CHAPTER - VIII

Summary and Conclusion


In the foregoing Chapters an attempt has been made to study the traditional life of the Adi tribe of Arunachal with relevant references to their origin, physical features, nature, dress, divisions, village settlements, family patterns, social institutions, customary laws, economic life, oral literature, religious practices, ceremonies and world view. In short, it has been an attempt to sketch the whole folklore of the place so to say, which has been prevailing in the area since unknown past, having been retained with implicit faith and obedience. Next, the changes in the Adi life and society which took place after their contact with the British and Assam plains people have been pointed, with relevant references to the state of matters as they stand at present.

This study of Adi folklore is never without a definite aim and purpose as has been followed in the preceding chapters by way of displaying a sense of historical continuity in which both tradition and modernity combine. Folklore has a historical background and the subject induced scientists to look back into the pre-history of mankind and their primitive practices that are still surviving. Folklore usually suggests
traditions passing through the centuries through the oral medium. It has a wide domain in so far as it refers to orally inherited tales, songs, saying and beliefs, or to village festivals, household customs and popular rituals. In all these matters tradition plays the most important role and since tradition varies from place to place, the study that a folklorist has to follow must conform to the shape and form of a particular civilization. The growth of interest in the study of folklore in different countries of the East and West was prompted more by a sense of national spirit than by a spirit of academic pursuit.

Each tribe and each locality has a folklore and it is obvious that to set forth any given folklore, with all its stratifications, in a comprehensive and orderly way, would virtually amount to exhibiting fully the past and present intellectual, moral, religious and social conditions of the people to whom it belonged. Folklore limits itself to a study of the unrecorded traditions of the people as they appear in popular fiction, custom, belief, magic and ritual.

Folklore may well be called a historical science; historical, because it attempts to throw light on man’s past; a science, because it endeavours to attain this goal, not by speculation or deduction from some abstract principle agreed upon a priori, but by the inductive method which underlies all scienti-
fic research whether historical or natural. So far as the ancient tribes are concerned, it would seem that the greater proportion of trustworthy data is to be derived from that department of their folklore which manifests itself in traditional practices. Even the modern usages of social and domestic life, when skillfully read, are capable of telling us something at least of the condition of the people and society of old times.

Folklore is a living and inextinguishable force, ebbing and flowing with the rhythm of social life, carrying into the present the traditions of the past and constantly adapting itself to the changing conditions of the times. Old customs disappear and superstitions vanish with new techniques and knowledge, but ancient forms of thought continually reappear in a new guise. Folklore material is no longer looked for solely in the country or in the records of the past. The products of the folk mind working under present conditions in urban as well as rural areas and the effect of modern ideas upon the birth of new folk traditions form an important part of the study to-day.

The whole account as presented in the preceding chapters doubtless points to, in perfect accordance with the norms of the historical science of folklore, the Adi tribe's strong adherence to the traditional past and customary practices in almost every sphere of life and society. There have of course been infiltration of many and varied changes with the
passage of time and changes in the socio-political condition and atmosphere in the neighbouring arena. But these could not completely topple the old solidarity and strong plinth of the settled social structure. Rather, a sensible and adjustable balance could be arrived at without much strain, primarily through the practical outlook and accommodating, adaptable nature of the Adi people on the one hand and the Government's wise, mature and sympathetic handling of the whole situation on the other. Let us sum up the whole matter.

Till the early 1950's only a few of the tribal communities inhabiting the North-Eastern Frontiers of India had developed some measure of close association with outsiders. The multitude of tribes of the vast mountainous tract north of the Brahmaputra, had hardly ever been brought under direct and effective administrative control during the British regime. The British could see no financial profit from these intractable, inhospitable areas, considered it pointless to commit themselves to infructuous expenditure and hence left the tribes to themselves in their undeveloped state without any direct interference in their internal affairs. The British had also previous experience gathered elsewhere during their imperialist expansions that in tribal practice any sudden intrusion by strangers into their territory meant subsequent pillage and outrage of their culture. The tribals were perfectly content with their own way of life and
resisted with all violence any attempt to force exotic ways and patterns upon them. While they might not have been aware of long-term implications of such changes, their own way of life was as important and meaningful to themselves as was that of the others elsewhere. These considerations led the British to follow their policy of non-intervention about the tribals of the north-east excepting in cases of necessary military domination.

In sharp contrast to this policy is the second one of assimilation or detribalization. Although it has favoured, elsewhere in the world, a few gifted individuals who are able to assimilate the new way of life, it generally deprives the mass of the people of their standards and values without putting anything comparable in their place.

The government of India since the attainment of Independence was thus faced with a problem much like the performing of a delicate balancing trick in forming an acceptable policy regarding the vast tribal population of the country, including that in NEFA. In administering NEFA, specially in view of the presence of possible unfriendly neighbours across the borders, it was necessary, on one side, to demonstrate that the writ of the government extended as far north as the McMahon Line. It was equally necessary, on the other side, to ensure that the entry of the administration into virtually unexplored tribal
territory did not raise suspicions and apprehensions in the minds of the tribal people. It was indeed a delicate task which had, in its onward course, met with occasional set-backs and much of the administration's success in establishing friendly contacts with the tribes of NEFA may be attributed to its calm and reasoned, restrained and sensible handling of the whole process. It ended in ultimately winning over the complete confidence of the NEFA tribal world and their unaffected friendship and co-operation.

8:2. Concluding Observations.

There can be no doubt that the people in this vital promontory of our country need be given the full benefits of modern science and knowledge. There should be an all-round progress in their cultural, economic and social spheres. The walls of separation and isolation should be pulled down in the interest of the democratic progress of the country as a whole. This progressive policy became imperative particularly after the Chinese invasion of 1962. It advocates the advancement of these people and their integration with the rest of India. In the implementation of this objective, care is duly taken to ensure that progress is built on the foundations of their existing values and social patterns and that the process is touched off by the widening of the mass consciousness of the people. In concrete terms, it means arousing the awareness of the people to
the fact that they are a part of a big nation which is devoted to high-minded democratic and social ideal, freedom, oneness, equality of opportunity and a wide range of human tolerance. The policy objectives in NEFA in terms of constitutional aims have been to set out a process of building a representative government of the people so that they, in keeping with the advance in education, may manage their own affairs and have freedom in developing their social and economic condition within the framework of the constitution.

The administrative aims in Arunachal are those of integration, prosperity, and security. Integration lies in the realm of the mind and it is not achieved merely by showing a certain territory on a map. The initiative has to be taken to generate a sense of belonging to the country as a whole and to its various other parts. This necessitates social intercourse and one of the methods to achieve this is provided by the non-government social welfare missions. Some of these were inducted into NEFA from 1963 and these are playing a useful part in nurturing bonds of comradeship between the people of NEFA and the rest of the country. The awareness of the people that they belong to a big nation has also been strengthened by the various archaeological finds as those at Bhismaknagar, Malinithan, Parasuram Kunda etc. which speak of a very rich Indian culture of old that prevailed in the area cen-
turies ago. They point to the historical and cultural links which have existed between these areas and the other parts of the ancient India.

Side by side with this, to promote further intercourse with the rest of the country, boys and girls from NEFA are sent every year to academic institutions in the four corners of India and even outside the country. This will help in bringing up a spirit of national leadership among the promising youth of the region and effectively assist the growth of a bond of emotional integration between NEFA and the other provinces of the country. With regard to the indigenous beliefs and religious faiths of the people, programmes of regular studies and researches have been undertaken by the departments of education and culture. The general policy of the government is to respect them and to help their expansion and development in keeping with the wishes and sentiments of the tribal people. Such an organised and consolidated programme of propagating the faiths, beliefs, and traditional culture of the NEFA tribes will go a long way to enrich the composite culture of our country as a whole.

The administrative aim of prosperity has yielded good results by showing distinct evidence of economic growth in the matter of production and in the uplifting of the general condition and well-being of the people. In recent
years, a few industries have been started in NEFA. Further surveys have pointed to the future scope of prospective forest and mineral-based industries which are proposed to be gradually taken up in the Five Year Plan. These programmes did and are expected to sufficiently enhance the economic prosperity of the region and, what is more, establish a spirit of interdependence and co-operation between NEFA and other regions of the country.

The government's most vital aim in NEFA has been to provide the people of the region with proper security against the backdrop of foreign invasion threat from across the international border. The people of NEFA, particularly the young men, are getting enrolled in increasing numbers as members in the Home Guards, the Police and the Armed Forces. In addition, they are availing themselves of the opportunities to enlist in the Assam Rifles and the Assam Regiment which are special to this region. Their contribution to security is a vital and undeniable part of the defence system of our country. Since these areas and these people are located and positioned in a very sensitive frontier of India, both have a vital role to play in the overall safety of our country.

To-day in this late 20th century the appearance of the Adi culture and society has immensely changed, showing the full truth of Tennyson's proverbial saying, 'old order changeth, yielding place to the new'. The people got a State
and government of their own; boys and girls are enjoying full
benefits of Western education and greater Indian culture; they
are spreading their talents in various fields, becoming minis-
ters and responsible officers, participating in the national
life of India to the full and perhaps at times thinking: 'what
once I was, what am now'. People from all over the country are
flowing into Adi land either for business or employment. Smart
towns and humming colonies are coming up. The whole place is
bubbling with activity and all-round development, while in a
dark corner of a remote village the hoary-headed, dim-sighted,
antediluvian great-grandfather is still perhaps trying feebly to
cling to the rusty, traditional past, thinking of the days that
are no more and feeling with a heavy heart: 'My days among the
dead are past'.

Since the time that Arunachal Administration was
formed, the keynote of the policy of the government to be
followed towards the tribes has been that of friendliness and
sympathy, as hinted in the remark—"the tribesmen first, the
tribesmen last, the tribesman all the time." The task of the
Administration has been to educate the people to know, love and
be loyal to India; the people were trained how to build up and
manage their Councils for judicial and development work; the
officers of the Administration inspired them with the ideas of
equality and justice inherent in their traditional set-up.
Schools were set up in almost every village where the people are taught, along with the basic three R's, means of better cultivation, habits of cleanliness, and the ideals of love, justice, equality and humanity, as also a stronger devotion to the essential tribal integrity - cultural and religious.

Besides, on the material side all efforts are taken to make the life of the people smooth, happy, and comfortable. Thus, numerous roads were constructed to make communication easier; regular transport arrangement has been made; in major urban areas electricity has been extended; hospitals and health centres have been built; one of the biggest colleges in North-East India was established at Pasighat for higher education in arts and science; and lastly, Cultural Research Officers were posted in every town for the preservation, study and careful propagation of the arts, literature and cultural tradition of the people. The result was the construction of several fine libraries and the creation of a smart, enlightened, and dashing young generation. Adi boys are becoming big officers, doctors, engineers, teachers and politicians but at the same time they are proud of their rich cultural heritage which they are eager to preserve, enhance and propagate. This remarkable blending of the two different worlds— one hoary past and the other smart and progressive present— is really praiseworthy and that shows the commendable success of the Third Policy of the government.
With the formation of the Union Territory and subsequent State of Arunachal Pradesh with a regular elected popular ministry, the matter of development and progress became quickened more than before. The people had a chance to send their elected representative MPs at the Centre to voice their needs and demands. The setting up of 'Panchayats' and abolition of some of the powers of the traditional Kabang may have given rise to occasional controversies but that the whole area has made tremendous progress by leaps and bounds can never be denied. The people have become increasingly conscious of their needs, rights and demands. The percentage of literacy has gone up quite a lot. Problems and disadvantages are there. But that they will be eased in near future is sure and certain, because the Adis, like Browning's hero, are both optimistic and persevering, who believe in the saying: "Ride, ride together for ever ride," that is to say, to accept life as it comes, with its beauty and filth, good and bad, relief and agony, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. In this background

In this background of social, political and cultural reconstruction literature has also a vital role to play and that role is played through the writings of the educated members of the younger generation. Modern education and close contact with the outside world have broadened their outlook and killed all parochial bias. Their knowledge about the problems of today has
widened, making them conscious about the problems and needs of their own society. They feel that to uplift their own land, to cure its problems and to make it worth living is their first duty and in this they enjoy the whole-hearted support of all sections of the society. They have realized the vital truth that their first and most important task is to revive the literary heritage of the past and to bring their literature and culture to a stable footing because that is the only object of everlasting truth and permanent value. Thus enlightened Adis of today, Lumer Dai, Oshong Ering, Mating Dai, Talung Rukbo, Jikom Riba, Ano Perma, Ette, Talom Gao, to name some, have devoted their energies to a serious study about the traditional past of their literature, culture and society. They have published books and papers on the various aspects of the Adi life and society, their moshuo and rasheng of yesterday and today, their social laws and institutions, translations of their myth and folk literature, their abanos, ponungs, songs and lyrics, critical articles on their festivals and ceremonies, their supernatural beliefs, spirit and religion and such other varied topics. They have also started composing original songs and novels of their own which have really enhanced the prestige and utility of their literature to a great extent. Thus not only in the regeneration of tradition and a new social mobility, full of vigour and liveliness, but also in the production of a fresh literature, both popular and intellectual, the culture of the Adis has achieved a really creditable dimension.
that demands sincere appreciation.

The literature of today, which is written and not oral as in the past, finds expression in two different scripts, Roman or Devnagari and Assamese. While the critical literature which is written by and for the educated intellectual section of the people, has to be expressed through English medium, the stories, novels and such other things which are meant for popular reading, are written in Assamese medium, because Assamese is as well-known to them as their mother tongue. Thus the novels of Lumer Dai like 'Prithibir Hanshi' (Smile of the Earth) and Dai Prithibir Shile Shile (On the Rocky Steps of the Earth) are written in Assamese and have drawn much popular appreciation and have also been awarded great recognition by the Assames Sahitya Sabha. Similarly, the other Adi writers, already mentioned, who have written critical papers on traditional life and society of the Adis, have used the English medium and these also have been equally applauded. In this way, a very healthy trend of integration is perceptible all round which will definitely place the Adi culture in near future on a sound footing.

The eminent historian Toynbee once observed that every society is characterised by an alternating rhythm of static and dynamic movement and pause and movement. This statement mirrors the old history and the new dynamics of the NEFA people. After a
pause of centuries, they are now stirring to a new movement, a movement which will establish them in the very core of our country from the viewpoint of defence and social and economic growth. The varied and colourful NERA personality has undeniably started lending a remarkable richness to the diverse wealth of our motherland India—a wealth which is never exhausted and which constantly grows richer with the addition of each and every newly-explored facet.
Notes and References to Chapter VIII.

2. Ibid.
3. Excerpts from the writings and speeches of some eminent Indians on Nêra tribals and policies to be followed about them:

Dr. Rajendra Prasad:

There can be and should be, no idea or intention of forcing anything on them either by way of religion, language or even mode of living and customs. Even where we feel that the religion or the life that is offered is better than theirs, there is no justification for forcing it upon them against their will. My own idea is that facilities for education and for general improvement in their economic life should be provided for them and it should be left to them to choose whether they would like to be assimilated with, and absorbed by the surrounding society, or would like to maintain their own separate tribal existence . . . . Personally, I am for service to them uninfluenced by any consideration of winning them over. ... It is only in that way that we can win their confidence. (Elwin: A Philosophy for Nêra, p. 56).

Jawaharlal Nehru:

The problem of the tribal areas is to make the peo-
ple feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them should signify not only a protecting force but a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them ... or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them, will alienate them and make our frontier problems more difficult.

We must inspire them with confidence and make them feel at one with India, and realise that they are part of India and have an honoured place in it. This can only be done by allowing them to retain their own cultural traits and habits and leaving them to develop along their own lines without any compulsion from outside.

I am anxious that they should advance, but I am even more anxious that they should not lose their artistry and joy in life and the culture that distinguishes them in many ways. ... What I am anxious about particularly is to avoid large numbers of outsiders being sent to the tribal areas in some capacity or other. ... The danger is that these people will lose their culture and have nothing to replace it.

To some extent, there is danger of the so-called Indian civilization having this disastrous effect, if we do not check and apply it in the proper way. We may well succeed in uprooting
them from their way of life with its standards and discipline and give them nothing in its place. We may make them feel ashamed of themselves and their own people and thus they may become thoroughly frustrated and unhappy. They have not got the resilience of human beings accustomed to the shocks of the modern world and so they tend to succumb to them. We must, therefore, be very careful to see that in our well-meaning efforts to improve them, we do not do them grievous injury. It is just possible that, in our enthusiasm for doing good, we may over-shoot the mark and do evil instead. ... We must cease to think of ourselves as different from them and approach them in a spirit of comradelyship and not like someone aloof. ... In some respects I am quite certain they possess a better variety of cultures than ours and are in many ways certainly not backward. ... They lead a corporate communal life which, I think, is far better than the caste-ridden society from which we suffer.

Our people all over India should develop affection and respect for these fine people. ... I hope there will be no attempt made to impose other ways of life on them in a hurry. Let the changes come gradually and be worked out by the tribals themselves. ... We should avoid two extreme courses: ... to treat them as anthropological specimens for study and ... to allow them to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity. ... It was true that they could not be left cut off from the world as they were. Political
and economic forces impinged upon them and it was not possible or desirable to isolate them. Equally undesirable, it seemed to me, was to allow these forces to function freely and upset their whole life and culture which had so much of good in them.

I am alarmed when I see ... how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness, and to impose on them their particular way of living. We are welcome to our way of living, but why impose it on others? I am not at all sure which is the better way of living, the tribal or our own. In some respects I am quite certain theirs is the better. Therefore, it is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to behave or what to do and what not to do. There is no point in trying to make of them a second-rate copy of ourselves.

We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take interest in them. In the world of to-day that is not possible or desirable. At the same time we should avoid over-administering these areas and, in particular, sending too many outsiders into tribal territory.

It is between these two extreme positions that we have to function. Development in various ways there has to be such as communications, medical facilities, education and better agriculture. These avenues of development should, however, be pursued
within the broad framework of the following five fundamental principles:

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.

2. Tribal right in land and forests should be respected.

3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.

5. We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved. (Elwin, Ibid., pp. 53, 94, 113, 254, 258).

S. Fazl Ali (Former Governor of Assam)

The people of NEFA are sensitive and intelligent and
though they might occasionally be bewildered by the advance of an unfamiliar world, yet I think they will be disposed to greet this advance with all the friendliness of their open-hearted and hospitable nature. They are observant and intelligent and are deeply conscious of the natural dignity of their simple ways of life.

We must, therefore, approach them not with any feeling of civilized superiority, but with a genuine spirit of service and seek to learn from them at least as much as we would like to teach them. They must be made to feel that it is their own prosperity and happiness which we are anxious to promote. If we try to change their traditional modes of living too rapidly or too rigidly, in accordance with any pre-conception what a civilized social order should be, they might be easily led to believe that we are seeking to disrupt their way of life or to uproot them.

We must follow the golden mean between leaving too much alone and interfering too obtrusively in their daily life. It is our duty to go ahead with the task of removing their pressing needs and doing everything which will really add to their happiness and prosperity and broaden their outlook. But they should not be overwhelmed by a multiplicity of projects in such a way as to undermine their self-reliance without evoking their enthusiasm. More important ... is to arouse the enthusiasm and
co-operation of the tribal people who will then be able to realize in their own way the advantages of more intimate association and contact with the rest of India (Elwin: Ibid., pp. 57-58).

Verrier Elwin:

We must approach the tribesman with the mind of the tribesman. ... The tribal folk are not 'specimens', 'types', or 'cases'; they are people; they are human beings exactly like ourselves in all fundamental ways. We are part of them and they are part of us; there is no difference. They live under special conditions. They have developed along special lines; they have their own outlook and ways of doing things. But the ultimate human needs, aspirations, loves and fears are exactly the same as ours.

With this background, I have tried to apply ... humane and scientific ideals to concrete situations. To do this loyally and intelligently is, I believe, the chief source of hope for the people of NEFA and indeed for all the tribal people of India. (Elwin: Ibid: Preface)

K. L. Mehta (Former Advisor to the Governor of Assam):

Unless we are clear in our minds about what we are trying to do, unless, in fact, we have a philosophy behind all our activities, we may do more harm than good with the money and labour we spend.
There is little point in laying down targets which are unachievable and making promises which can not be fulfilled. Sometimes to slow down the tempo of development to avoid the feeling among the people that our welfare schemes are being imposed upon them. ... The inculcation of self-confidence in the people is perhaps the most important single factor in bringing success in the type of work we are attempting to do.

... I doubt whether we are still doing as much as we should to develop a sense of confidence and pride among the people ... and to give them scope to solve their own problems. ... Development is for the people, not the people for development. (Elwin: Ibid. p. 113 and 207)