

CONVERSION AND QUEST FOR INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: EMERGING RELIGIOUS TERRAIN IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri

Associate Professor, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University
Rono Hills, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh . (saritkchai@rediffmail.com)

Backdrop

Arunachal Pradesh, the erstwhile NEFA, is the homeland of large number of tribes with distinctive identities who spread over sixteen districts. This state is sharing boundaries with Tibet, China, Burma and known for its cultural diversity reflected by variegated tribes though some elements of commonalities can also be traced on the basis of which some scholars tried to have some broader classification of the tribes. Even on the basis of religious beliefs and practices one could have classified tribes on two broad categories, such as, Buddhist and Non-Buddhist tribes which will be too simplistic to understand the spectrum of intricate traditional religious faiths and practices. It is true that majority of the tribes can be classified as animists in spite of reflecting tremendous heterogeneity evident in the nature of deities, spirits, religious specialists, festivities and oral tradition. However, like many other tribes of the region the tribes of Arunachal are passing through a phase of transition and undoubtedly Christianity is becoming one of the dominant forms of faith practiced by many tribes of this state, like Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Galo, Tagin, Wancho, Nokte, Tangsa, Sulung etc.

It may be mentioned here that Christianity has a long history in the context of Arunachal though its impact and acceptability has had tribe specific connotations. For example Riddi (2010:232-233) writes, “The missionaries tried to spread their activities in the Tagin area only after 1950. During the early years and reform, the years of independence, the administration attempted to promote indigenous religions by not allowing the missionaries to come in and proselytise the tribes. They tried to create a climate in which the old regions could grow and reform themselves “from within” so that ultimately there would have a wider and purer conception of God and man”. It may be added that NEFA administration imposed restriction on the missionaries to build churches and carry out proselytizing

activities beyond the inner line' It also insisted that the songs and hymns sung in the schools should be secular in character (ibid).

In spite, of various protective measures within last few decades Christianity became one of the major dominant forces, which led massive conversion among most of the major tribes of this frontier state.

With the emergence of new faiths and practices there are new reformist movements emerged which are gradually gaining ground among the tribes in order to protect and preserve their indigenous religious beliefs and practices. Such reformist movements generated new taxonomies, such as, Donipoloism, Intyaism, Rangfraism etc. Moreover, all these have tried to institutionalize tribal religion by inventing images of Gods and Goddess, constructing temples, textualising religious chants or oral traditions, which are very similar to another major religion called Hinduism. The present paper deals with such images as well as various reformist practices taking examples from various tribes in order to understand the contested domains of religious transformation historically which ultimately may throw some lights on the emerging realities of a frontier state.

Emergence of Donyipoloism

'Donyi' and 'Polo' literally mean 'sun' and 'moon' which Tani group of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, such as, the Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin and Galo, worship for prosperity, fertility and protection from calamities. Talom Rukbo, the founder member of Donyipolo movement, said that sometimes the concept of Donyipoloism is confusing as it has multiple connotations, such as it represent Almighty God, symbolize sun and moon, and also manifests traditional belief systems of the Tani tribes. He further said, " ... the ritual and the spiritual parts of the culture of the people of Arunachal Pradesh are found to be eroding gradually due to want of its written form and proper practice like that of other ethnic groups. So, with the aim of restoring the decaying rituals, prayers, hums, the people of Abotani group, mainly the Adi, the Nyishi and the Apatani have organized cultural societies in the name of Tani Jagriti Foundation, Donyipolo Youth Federation, and Donyipolo Yelam Kebang (DYK) at Pasighat etc. These voluntary organizations have been collecting materials and have brought out books and booklets for the benefit of the

younger generation who are not in touch with these cultural literatures in their academic lives and under the present social change. Further inventive and creative activities are also coming up by constructing shrines and altars for regular prayer service in the center. Through the untiring effort of Donyopolo Mission, Itanagar, the religious world has come to know the existence of Donyopolo Faith in a corner of India that is Arunachal Pradesh"(2002:79).

According to Ering (1994), in a religious concept Donyi Polo is essentially a channel of human aspirations as traditionally understood by the people. Donyi Polo associated with superstition, myths, legends and has some deeper philosophy. Some tribes of Arunachal Pradesh claim themselves as the direct descendants of the great legendary human father called Abotani, who ascribed to be the first ever human being on the planet. The people of these tribes are the believers of a faith called DonyiPolo (DP) which basically mean sun and moon. Under the supremacy of DP, the Adis classified various God and Goddesses, deities, spirits whom they worship for different purposes though they believe that all such gods, goddesses etc., are sent by Seedi, the great creator, to look after all the human beings on the earth”.

He adds (ibid,36-37), "Since there is no written documents and systematic oral literature to substantiate philosophic conception of DP, we may communicate things by analysing traditional belief, faith and practices. DP is a common expression in Adi society. Depending upon circumstances and situations, by this term, they mean truth, purity, enlightenment, wisdom, justices, righteousness, peace and non-violence. For example, traditional oath taking is administered with the pronouncement of DP. While deposing before the *Kebang* or tribal council, an individual swear by DP”.

Concept of *Gangging*

Gangging is an Adi word which literally means a place of worship of traditional faith and beliefs of the Adis. It may also be conceived as a place where fight took place to

denounce evil spirits and some of the founders of Donyipolo movement (like Kaling Borang etc.) explained that *Gagging* is a place which evolves wisdom and enlightenment which made the dweller proud of and from which they can repeal outside impact.

This concept emerged along with the reform movement called Donyi poloism which basically popularized by Donyi Polo Yelem Kebang under the leadership of late Talom Rukbo. This voluntary organization was established in 1986 on 31st December which is also considered as the Donyio Polo Day. Other founder members were Kaling Borang, Late Dibu Moyong, Late Talut Tamuk, Osong Ering, Tapon Jomang etc. This organization came in existence in order to give an organized form of Donyi Poloism. According to Rukbo the word *Gagging* originally derived from *Gangging Siring*, an imaginary land or spiritual tree that exist somewhere in between the spiritual and natural world from where every object of living and non-living came in to existence. Among the Adis, the word *Gangging* represents a sacred place for keeping the idols of gods and goddesses for worshiping. According to Tayeng (2008:22-24), "The practical ideas of systematic revival was brought by some members of Donyo Polo Mission who attended a meeting in World Religious Conference in several places and showed the seed of religious practice at Pasighat. On 31 st December 1996, a group of Donyopolo believers declared the day as milestone of religious movement. From that onward they gathered on every Saturday regularly. They collected materials on religious literature, composed prayer songs and published them for use. There images of god and deities were erected. This drew attention of the people of DonyoPolo faith believers. Immediately orientation courses to train up youth in right direction were conducted to spread the message of Donyipolo faith believer.

Earlier male dormitories (Mosup) served some of the functional aspects of *Gangging* but it has some problems to accommodate all because of certain taboos, such as, women are not always allowed in certain occasion, people bitten by snake or suffered with the attack of wild animals are not allowed until some rituals are not performed, parents of new born baby have the same plight etc.

Gangging members have to follow certain rules which are newly framed. Male members have to sit at the left side in a row and female members have to sit at the left row in cross leg position. There should not be any noise during prayer except harmonious voice of hymn. The gangging organizes prayers on Sunday and its branches are now established in all the villages under Siang district. And all these Ganggings are centrally regulated by the Donyo Polo Yelam Kebang. Large numbers of ritual chantings are textualised in standardized forms which are used during prayers inside the Gangging. In fact, the initiation of Gangging to spread Donyo Poloism is intricately linked with the formation of Donyo polo Yelam Kebang. Rukbo (2005:35-36) categorically said while narrating the activities of DPYK, "First the religious literature of old practice was collected and compiled and books were published. Secondly, prayer songs were composed and books were published. Thirdly, for gathering people, a Donyipolo temple was constructed at Pasihat. Fourthly, images of Donyipolo and other gods and goddesses were prepared and others were placed on the altar of the temple. Fifthly, valuable ornaments were collected and then other healing materials were collected and kept in the temple for use". He (ibid:35-37) narrated the details of the institutional practices of Donyipoloism, " A day for public gathering was fixed on Saturday to symbolize the last day of festive days which is called Gamruk Dikong. A time for public gathering from 9 to 10am was fixed and prayer time was fixed from 10 to 11 am. Also donation was made compulsory for all devotees on the prayer day. Candle and scented perfume were accepted as ritual articles for burning on the altar in front of the images. The puja starts with prayer songs by all the devotees. This will follow chanting of ritual by the priest. After sanctifying the other healing materials the priests sprinkles sanctified water on the heads of the devotees. After this the prayer will continue, which is conducted by an experienced person who is conversant with the scripture. From time to time, sermon on moral lesson and philosophy of Donyipolo is delivered by the experienced person, while praying all the devotees sit cross legged on the floor in the disciplined way. Either before prayer or after, the healing rope (Ridin) is tied on the wrist of the devotees by the priest as the blessing of Donyipolo.

At the end of the prayer, all stand up and sang the closing prayer and then the devotees disperse".

This method of Donyipolo prayer received appreciation and applause from many people. Hearing the message of this institutionalized acts and rationalized method of Donyipolo prayer; people thronged the centre of Donyipolo Yelam Kebang (DYK). Representatives from interior areas expressed deep enthusiasm to learn and practice this newly devised form of Adi religion. Rukbo (ibid) added that to meet the growing demand and desire of the people, DYK initiated orientation course twice in a year and trained up batches of youths who were sent back with printed books and invented images of Donyipolo, gods and goddesses to their respective villages. They started preaching this institutional form of Donyipolo faith and encourage people to construct prayer hall (*ganging*) with in the villages and took the responsibility to conduct prayer in every Sunday. From the main centre of DYK located at Pasighat, the trained up youths were instructed to go round the other villages to spread the message of Donyipolo movement and this had lead to the way of revival of Donyipolo faith initially in Adi inhabited areas.

After covering east Siang district, this message reached to Upper Siang and West Siang districts and then gradually penetrated in Lohit district also. Two new centers were established at capital complex, Naharlagun and Itanagar, to spread the movement to Papumpare, Lower and Upper Subansiri districts. As a sequel to such spread, DYK decided to declared that the birth of DYK which symbolizes initiation of reform movement, need to be celebrated as Donyipolo Day. And this needs to be solemnized by all and this day was also conceived as the Solidarity Day for the Donyipolo believers.

With in these two decades such spiritual mission has gained wide momentum by influencing various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to revive the indigenous religion by accentuating reform in an institutionalized way. However, this movement is suffering with some constraints in various fronts which Rukbo (ibid) expressed, such as, getting fund, land for DYK activities, dedicated workers, script writers, resistance from some sections of

people, challenge of alien culture, language problem, attitude of Anglicized groups etc. Regarding the problem of anglicized group Rukbo (ibid) expressed that they are exclusively highly qualified people with high-ranking jobs and the leading public figures on whom common people have faith to lead their society to a great height and preservation of traditional faith and culture. But in actual practice they remained aloof from the society in general which is a great set back for the Adis in general. In spite of that judging by the endeavor and the endurance of the people, it can be safely said that the perpetuation of Donyipolo faith is by and large ensured that the people have gained a self-confidence and moral strength to preserve it and practice it as the path of spiritual aspiration. The rejuvenated faith has roused religious curiosity and inquisitiveness among the people and therefore, the response of the people to DYK is tremendous which have also encouraged the people to keep intact their dignity (ibid).

Inventing Images

Rukbo (undated: 12-13) , the prime mover of Donyipolo movement, explained the reasons for inventing man made images of Kine Nane, Dadi Bote etc., which are placed inside the prayer hall (Ganggings). According to him, there is a great sublime purpose behind it. Though the images are insentient but it is the conscious and sentient god or goddess that are brought to the minds of people by the images as we remember the living and conscious person when we see his/her photograph. We find that all religions have images of their gods/goddesses and prophets. Leaving aside the question of Hindu and the Buddhist, the Christian worship the crucifix, the Muslim adore the *Kaaba* stone, the patriot worship National flag, all of them have to be dubbed as idolaters.

Since the early days in the religious practice of the Adis, they erected an altar which looks like a skeleton of an image out of branch of trees and bamboo from their imaginary vision and they worship such image on other occasions. But in festivals, except in Mopin, the Adis generally do not use image. Only offering is done in consecrated place at home and in green fields during Solung festival. This is done in consecrated place at home and in green field during Solung festival. This is done without seeing the image of sentient gods/ goddesses/ deities with physical eyes or inner eyes. This does not leave any imaginary impression of the image of the deities in their heart or mind. This causes a doubt about the very existence of deities. Particularly, at present days the grown up generation has developed a dubious views on the existence of those gods, goddesses and their presence during festivals.

Rukbo believed that many a time such doubt and suspicious circumstances divert the faith of the people. So from main stream of thinking they had to bring out the images of sentient gods /goddesses amalgamating tribal (Adis) imaginary vision too so that the shadow of the images are set in permanently in the minds of the people who can recognize, identify their own believed gods/ goddesses and remember them all the times (ibid).

IMPACT AMONG THE GALOS

Like the Adis this Donyi-Polo movement has spread among the Galos who come under the Tani Constellation of the tribes. In Galo inhabited areas Donyi-Polo temples are created under the patronage of Donyi-Polo Welfare Association (DPWA). In the context of Likabali, a Galo inhabited area, Riba reported (2005) that on 18th June, 2000, Tamar Karlo organized a meeting and invited representatives from different villages of West Siang district and the prime leader of Donyi-Polo movement, like Talom Rukbo, Nabom Atom where they discussed about the necessity of constructing temple as well as community hall (Dere) by raising donation and this meeting led to the formation of the DPWA. Accordingly constructions of Donyi Polo temple and community hall were completed on

6th May, 2001 with the formation of a nine member's executive committee under the chairmanship of Tamar Karlo. Similar functional activities takes place in side the temples what is found inside the *Ganggins* in Adi areas. Here Sunday is fixed for the gathering of followers which may include the priest (*Nyibu*) and printed text for prayers in Galo language are used. For opening prayer they used a book called 'Angun Bedang' which is prepared by Central Donyi Polo Yelam Kebang under the supervision of late Talom Rukbo. Generally *Nyibu* (priest) arrives early and then the followers reach to prayer hall or temple around 9am after which prayers and other ceremonial activities actually start. After the prayer song another prayer starts which is called *Murnam* in order to protect people from misfortunes or illness. Generally it is chanted by the priest or by the person who conduct the whole affair in the absence of a priest or *Nyibu* in a particular day. Then some selected person narrate tells or legends related to Donyi Polo. And this is followed by one ritual performance either by priest or assistant priest who stands at the doorstep holding water in a container and sprinkles the same with the help of a small ritual stick called *Tajir*. This is an act of purification and even cures sickness as per the Galo belief system. Then only all the devotees or followers will stand up and sing the closing song from the book prepared by Talom Rukbo. And then everybody will get eatables (*Prasad*) in their community hall (*Dere*) built adjacent to temple or prayer hall. Every 6th May is celebrated as the foundation day by sacrificing animals and they enjoy the day by singing and dancing inside the community hall. Similarly 31st December is celebrated in a grand way throughout the inhabited areas of the Adi and Galos as Donyi Polo day. On this occasion, the followers of Donyi Poloism bring eatables and local drinks from their respective homes and keep near the images painted or kept inside the prayer hall. Then priest invokes and it is believed that blessings are showered upon those things. After the prayer and other performances are over then all drinks and eatables are mixed and shared by the people present on that particular occasion inside the community hall.

Diverse opinions are found among the Galos on the essence of this movement. Some believe that this has brought some order or systematization with in their traditional religion by inventing forms and symbols which was necessary to protect their indigenous religion though even in the Likabali area majority of the Galos accepted Christianity (Ibid).

DANYI-PILO MOVEMENT AMONG THE APATANIS

Among the Apatanis such religious reform movement is popularly known as Danyi-pilo movement and in response to such movement they have also constructed a temple like structure which is called Meder Nello and even printed prayer book with various songs and hymns which they call '*Lyambo Pe*' and this was initiated by the organizer of Meder-Nello of Hari village, one of the biggest village of the Apatanis located in the Ziro valley. Yampi (2009:351) reported that in the 1998, first such gathering of of the Apatanis who initiated such movement was took place in the house of Rubu Tamin in Tajang village. In fact, there they took a decision of having permanent temple like construction (Meder Nello) which first came in Hari village and it was inaugurated by Kaling Tayeng , an IAS, on 28th March, 2004. It may be mentioned here that the word 'Meder' means 'purify' and 'Nello' means household site which was coined by Kago Siga of Hija village. Now every Meder Nello with in the Ziro valley has committee to look after its functional and organizational aspects. She also added (ibid), "Every Sunday the followers of Danyi-Pillo religion gather at Meder-Nello for offering of regular prayer where they start praying for themselves as well people who are sick or unwell. At the end of the prayer if any one wishes then can perform a ritual act that is offering rice powder before the images of Danyi and Pillo. The responsibility of preparing rice powder or rice beer is distributed among the followers or members whose turns are suggested clan wise. Just like the '*Raksha Dhaga*' of the Hindus followers of Danyi-piilo tie their hands with a black thread (*Tiipyra*) for protection from evil forces. In order to run this regular worship the members have to pay 50 rupees annually as donation.

Apatanis are divided on the issues related to this reform movement. Many feels that the way this Danyi-Piiloism is being practiced in order to promote indigenous religion as well as culture is very much questionable and many believe that it is diluting the very essence of that indigenous identity rather resembling Hindu mode of worship by using insent sticks, candles, ringing bell etc which are promoted by Arunachal Vikash Parisad, a branch of Akhil Bharatiya Vanavashi Ashram (ABVKA), functioning among the Apatanis since 1990. It may be mentioned here that this organization is running Balbadi and Vikash

School in the Apatani Valley and try to persuade people to promote indigenous religious faiths and practices. Yampi (ibid: 354) referred the comments of Kago Zerang, President of Apatani Youth Association, that it could have been good if Apatanis revive their religion without copying the other's religion. And according to him ongoing practice of Danyi-Piiloism seems to be a combination of both Christianity and Hinduism. Bath (2004) and many other opined that it is diluting the very core of their traditional religious faith and the Nyibus (religious specialists) who hold the core of Apatani religion hardly found a place in the new movement. There are incidences which had created some social tension in the valley between the followers of Christianity and Dani-Piiloism disrupting much needed social cohesion in the valley but somehow not took an unfortunate turn.

EMERGENCE OF RANGRAISAM

According to the Rangfra Faith Promotion Society (RFPS) (2006:6), "It was the will of the Almighty Rangfraa that a social reform movement be launched in the area of the Rangfraiters in His name. Therefore, sometime in the past 20th century A.D, the Almighty Rangfra in its own accord, conveyed in the minds and dreams of his devotees for its immediate realization in form and be worshiped and prayed by his devotees in the systematic way at a regular interval, which finally necessitated the inception of Rangfra Faith Promotion Society in the year 1995. Subsequently a social reform movement called Rangfra Social Reform Movement was launched and has been operating successfully since then".

Initially, Sri T. Taiju, honourable Ex Minister as the Secretary General and Sri P. Khimhun, the present honorable Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) as President respectively sphere headed the RFPS till 1998. After that Sri L.Khimhun, Executive Engineer and Sri W. Zongsam took over the charges of the Secretary and president respectively and holding the same till date.

The image of Rangfraa was brought in to the picture form in accordance with the description depicted in the mythology of the Rangfraiters. More than hundreds of painters

from all walks of life joined in the drawing and painting competition. Out of them the screening Board Committee of RFPS approved the picture painted by Mrs. C. Lowang, an artist of Tirap district. Accordingly the idol of Rangfraa, the Almighty or Rangkhothak was carved out somewhere in Jodhpur from a single piece of marble weighing about 300kgs. It was brought to Changlang with the help of the members of RSS and it arranged by the then Railway Minister, Government of India (Maihu 2004: II). By the end of 1997, it was ready for installation and ultimately installed on 4th November 1997 as it was a full moon day. Selection of full moon day is linked with the following grounds as organizers believed.

The Rangfra Seva Samiti and the Rangfra Faith Promotion Society are members of Indigenous Faith and Culture Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP). The Rangfra Seva Samity is linked with national level organizations, like, RSS and also with Arun Jyoti, Vivekananda Kendra who are providing opportunities to tour different parts of India and also to study in Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya.

The first Rangfra temple was constructed near by Changlang village by the Rangfra Seva Samity with the help of RSS on March 1999. It looks like a combination of three religious architectures, like, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian, leading to a syncretism. Through out the Changlang district 12 numbers of such temples are found which the Rangfra Seva Samity in between 1999 to 2004 established.

Symbolism in Rangfra Image

The Rangfra idol is made up of white marbel and apparently looks just like the image of Lord Shiva, one of the supreme god of Hindu pantheon but instead of trident Rangfra holds a spear which is locally called 'Pajung' on his left hand, the right hand raised on blessing and on his loin wore a traditional dress called 'Kharei'. There is a halo designed around the head, which is typically foreign. The hairstyle is traditional of course in the manner of the Tangsas that is no more in practice. On the right ear of the image, there are

branches of paddy corn and on the left ear-dangling stool of pig. Such symbols borrowed from the mythology associated with Rangfra.

RFPS members explained why such image making was necessary. As per their notion Christians are having cross which is much more than the image of the Christ Himself. This Cross symbolizes the entire life history of Jesus but for the Rangfraites there is no such alternative but to invent an idol or image of Rangfraa as depicted in their mythology which was essential for formulating a new system of worship and prayer. So, otherwise formless Rangfraa had to take a form for the convenience of the Rangfraites. Like their ancestors they continued to worship Rangfra but just brought changes in system of worship and prayer and not change the God itself. According to them to change religion is as good as to substitute the rice with bred by saying that the rice eaten by our ancestors is not good; let us eat bred instead (ibid: 12).

Rangfraa in Tangsa Myth

Once there was a time when only women but no men were to be found on earth. For further generation of their own kind, it is told in the mythology that the women used to have got conceived with the help of wind and sun as their husband. The life process, as told in the mythology, went on smoothly on earth as usual without any uneven or unusual happenings for ages by giving birth only to the offspring of their own kind i.e. female child alone but at the time of incongruity was destined to come one day and it had in fact come when the women were to have given birth to male child very of ten which as told in the mythology, were eaten up by their own mothers just for not being of their kind. This sort of life process also again went on earth for ages but a time of evolution was destined to come and in fact came when one mother among them had to hide and nourished her male child secretly to see how would he become when grown up. A time had come when that male child attained his complete manhood. He became a very handsome youth, well built, stronger and wiser than his own mother did and by seeing her son, she was confident of his

ability to survive in the midst of the other wild and cruel women. His mother also became very old so one day she said, "Son, now you are grown up and have already attained your complete manhood at the same time I have become too old to care you so you have to take care of yourself from the hungry and merciless teeth of the other women. My blessing is with you. Now you can go and further your life". His mother clothed her son with the piece of her own cloth and sent off for deciding his destiny. The sooner he came out from the bosom of his mothers, all the other wild and merciless women rushed towards him to kill and make him their feast but he ran fast, crossing mountains and rivers yet they didn't leave him easily. This process also went on earth again for ages and a day, which was destined to, had come when he had to run for his life through wet land where he had to fell many trees of wild banana whichever falls on his path. As it was destined to be, it is told in the mythology that one of the women by accident slipped over the slippery banana tree and by seeing the young women lying half-naked, the young man got excited and had sexual union with her and that was the end of his fighting for his survival from the wild and cruel women and family got succeeded by the blessing of his old mother. Since then he could adjust with them and from that day, onwards there were no more struggles for his survival.

Idea behind RSRM

Textbook published (2006) by RFPS reflects purpose of initiating Rangfraaism in Arunachal Pradesh. According to the document, "The basic idea behind Rangfraa Social Reform Movement (RSRM) is to bring about an evolutionary change in our society through inner development of every individual by focusing on the true nature of innate qualities that are already inherent in every soul. With firm conviction, I can say that unless each and every one of us is enlightened, to expect a developed and prosperous state would be something like expecting a strong building from a weak foundation ... The plan, through a slow process, will work because I have full confidence that the people of Arunachal Pradesh in particular are not so degraded to the extent that they will fail to appreciate what is good, true and right. Our society has been badly infected with so many diseases like

corruption, unemployment, poverty, opium and drug addiction etc. that it appears to be beyond repair but solution is there, and that is "Dharma". Dharma alone can liberate us from these shorts of problems. By Dharma what Rangraites understand is to think, do and live for the well being of society or more precisely 'humanity'. Dharma is nothing but a life having strong sense of sacrificing one's personal interest for larger interest. The RFPS desires that not only the people of Arunachal Pradesh but also of India as a whole should learn to serve and sacrifice. Unless we learn to live for each other, there won't be any progress be it social, cultural or economic. Prosperity lies in peace and peace in dharma ... The type of progress that we enquire for our people of course is not to be at the cost of our ancestral faiths and culture for we believe them to be our most intimate and precious wealth. Indeed, we have a strong reverence not only for our ancestral faiths and cultures but also for all the other traditionally inherited properties including land ... To express a sense or moral obligation towards those whom we owe is what we understand by dharma. Ours' are no way inferior to the customs of any other advanced society. Only the evil I find in the tribal societies is what they practice based on superstitious beliefs, which of course is not a part of culture in any manner. It needs to be eradicated. Therefore, let our people develop in their own genius by eradicating the unwanted practices and assimilating the good things from outsiders in their own justifications and capacities without any interference or imposition from them. This does not mean that to come in contact with the outside world is an evil, rather it is necessary but we must not be forced to eat while we are not hungry, less it may ruin our health and thereby ultimately leading to death and extinction. Many aboriginals of America are no more today ... Let us pray to the almighty God or the Rangkhothak Rangraa that we may not have to face the same fate in near future. Other North eastern states except Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been brought to their cultural death and extinction. They are suffering from identity crisis now. For wise people these examples are more than enough. It is only the fools who wait to face and experience by themselves ... Not only the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh but also of other parts of India or elsewhere have been treated as savage, wild, unruly, inferior creatures, vandals, cannibals, human head hunters, selfish, irreligious, unorganized, barbarous and what not. I say some of such accusations on us may of course be true at

present but never in the past. Our ancestors were well organized in the past that is why they could protect their family, land and cultures from the invasion of outsiders but now we are unorganized for we have yielded to a systematically planned and well organized way or foreign cultural invasion, which badly divided us in the name of religion. Religion! What is religion? Religion is not a new thing for us. Our ancestors had been practicing it since time immemorial. Religion is concerning '*paap*' and '*punyo*'. If these two words vanish the religion will also vanish but we have words for these two in our language i.e. '*ngaarai*' and '*Kayechu*'. Religion for us is as old as two words i.e. *ngaarai* and *kayechu* and now imagine how old these two world could be? We are irreligious now for we have become narrow, suspicious, corrupted and selfish after coming in contact with the outside cultures otherwise we were always religious in the past and will remain in future too ... The RFPS wants to show the world that the tribal people are indeed and can be very honest, noble, trustworthy, loyal, simple and straightforward, full of love and compassion, selfless, and helpful to others with high sense of dignity, pride and confidence. The society also wants to infuse in them a strong sense of sacrifice and service so that they are truly religious, far from the dirt of politics whether internal and external.

Lastly, the RFPS appeals specially to the tribal societies not only of Arunachal Pradesh but also of Arunachal Pradesh but also of the while India or elsewhere to either cooperate in this Rangfra Social Reform Movement or otherwise to launch such similar movement in parallel with the same motive and philosophy".

So the person who is the believers of Rangfra god is considered as Rangfrait in general. Mihi (ibid: 15-17) incorporated three interesting interviews where Tangsas explained their perceptions or being a Rangfrait. Ngimen Changmi of Changlang said, "Who so ever is a pure hearted person is a Rangfrait, no matter to which religion one may belong. In other words, the way Rangfrait view one is simply is simply as either religious (Keychu) when he believes in Rangfra as god, the sole creator of his being. On the other hand a person is Ngarei when he shows no respect to his parents has no ethical or moral obligations towards his society elders and above all has no faith in any religion, simply leading a life of himself and striving only for worldly benefits".

John Jugli of Yanman village expressed, "A Rangfraite is one who believes in the existence of god, one who has a sympathetic heart towards the poor, sick and old people, one who feels a sense of brotherhood towards his fellowman, one who is bold and fearless and does not believe in spirits, ghosts, deities because in Rangfraism there is direct communication with god, there are no other intermediary entities on the earth. So to be Rangfraite one has to open his heart to receive God; sacrifices, black magic and rituals are useless to approach god".

Contested Domains

Rangfraism , a new institutional form of Tangsa religion, created space among the Tangsas though it has given rise to contested voices in relation to its philosophy, reshaping belief system and mode of actual practice which Rangfraism prescribed for its followers. Regarding its emergence Mihi (ibid: 1466-147) echoed four points which are largely applicable for the growth of all other reformist movement in Arunachal Pradesh. He basically hinted for political needs for identity consolidation, superior attitude of Hinduism and Buddhism, tremendous dissemination of Christianity in Arunachal and ideological preaching of Hindu nationalists among the Arunachal tribes. His second point seems weak looking at the historicity of Buddhism and patronage received by Hinduised institutions since the achievement of statehood. Rather it was Christianity which has showed its superior status and projected negative ingredients covertly or overtly with in the tribal beliefs and practices. It seems here Mihi failed to come out of his subjective biases being a Christian convert.

He (ibid:147-148) identified some contradictions, such as, basic concepts of Rangfra has been Hinduised, system of worshipping has been Christianized, effected with alien religious ideas and does not agree with indigenous belief system of the Tangsas. He has textualised some important views which can be briefly mentioned here. W. Ronrang of Baptist Church, Changlang, said, "The institution of Rangfra is a misconception among

Tangsas, there is no god such as Rangfra. Even if there is the new form is absolutely outrageous in terms of its philosophy, it is borrowed from Hindu and Buddhist teachings ... it is ridiculous that some people are trying to give him the status of god. Ignorance of the common people unable to formulate a true definition of religion coupled with petty politicians who divide and consolidate people for political gains have created false god Rangfra". Insu Zamir, an Evangelist of Catholic Church of Changlang, expressed, "The slow social and economic development of Tangsas correlates the antipathy towards Christianity they are developed in every field, the main reason for backwardness of the tribes like Tangsa is religious, there are number of blind faiths and superstition surrounding local beliefs that it is very hard for new ideas to imbibe, Christianity is the only solution for modernization of Tangsas. Even if Rangfraism gains momentum it will never be able to eradicate ignorance because it is still rooted in wrong notions about god". W.M. Zugli, member of the underground Christianized Association of Nagaland, said, "There is no secret in the aims and goals of our organization, we believe that Christianity is the just need of the people of Changlang area and we are opposed to any other religion that tries to compete with it, on March 12th 2003, we have demolished two Rangfra temples at Thamang and Kangkho and will continue to do so if Rangfraism does not stop its fanciful activities. Rangfraism tries to deceive common people and teaches hatred against Christians which we will not tolerate, all the Tangsas must cease to worship false god if not, at least should not contradict Christianity". Shri Om Prakash, Pujari (priest) of Changleswar Mandir, Changlang, opined that the construction of Rangfra Mandir and status was commendable and Rangfra institution working everywhere in Changlang is spreading spiritual commune which need to be supported by the common people. Similarly, Sri Shyam Sundar Trivedi, priest of Rangfra Shiv Mandir, supplemented Om Prakash's view. According to him, there is no basic difference between Hinduism and Rangfraism and so, people come to Rangfra Shiv mandir to worship both Shiv and Rangfra and the idols of both gods are kept in juxtaposition in this temple, both the religion reciprocates with each other in terms of its principle and teachings.

INTAYAISM AMONG THE IDU MISHMIS

Idus are considered as one of the major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh through population wise they are not very big located under Upper Dibang valley and Lower Dibang valley district of Arunachal Pradesh. Sometimes they are also included as a part of the larger conglomeration of the Mishmi group which includes the Digaru and the Miju Mishmis. Culturally Idus are very much distinct from rest of the two which is reflected in various aspects of their day to day life and social structure as well as value systems. Idu Mishmis are popularly known as the 'Chulikata Mishmis' because of their distinct hair style, perhaps this nomenclature is given by the people of the plains (Bhattacharjee 1983: 13) with whom Idus had trade relations and in many colonial documents some sections of Idus were identified wrongly as a separate tribe called Bebejiya who are portrayed very negatively (Needham, J.F.1900, Cooper 1995). Dalton (1872) reported them as Midhi people Bhattacharjee (1983: 13-33) tried to textualise their origin and migration on the basis of various elements of oral narratives popular among the Idus.

Like many other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh Idus are also great believer of large number of gods and goddess and also in the existence of more malevolent and very less benevolent spirits which might be conceptualised with in the frame of "Animism". Traditionally they didn't perceive such belief system with in any local term but today a new terminology is invented to denote their religious faith and practices which is known as 'Intiyaism'. This has created a contested domain which this paper tries to underscore. And it precisely is related to the kind of transition which is visible among many tribes of Arunachal under different popular nomenclature at a crucial juncture when Christianity is spreading very fast among many dominant tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

If we look at the colonial documents or post colonial writings, ethnographies then we can get basic information about the Idu religious belief systems which is centered round the Igus, the Shamans, who basically try to control or negotiate with their world of supernatural beings Igus influence is so pervasive that in most of the crucial phases of life his presence is must and he is the most powerful indigenous healer with the Idu society

though they perform some profane functions also specially in case of settlement of disputes. Key concept of spirit (khinu) rules their world of unknown, though they have the concept of supreme creator known as Inni, The supreme God Inni, embodies the highest ethical conception reached by the Idus. Besides being supreme creator of all things, he is the impersonal principle of justice and the holder of moral order of creation" (Barua: 1988.69).

Bhattacharjee (1983: 117) writes, "An Idu constantly haunted by the spirits (Khinu) who abounds in jungles, hills, shadowy recesses, rivers, gorges, cliffs as well as in the home and the village. They are dreaded, as no one knows when and where one may fall into the trap. The spirits are real masters of their fate. Any calamity-befalling them is attributed to spirits". Idu mythology also reflects that syndrome. Since the origin of universe, man & spirits were the progeny of the same ancestors. As per their beliefs, even in the world of unknown, hierarchy remains within the variegated deities who were responsible for the creation and survival of moral order of things (Linggi and Miso 2000 :23).

It is the Igu or shaman who works as the mediator between the Idus and their world of unknown through performing various rituals, magico-religious acts and most importantly by unique dance with the help of some team members who join or assist the Igu. Bhattacharjee rightly mentioned (1983: 123), "The Igu's performance is always held in awe and high administration. The deep faith of the people in the ability of the Igu to converse with the Supernatural being is one of the reasons for them to ask for help in illness, very important aspect which can not be ignored." He added (ibid), "Though a person with flesh and blood an Igu always feared. When his house is visited the people make no noise as it commonly believed that the Igu might be having a dialogue with spirits will be greatly disturbed. For similar reasons early morning, visits are also avoided in case possible and if a visit is unavoidable, any distributing noise should not be made.

Therefore, Igu occupies the most significant social status in their society. Igu has so pervasive influence in the whole social system that even today when their society is passing through the process of transformation still most of the people have strong

cognition in the divine power of the Igu; an institution which is gradually fading out from the society.

Therefore, heterogeneous perceptions remain with in the society regarding how an Idu really becomes an Igu. The most popular belief is by the will of god only the supernatural power transferred or imbibed by an individual may be male or female. This transition is evident through different abnormal symbolic acts of an individual who is in the initial phase and which may take place at any stages of life.

As per their belief their first Igu are named as Seneru and Azizurucho who wanted to have special ceremonial clothes for ritual performance because they need to gain powers and have different out look and this could be only done by wearing clothes different from the commoners to gain spiritual power. The almighty will transmit power if they wear special hair band and other components of Igu costume. These will protect Igu as well as people from evil spirits. Even an Igu gains power from the weaver who wears the special dress. However, Idus believe that once the Igu wears it then it becomes a scared object and becomes a source of spiritual power. It may be mentioned here that an Igu does not wear full costume in each occasion but during performing 'Yah' and 'Reh' they appear with full costumes. It consists of seven components, such as, Aweto (a head gear) Ripu (these are small drums), Eto-ti (a coat with various designs), Athumbra (a nicely designed skirts with many loops), Amralla (a garland with good number of tiger etc. teeth), An-ambo (a big drum) and Ajuru (a blowing instrument made of horn). In case of the Idus, if we look at the images, symbols and the way such process is taking place then it is evident that the effect of Hinduism can be traced in disguised form. Some of the NGOs which are guided by Hinduised dogmas, are covertly or overtly involved in directing such change. But that does not mean that every followers of such newly invented ways of praying and worshipping various gods and goddesses are member of such organizations or followers of their ideological frame. In fact, many individuals who are against the conversion to Christianity or who believe in the preservation of traditional faith and beliefs, have felt that perhaps this image or institutionalization is bound to happen in order to counter Christianity which is becoming dominant force or in order to

draw attention of their own people who are exposed to different alien forces of transition. In fact, among the Idu Mishmis, emergence of Goddess Nani Intiya can be looked at from this perspective.

There is an attempt to popularize invented goddess called Nani Intaya and as a result, even residential schools are coming up with the nomenclature like 'Intaya Public School'. Even photographs along with another image of Maselo Ginu are printed as wall calendars by some sections of the Idus that were sold in the markets. At least two varieties of images of Nani Intaya are available. However, the photograph, which is drawn by one Idu artist, has been printed by the organization in the form of calendar to make it popular with in Arunachal. This image looks like a super imposition of Hindu Goddesses and far away from indigenous perception as depicted in their verbal lore regarding the Goddesses Intaya. Naturally, many upcoming Idu youths contested such visual depiction through an alien image. Many of them believe that in a given circumstances it seems that it is inevitable to have an image but it must have to be in tune with their indigenous belief system rather than promoting ideas or images from the so called major (mainstream) religion. Undoubtedly, from the printed photograph of Nani Tntiya, one can assume the ongoing nature of religious transformation in Arunachal Pradesh. Following the existing frame of Donyi-Poloism, some people are referring Idu Mishmi religion as Intayaism.. Christianity is yet to make any serious inroads among the Idus though it has substantial presence among the Padams, a section of the Adis, who are their closest neighbors and with whom they have constant interactions in various forms since the colonial past.

CONCLUSIONS

This whole discourse bring in to sharp focus how the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh are trying to cope up with heterogeneous forces which are responsible for bringing changes in the sphere of religious faith and practices. It is historically true that Hinduism missionaries gained political patronage from the statecraft since the achievement of statehood. Hinduised cults, temples, Gods and Goddesses are also penetrated in to the

frontier areas through the establishment of massive military base across the international borders, especially after the Chinese invasion in 1962 and also through the developmental initiatives, specially the establishment of roads in difficult terrains by the Government of India under the supervision of Border Road Organization (BRO). These can be easily ascertained through the visibility of temples in army cantonment areas and the large numbers of smaller shrines or temple like structures established by the BRO's mobile laborers adjacent to their roadside labour camps. Again people who came from other states of India as government employees, teachers, businessmen etc., also periodically celebrate major Hindu festivals, such as Durga puja, Kali puja, Viskarma puja and even Holi, which have an impact among the local tribal population, specially those who are living in urban or semi- urban areas or even at the fringe villages. The prime motivating forces are the various Hinduised Organizations, such as, Ramakrishna Mission, Viveekananda Mission, Sharada Mission, and Vevekananda Kendra Vidyalaya. However, it is evident that such organizations have been rendering tremendous services in both the sectors of education and health in this frontier state. Many eminent public leaders, administrators, intellectuals, educators, social workers, activists, doctors etc. of contemporary Arunachal Pradesh, are the products of such missions.

However, within last two decades there is a massive expansion of Christianity which has created a huge impact among the Tani group of tribes and also among the tribes of Tirap and Changland district, the bordering districts with Nagaland, which is by and large a Christian state. This has hardly made any impact on the Buddhist tribes of the state and least affected the Mishmis (Idu, Digaru and Miju) of Lohit and Dibang valley districts. Initially, Christianity faced resistance from both the people and the state machinery; there were large number of incidents where such resistance led to violent forms. Many tribal people (traditionalists) strongly believe that the agenda of conversion is complete negation of indigenous religious faith as well as practices, and creation of stereotyped notions about the indigenous or traditional ways of tribal life which gave cultural shock to people and ultimately culminated in to such violent acts. However, in spite of such initial trauma, the Christian Missionaries of different denominations went on perusing their agenda- perhaps in much more vigorous ways and gradually were able to convince some of the local people across the tribes and more importantly remained successful in

getting political patronage from the state's power structure. And with in last two decades Christianity being a highly organized religion, successfully penetrated among the large number of tribes and brought transformation in the traditional religious landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. However, it has to be kept in mind that the history of Christianity of this frontier state can not be ascertained in a homogenous frame rather it has to be understood contextually. Precisely, this is the back drop which has given birth to the reformist movements which tried to articulate very popular slogan that is "Loss of Culture is the Loss of Identity". This has led the birth of reformist movements culminated in to Donyipoloism among the Adis by creating new sacred space like *Gangging*; *Nyder Namlo* movement among the Nyishis; *Nyeder Melo* among the Apatanis and subsequently led to the emergence of Nani Intaya and Matai among the Mishmis. And all these movements received immediate patronage, overtly or covertly, from Hindu Nationalists Organizations who are trying create a strong base in this frontier tribal state which has historically created some space for Hinduised ideas. As a result of number of images are invented which are to a great extent influenced by Hinduised notions though an attempt has also been made to accommodate some local cultural traits. As a whole such processes of institutionalization of traditional tribal religion leading to a "third order reality" in Arunachal Pradesh. These complex realities of tribal life need to be understood through this contested space and the ways heterogeneous tribal people as well as the state craft negotiating with emerging socio-political realities of a frontier Indian state.

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