not readily surrender the patronage in appointments, con-
tracts and other fields that central rule offered. The Assamese
argued that the tribes of NEFA had enjoyed age-long historical
ties with Assam and that, if only offered the opportunity and
choice, would readily accept being administered by the Assam
Government in preference to New Delhi. The Assamese further
maintained that they had a better understanding of the ways and
attitudes of the tribes of NEFA and that many of the latter were
conversant with the Assamese language. New Delhi, on the other
hand, was too remote to be able to appreciate the problems of NEFA,
and officers appointed by the central government would, in any case
find themselves handicapped in communicating with the tribals, who
had a smattering of Assamese but none of the other major Indian
languages such as Hindi, Marathi or Telugu.

It was the Assamese case that, if the ultimate inten-
tion of the Constitution was to bring NEFA within the administra-
tive fold of Assam, preparatory action towards this end must be
initiated at once or else NEFA would be kept perpetually as a se-
parate entity under the centre. The first desideratum, in their
view, was to vigorously promote the spread of the Assamese langu-
age for official, educational and other purposes. It was not long before agitations were set afoot all over Assam to bring pressure on the central government to enforce Assamese as the medium of instruction in every school in NEFA. Pressures were also progressively built up for posting Assamese officers in NEFA in preference to officers from other states, in the expectation that Assamese Officers were more likely to favour and work towards NEFA's early integration with Assam.

What the Assamese failed to appreciate was that this Assamese Veneer was limited to the narrow southern belt of NEFA that was contiguous to, and had some limited contact with, the Assam plains. But in the absence of internal communications, by far the greater part of NEFA had enjoyed no such contact. Many of the tribes inhabiting the extreme Northern areas found it indeed more convenient to cross over to Tibet for their essential requirements and had little occasion for visiting the Assam plains and so coming under Assamese cultural influences. The casual visitor to NEFA therefore, moving along the Southern regions contiguous to the Assam plains, would gather a totally misleading impression of the overall culture of the people.

To do them justice, though the Assamese pressed their case for the immediate integration of NEFA, it was in a spirit of reasonableness and restraint. This was partly in
deference to the statesmanlike guidance of the then governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, who was able to convince his ministers that he favoured the ultimate integration of NEFA with Assam and was steering his course to that end. The appointment of Assamese officers to focal posts in NEFA, including the posts of Political Officer, went a long way towards satisfying Assamese aspirations and allaying fears that their people would be excluded from the administration. (11)

6:3. Administrative Steps for the Region.

The Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, however, marked a turning point in NEFA's history.Whatever might have been govt's stand in the past regarding the future shape of NEFA, it now became abundantly clear that NEFA was a zone of vital political and strategic importance which must not on any account be allowed to become the sporting ground of rival, bickering politicians. High-level committees were constituted to examine every aspect of the administrative apparatus, developmental, cultural as well as strategic and a final blueprint drawn up to set the pattern for NEFA's future. (12)

There were, however, certain original features in the overall policy approach that saved the tribes of NEFA from much of the distress, cultural degradation and loss of nerve that has been the lot of tribes elsewhere subjected to the processes
of civilisation. For although the plans for the social amelioration of the tribes followed a conventional pattern, very special, and not so conventional, measures were adopted to ensure that their implementation on the field should not cause them shock or emotional hurt.

The first essential was to recruit a team of officers who would be both professionally equipped and temperamentally suited for the very unusual and exacting conditions of NEFA. It was decided to constitute for this purpose an All India Frontier Service, which would carry prestige and status no less than that of the Indian Administrative Service. Recruitment to this new service was to be through interview by a high-level board consisting of experienced administrators and specialists in the field of tribal culture, including Verrier Elwin, who was appointed tribal consultant to the NEFA administration. Applications for the new Indian Frontier Administrative Service were also invited from the Defence and Police Services. Moreover, a decision had been taken that the British policy of non-interference in the tribal areas required to be reconsidered, for the administration's objective was no longer to be limited to the maintenance of law and order only. It was to be extended to ensure that the Directive Principles of the Constitution should apply to the remotest corner of the tribal areas with as much force and effect as in the capital at New Delhi.
It was expected that officers from the Defence and Police Services would have had a good grounding in discipline and would be physically well-equipped for the strains of touring in the hills. A special Recruitment Board was constituted to sift the thousands of applications received from the Defence, Police and other services and recommend, after scrutinizing their records of service and on the basis of a searching interview, which would be the officers best suited, temperamentally and otherwise, for the new frontier service.

On finalisation of the selection, the officers were put through an intensive training course directed to preparing them for their new responsibilities. While the trainees were duly briefed by the heads of the various technical departments, such as Agricultural, Forest and Medical, more particular emphasis was placed on giving them an insight into the basic problems of tribal administration especially the problems arising from contacts between communities at different levels of culture. It was wanted that the officers should understand that tribal culture was not a primitive anachronism to be summarily swept away, that it was the very flesh and life-blood of the people, that with its extinction would be extinguished also their vital force and motivation for living. The officers were intended to understand their land, forest, agriculture, song, dance, handicrafts, institutions, art, language, literature, beliefs and how much hurt could be caused by insen-
sitivity to tribal sentiment.

It was decided, as part of the training exercise, to invite tribal representatives from NEFA, so that the officers of the administration should be enabled to have an idea of the rich spectrum of tribal life. This orientation was intended not for the officers alone but also for the public at large; for unless the public could be educated and led towards a more rational and objective understanding of tribal values, official endeavours would not bear fruit. It was no less essential therefore to offer the public an opportunity of appreciating something of the richness and beauty of tribal culture. It was made clear that the officers were for the tribals and not the tribals for the officers.

The Chinese entry into Tibet in 1950 had changed all this. Political and strategic pressures dictated henceforward a more elaborate and complex administrative structure in the tribal areas than before. It also required a heavier physical presence of the bureaucracy and of the engines of law and order in the very centre of the hills, and not merely at their extreme southern periphery as in the past. A new policy was necessary which warranted a difference of technique to be followed in the area at this crucial transitional stage.

The enormousness of the task of setting up a regular and full-flagged administrative apparatus in NEFA will be
appreciated when it is realised that there was not even a rudimentary net-work of hill tracks throughout the area. The organising of a routine tour involved endless logistic problems and it can be well imagined what would be the difficulties of establishing a net-work of administrative headquarters, with offices, residences for staff, hospitals, schools and so on, to cover the entire hills. So although the policy decision had been taken to set up a regular administrative apparatus, the inhospitability of NEFA's terrain and the austerities, if not perilous, living conditions of the area discouraged recruitment of staff, despite the offering of compensatory benefits.

It was decided as a principle that whatever work and measures were undertaken for the benefits and development of the NEFA regions, must be only in consultation with the tribal people and with their consent. Nothing, however good or apparently beneficial according to plains people's standards, should be forcibly imposed upon the tribals in order to avoid unnecessary friction and irritating relationship between the administration and the people of the soil. Officers were warned against the patronising attitude of assuming that they knew better what was good for the tribals than did the tribals themselves. It soon became apparent that an over-rapid programme of road construction would cause serious hardship to the tribals if they were to be conscripted to carry out the work. And there would be complications of
a different sort, and no less harmful, if a labour force from outside was inducted for the purpose. The momentous decision was thus taken to resort to air-support to maintain the administration. The air-lifting and air-dropping of stores at the administrative centres eliminated a major cause of discontent and humiliation amongst the tribal population. It also reduced the number of outsiders who would otherwise have been moving about through tribal villages, giving rise to friction and misunderstanding.

The policy and aim in NEFA was not however merely negative, the protecting in passive isolation, of the tribes from outside contacts. The first objective was to win the confidence of the tribes by assuring them that the government respected their culture and way of life and had no interest in destroying it and imposing an alien culture. Following closely upon this fundamental aim was a positive and constructive endeavour to prepare them to meet the challenges of an inevitably changing situation — to so equip them that they would be competent to assess and make their own choice, with wisdom and forethought, between the traditional values of their community and the new values they found crowding in on them from all directions.

Definite steps were taken to build up a Department of Tribal Research, to collect material and publish a series of monographs on NEFA's manifold tribes. A team of young research
scholars was recruited and was quickly put to work. The objective was to make available to the administrative officers, in a compact, easily-readable form, the basic data regarding the tribes amongst whom their work lay -- their customs, beliefs and superstitions, their art, history and language. Attempts were made to make the tribal people know that the administration considered their culture important enough to be worth studying and telling the world about; for past experience had taught that nothing is so damaging to a tribe's vitality and sense of well-being as loss of self-respect, as a devaluation in their own estimation of their own culture and heritage. It was necessary, again to educate the public about the frontier tribes and to correct the popular misconception that they were no more than backward primitives. Unless the public could be made aware that the tribes had a culture and identity of their own, it would see no justification for troubling about their survival as tribes -- and the tribes would soon become engulfed in the vast ocean of India, to be lost and forgotten for all time.

The administration took pains to recruit officers with a sympathetic approach to the tribal people and to give them some training and insight into tribal problems. The officers were desired to understand that tribal practices which might appear strange and meaningless on the surface were generally based on the soundest practical experience. The administration was never
opposed to change on principle, but it was opposed to change for the sake of change alone. There was need to be as alert as watch-dogs to ensure that only such projects were taken up as were directly beneficial to the tribal people. As important as putting a curb on the proliferation of unrealistic schemes was to ensure that, whatever might have been the approach and attitude towards tribals before independence, officers of the administration should treat them in future as equal and respected partners.

It was decided therefore to discontinue the use of appellations that were derogatory to tribal self-respect and to adopt instead the names by which the tribes referred to themselves in their own languages. The uncouth 'Abor' thus faded from history and became 'Adi, damizen of the hills.' While these may appear to be small matters, they were significant as token of a fresh and more enlightened approach. It was made clear by this deliberate change in nomenclature that, as far as the administration was concerned, the concept of the tribal as a primitive boor was a concept of the past -- that, in the new India, the tribal, whatever might be his language, dress, customs or religion, was an equal and respected partner with the rest of his fellow-citizens.

The administration in the early stages was essentially patriarchal, and the selection of tribals for training courses, scholarships and appointments was finalized only after a personal interview with the highest executive, the Adviser himself.
But this was possible only as long as the administrative structure was kept within manageable limits and the pace of administration was carefully regulated. The subsequent stability of NEFA owed much to the personal hand picking and rearing (24) of the first generation of tribal leaders.

NEFA's administration was the responsibility of the President of India and therefore excluded from the jurisdiction of the politicians of Assam. And, until the Chinese invasion of NEFA in 1962, the politicians at the centre were too remote and had their minds too pre-occupied with pressing issues nearer home to trouble themselves much over the tribals of the northern hills. The Chinese entry into Tibet in 1950 had focussed interest upon NEFA. But it was a limited interest and it was not until the full-scale invasion of 1962, which was a direct threat to India's security, that NEFA's concerns were considered to be of sufficient weight to warrant a review of the policy followed (25) by the government towards it. But by then, strong and solid foundations had already been laid and there was a nucleus of tribals in NEFA with a balanced approach to the changing situation and who were largely free from the apprehensions and suspicions that had poisoned the relationship between tribals and non-tribals in other parts of the country. The administration had gently held its hand during the official years since Indepen-
dance, without pushing them or hustling them. They saw India, therefore, not with an unfriendly eye, not in the light of a cultural aggressor, but as a friend, associate and guide in every matter pertaining to their very survival, socially, culturally and territorially.


The first serious challenge to NEFA came with the dislodgement by the Chinese in 1959 of a small Assam Rifles outpost from its position at Longju in the Subansiri Frontier Division, just south of the McMahon Line. This blatant act of aggression made it clear that more would in future be needed for the defence of the borders than a light net work of paramilitary Assam Rifles outposts. The time had come for the positioning in strength of regular army troops at strategic points of NEFA to hold the Chinese back from a full-scale attack on India's frontiers. With the Chinese threatening to make an issue of the boundary question, sizeable army dispositions needed to be permanently established in NEFA itself for defence of its frontiers with China.

Before much progress could be made in this matter the Chinese struck. So rapid was the enemy advance and so utter the collapse of Indian resistance that it was taken for granted that, within a matter of days, the whole of NEFA, if not Assam, would be
lost to the Chinese. During their brief period of occupation of NEFA, the Chinese went out of their way to be friendly to and win over the tribal population. Fortunately, in course of several months the Chinese vacated the occupied areas of NEFA and matters became normal. It was a miracle that within six months of the confusion and tension of the invasion, the tribals should have peacefully settled down to their normal life, without the slightest feeling of bitterness against the Indian administration. The blandishment of the Chinese proved ineffective and the tribals' feelings of loyalty to the govt. remained firm although they had been virtually abandoned at a time of their graven peril. Within the next ten years, NEFA was formally bifurcated from Assam and constituted as a Union Territory, designated as Arunachal Pradesh, or, 'Land of the Rising Sun', a stepping-stone, in the fullness of time, to ultimate Statehood which it achieved on February 20, 1987.

NEFA's orderly constitutional progress provides an invaluable case-study, as it is one of the rare, if not unique, instances of primitive tribal communities being successfully guided to adjust themselves, within a relatively brief period, to a smooth and harmonious co-existence with, and within, cultures of a fundamentally different pattern. What is significant is that the relationship of confidence that has been built up is not a superficial veneer. It has stood the severest of tests, the test of a full-
scale military invasion. At a time when civil and military personnel were taking flight in fear and panic from their posts, the tribals of NEFA came willingly forward to porter loads for facilitating army movements and to bring in intelligence of the enemy's positions. The tribals might have been expected to bear resentment and hostility against the administration. But they showed no bitterness and their loyalty remained steadfast.

It may be asked wherein lay the success in the building up of a relationship of such unshakeable confidence and goodwill. The administration had been very scrupulous in showing respect for tribal culture and creating a propitious climate for its growth and fruitful development. But there was nothing new in all this. What was new in the administration's approach and gave confidence to the tribal people was that, whereas it respected their culture, it respected equally their aspirations and their right to move forward with the times, should they so wish. For while the tribals are sensitive and resent any slight to their traditions and customary way of life, they resent no less the imputation that, as tribals, they are not fit or ready to adjust themselves to and hold their own in a fast-changing world.

In a world where the techniques of mass communication are developing at a phenomenal pace, it is questionable whether any culture can indefinitely maintain its individual entity. We respect the culture of the tribes of NEFA, not out of any sentimental
feeling or expectation that their culture and languages can indefinitely survive in their present form. We show respect to their culture as this is a way of showing respect to the tribes that are its heirs and whose responsibility it is to decide in what shape this heritage is to be passed on to their successors.

In the case of NERI, political and strategic considerations ruled out the possibility of the tribes remaining in indefinite isolation. And if the Government of India had not taken the first initiative in including them within its embrace, they might well have fallen to the less tender mercies of their northern neighbours. Once the processes of change have been set into motion, there is no foreseeing to where they may lead, and it would be unrealistic to expect that the future pattern of life of the tribes of NERI will survive in the form it was found when the Administration first made its contacts with them.

It is not in human hands to preserve and crystallize in perpetuity the cultural pattern of NERI's tribes, even if that were desirable. What the administration has succeeded in doing is to save the people of NERI from the shock and trauma primitive people throughout the world have had to suffer during the painful period of breaking out of their chrysalis. This has been achieved not so much by dictating to them the way as by the assurance that it is for the tribes themselves to make their choices, for
them to decide whether any change is to be brought about in the pattern of their lives, and, if so, the timing, manner and pace of its introduction.
Notes and References to Chapter VI.


2. In the following words Nehru clarified the nature and aim of the Third Policy to be applied by the Government of India:

"Government of India is determined to help the tribal people to grow according to their own genius and tradition; it is not the intention to impose anything on them. Development must be according to their own genius and not something that they can not absorb or imbibe and which merely uproots them. I feel, therefore that it is unwise to try to do too many things at the same time there which may result in disturbing the mind of the people or in upsetting their habits. I have no doubt that development and change and so-called progress will come to them because it is becoming increasingly difficult for any people to live their isolated life cut-off from the rest of the world. But let this development and change be natural and be in the nature of self-development with all the help one can give in the process". (V. Elwin: *A Philosophy for NEFA*, p. 56).


6. Rustomji: Ibid.
7. Luthra: Ibid.
8. Rustomji: Ibid.
12. Rustomji: Ibid.
15. Rustomji: Ibid.
22. Luthra: Ibid.
25. Luthra: Ibid.
27. Rustomji: Ibid.
26.

29. Rustomji: Ibid.
31. Dubey: Ibid.
33. Excerpt from the speech of N. K. Rustomji (former adviser to the Governor of Assam) on the matter:

"We have as much to learn from the hillmen, as they have from us. Much of the beauty of living still survives in these remote and distant hills, where dance and song, are a vital part of everyday living, where people speak and think freely, without fear or restraint. ... The hillman has, essentially, a clean, direct and healthy outlook; he is free, happily, from the morbid complexes inhibited by the unnatural life of the city-folk, ... divorced from ... the beauty of nature, fresh sunlight, and free, spontaneous laughter. ..."

"The greatest disservice will be done if, in an excess of missionary zeal, our workers destroy the fresh creative urge that lives, strong and vital, within the denizens of the hills. If we wish to serve, we must show that we have respect for the hillmen, their institutions, their language and their song; and, in showing such respect, we shall secure their
confidence; ... as one amongst the people themselves.

Workers among the tribes must be men of adventure and elastic intellect. The mind must be constantly on the alert to discover ways and means of overcoming the hundred and one problems of administration in such unusual areas and amongst such unusual people. ... But the worker who plods along the beaten track, hesitant to undertake any venture lest it might not meet with immediate success, will be of little use for work in areas where the commonly accepted rules and practices are impractical of implementation and are a hindrance to the development and growth of the people. (Elwin, Ibid., p.267 and 151).