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Pasighat: Post-colonial Geography and History in Interface

Abstract

This is an ethnographic account based on fieldwork and documentary evidence on the first centenary celebration of colonial town Pasighat (2011) situated in Arunachal Pradesh, India. This study locates the state and indigenous people's interface from the perspective of the town's centenary celebration. It also records the indigenous intellectuals' apathy to incorporate the experience of colonial intervention within their history. In fact, in the year 1911, the British government in India had conquered the region and founded Pasighat's colonial outpost in the North-East frontier. Hence the year 1911 is observed as the year of establishment of the town of Pasighat by the tribal state government of Arunachal Pradesh. The establishment of the colonial town of Pasighat as the outpost of the British administration in the North East Frontier region introduces a new cultural concept to the indigenous people of the place. Therefore, the very idea of town emerged within the cultural ecology of the Pasi, Padam and Minyong communities. Those communities in colonial literature were known as 'Abor' tribe. Later, the local community(s) felt it derogatory to refer them as 'Abor' because they thought that the term was originally coined by neighbouring communities of the plains to refer them. Hence, after India's independence, they appealed to the Government of India to recognize them as Adi (People of Hills) and categorise them as scheduled tribe.

In the span of hundred years, Pasighat transformed its demography and social relations with the neighbouring communities. It also identifies itself as a centre for education in the region. In this backdrop the present paper locates the multiple dimensions of the hundred year's history of the town Pasighat.

Keywords: Postcolonial Geography, Decolonised Space, Indigenous People, Pasighat, Tribal State

Prism(ed) Oral History of Indigenous People

The prelude to centenary celebration of the Pasighat town was the publication of the book, *Song of The Siang-Pasighat 1911-2011*. It attempted to envision hundred years history of the town. The book is a myriad memoir of poets, filmmakers, historians, intellectuals and so forth. It pieces together over a hundred years of the piecemeal history of Pasighat township. Testimonies of land recalls oral memories of migration of ancestors, connected attributes of environment like forests, rivers, streams, wild animals through words. In her writing – “Dialogue with History”, poet Mamang Dai recollects words and stories (sirki-dingo) connecting social memories of the ancestral land- the place of fish and stars, mythology Kojum-Koja and Engo-Takar. Her poem has been re-published to celebrate the survivals of people, kin groups, neighbours and intergenerational experiences. River Siang serves as the “Missing Link” between the past (history) and present. As her poem says:

I will remember then the great river that turned, /turning with the fire of the first sun/away from the land of red robed men /and poisonous ritual,/when the seven brothers fled south /disturbing the hornbills in their summer nests.

Remember the flying dust /and the wind like a long echo /snapping the flight of the river beetle, / venomous in the caves where men and women dwelt / Facing the night, guard the hooded poison.

There are no records. /The river was the green and white vein of our lives/ linking new terrain, in a lust for land/brother and brother claiming the sunrise and the sunset, in a dispute settled by the rocks / engraved in a vanished land.

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

Remember the river’s Voice: / Where else could we be born / Where else could we belong / If not of memory / diving light and form out of silence.

Water and mist,/ The twin gods, water and mist, /and the cloud woman always calling /From the sanctuary of the gorge.

Remember, because nothing is ended / But it is changed.

And memory is a changing shape / Showing with these fading possessions / In lands beyond the great ocean / That all is changed but not ended.

And in the villages the silent hill men still await /

The long promised letters, and the meaning of words. (‘Deori and Riba’ 11)

In the year 1911, the British army attacked the region today known as Pasighat .The ancestors of the Adi people fought valiantly against the British forces. Among four Anglo-Abor wars (1858, 1859, 1894, 1911) the British forces equipped with their modern arm and weapons could not crush the indomitable spirits of the Abhors until the deciding one, which was fought in Kekar-Monyang. Thus the town Pasighat entered into the map of British colonial rulers in 1911. Oral history preserved the eulogies of war as ‘Poju-nimak’. The Centennial celebration of Pasighat geared up memories. Of late a seminar was proposed, “Lelam...” which in the Adi language

means “foot print”. ‘Arunachal Times, dated 7th December, 2011 published the news that a seminar on “Anglo-Abor War and After” is held in the village Kebang. The seminar claimed that this is the moment of writing History by going down the memory lane; the article had quoted OsongEring saying¹: He said that in the year 1911, British attacked the place on the pretext of the arrest of MatmurJamoh (perceived as a freedom fighter and the hero by the Adis) and some others, who killed members of British expedition team. The memories of MatmurJamoh’s arrest and defeated ancestors remained in the collective memories of Adis. People were engaged in debates on dichotomy; whether to observe the year 2011 as the centenary of martyrdom or to celebrate it as the centenary year of the colonial township of Pasighat. Thus IgulPadung, a historian and academician from Pasighat wrote, “The land has Many Stories” (Padung 27-34). This article unfolds a new era of colonization in the life of the Adi and the neighbouring tribes since the last hundred years back In the opinion of Smith, “western academics theorised, classified, and identified such phenomena, termed as modernization, assimilation, and tribalization!” (44). Pasighat was born as a centre for British administration. But later on, it became a place which attracted students from all over Arunachal Pradesh for its schools and colleges. . This town played a key role in articulating the indigenous voices which were carried forth by the civil society members of the region. MatmurJamoh in local memory was the “Legend and Patriot” despite being painted by the British colonials as a murderer. In the narrative of Padung,

MatmurJamoh, a legendary figure in the Siang Valley, played a pivotal role in the assassination of Noel Williamson and his party at Komsing and Dr.Gregorson and his party at Pangi, on the 31st March 1911. He was the Kebang Abu, the headman of Yangrung village. (27-30)

AdulEring, the father of OshongEring, who happened to have seen MatmurJamoh, when Adul was a young boy. “MatmurJamoh was middle aged with medium stature figure and was appreciably a good orator. He had an adamant attitude and was determined to stop the advancement of the Milun (British) into the interior of Adi Lands. MatmurJamoh was convinced and considered the services rendered to the British touring parties to interior Abor Hills as futile. For him the people’s labour as path cleaner, load carrier as well as ration supplier to the touring party was wastage of time, energy and wealth. He disliked the English behaviour of the superiority meted out to his folks. As a free man he liked the British on equal footings, not as rulers. This feeling of patriotism entwined with the humiliation meted out to him and his people, personally and to his people, resulted in the assassination and massacre of Mr. Williamson and his party.

In 1909, Mr. Williamson and his team on an expedition reached MatmurJamoh’s village Yagrung. The villagers were found not prepared to welcome *miluns* (local which indicates whites). For that, the villagers and the headman were summoned and being headman MatmurJamoh reached there carrying some gifts of poultry and ration to appease the *MilunMigom* (British important man). This gesture of

MatmurJamohdisappointed Mr. Williamson, who felt that the headman didn't follow his instructions and there was no arrangement for them :

Williamson lost his control without giving any chance to clarify the misdemeanour. He shouted at him using dirty words and trashed him right and left in presence of many people. This ... act aroused the manliness of hill men. They decided to do away with British interference to their life under the leadership of MatmurJamoh. (28).

In the article, 'When the Time Fades Memory Return' Eringrecollects thatMatmurJamoh who took initiatives to reply against the misconduct and arrogance of Mr Williamson. He organised the people of different villages as well as chalked out detailed plans with the support of *KebangAbus* (council of village headman). As a result of this, the flame of revolt against the British arrogance and tyranny flared up in the Eastern horizon of India. Komsing village become the epicentre of the revolt. In the year 1911 at komsing, Matmur's band of warriors avenged their pride by killing the members of British expedition team. Memories of the war of independence are nurtured again and again on the eve of celebration of birth centenary of the Pasihgat town (Panyang 41-45; Ering 49-52; Pertin 81-85).

Chaudhuri (2004)ⁱⁱ went for a study on MatmurJamoh. The objective of the study was to know MatmurJamoh from the collective social memory. He visited villages, Komsing and Kebang, where killings of Williamson and Dr.Gregorson had taken place. His journey ended after meeting the members of present generation in Matmur's family in Yagrung village. He shared the following observations from his memory:

I interviewed about fifteen persons in the Komsing village and five persons of Kebang Village including members from Darang family whose grandfather was also an associate of Matmur. I experienced popularity of Matmur while interviewing them. Even old women through actions and mime narrated the incident of reaching of Matmur to their village and killing Miluns (white man). The present heir of MatmurJamoh is also MatmurJamoh. He is named after his great grandfather. (Personal Interview)

Padung stated that the war of "KekarMonying had great significance, which could not simply be exaggerated so far as the history of present Arunachal Pradesh is concerned. The massacre of British touring party in the Abor hills caused a great turmoil ending in the annexation of a vast area to the British Indian Empire, and a solution, if temporarily, the international relations involving Great Britain, Russia, and China." (31). He further wrote that KekarMonying was the battlefield reflecting the British policy in the northeast for acquiring this area. Since 1875 the British India government firmly decided to push the outer line to further north. At the turn of the century, the process was rapid and the last opportunity provided itself in the massacre of Williamson and his party. Padung quotes Lord Harding, the viceroy, who justified the British interest in occupation the territory between Tibet, India and China, "The fall of Kekar-

Monyingsealed the fate of the Abors and along with them the fate of all peoples of Arunachal Pradesh. The British government claimed to have broken the backbone of the Abors (at present known as Adi) after the fall of Kekar –Monying stockadeⁱⁱⁱ. For the Adi people that is event of defeat, who did not get another opportunity to defend their country” (34).

State government’s announcement of the year 2011 as centenary celebration year of Pasighat brought back memories- lost treasures of old places, streams, through words and Rukbo wrote that it was not only demography but topography of Pasighat also transformed with its cultural boundaries (57-60). In hundred years, nature of inhabitants has changed. According to Padung:

the river side, where British made their post was under cultural boundaries of people but villages were not located there.^{iv} The villages on both the sides of the river were nearer to hills. The Pasiinhabited on both the sides of the river. Other than them, the Minyonginhabitedtheleft bank and the Padam the right bank of the river. After the establishment of British post of administration and from 1914 to1955 the place was the headquarters of Siang frontier division. (21-40)

Since 1930, Pasighat as the first seat of administration in the easternmost frontier hills of Himalaya grew as a centre for school and college education. Market facilities attracted people from different tribes and caste groups. Older generations of Pasighat, who were in schools and college during 1950s remembered natural calamities like earth quake and flood that changed thetopographyof the town and pushed it further towards hills in the eastern side. No less important was the lesson people learned from the natural calamities during 1950s and decided to maintain forest line alongside the river Sibokorong,which almost divided the town in two parts (Rukbo 57-60, Mije 65-81).

In hundred years, the oldest town of present Arunachal Pradesh transformed into an epicentre of civil society interactions, and expressed the rights to self-determination and religion. The Civil Society Organization of Pasighat celebrated the centennial year in 2011 commemorating the brave heroes of Adis, who fought all the Anglo-Abor wars (PojuMimak). The people of Kebang Circle, East Siang District and a voluntary organization PaatorGumin Heritage Preservation and Research Foundation celebrated the centenary year of the Anglo-Abor (Adi) War 1911 on December 9, 2011 to commemorate and pay homage to their brave forefathers, who had laid down their lives while protecting their homeland.

The Adi people felt that the war had brought changes in their socio- economic life. Places of wars were identified as the War Heritage sites. War heritage sites include all those villages burnt down by the British army. (Darang 1, 5). Regarding the birth of the Town Pasighat, Mibang possessed an alternative opinion that the Pasighat town is undoubtedly the oldest town of Arunachal Pradesh. As of today it is the headquarters of East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. By 1914 Pasighat was declared as the headquarters of Abor hills by the British administration. The Balek village became a regular signalling station with the posting of about

two hundred soldiers under one Assistant Political Officer. So, 2014 might be befitting year for celebration of the birth of town instead of the year 2011.

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

Photographs of this book reminded me of the book *Silent Lips and Murmuring Heart*^v. In the translator’s preface Nath wrote “I felt that it was very important to situate the novel in Arunachal Pradesh of the nineteen fifties. And the sort of colonialism that it evident (I leave it to the judgement of discerning reader) in the novel is very different from the kind of British colonialism in the rest of the country” (vii). This idea may be elaborated further through words of Smith, who quoted Nandy in her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, described,

Colonization as a ‘shared culture’ for those who have been colonized and for those who have colonized. This means, for example, that colonized peoples share a language of colonization, share knowledge about their colonizers, and in terms of a political project, share the same project for decolonization. It also means that colonizers, too, share a language and knowledge of colonization. (Smith 45)

Society of Pasighat: 1911-2011

Extracts from the doctoral thesis (unpublished) of IgulPadung, reflected sentiments of the people and he quoted a song composed by OyemYomso,

Adikesisangkokenampasighat no / Arunachal Baddaklokkenamepasighat
no.SodiakeMyoboObueAnggino. / Pedongkonkuebotetakame / Tadii gone yitkoeloge /
Kammemannesikoleloge / Irmindarieirtuderie /Nita betualelene / Nebikuai /
Dadditakameduegegunamkuai / Riinepiirbepetenakope / Melokonnodadideto / Nom
pasighat nom / Nom... / Silokebomongedikso / Anegite nom / Tatiidilungediibiidakku /
Bangkogerlongemgorbidakku / Doyingeganggingedikoso / Anegiite nom /
Totudiilungediibiidakku / Bangkogerlongemgorbidakku / Doyingegangginge siring kope /
Gittepirgiingeedinglangkuka / Adikesirang / Arunachal” (189-190)

English rendering of the song (Padung 190) goes as follows:

“Every Adi knows Pasighat from the date of his birth. Pasighat is well known all over Arunachal. It is considered to be the first son of Sadiya as well as Shillong. It is the oldest

town and centre of trade and commerce. Even the fertile land of the Khampti^{vi} of the eastern border, once considered to be the trade route towards the southeast, is no match to Pasighat in terms of economic development and prosperity. All the people are proud of it and its roots are very strong, its branches are dignified with fruits like that of a hillock tree. Oh! Pasighat, you are really very great. Today we pray for you, we are planting totii (a sacred plant available in the outskirts of village used for massaging to relief pains of the body as well as to cure fractured bones) and bangko (a plant grown in kitchen garden as vegetable, bitter in taste, and used for curing stomach trouble) trees around you to strengthen your root and growth. Oh! Pasighat every Adi knows you from the date of your birth.”

Padung (191) mentions that this song is sung during important gatherings. It inculcates a sense of belongingness to the Adis.

In 1975, TalomRukbo, the religious reformer and pioneer spiritual leader of the Donyi-Polo Indigenous faith of the Adi, wrote, “.... Pasighat is still predominantly an administrative centre, job opportunity are very limited. Unless traders, transport and communication facilities are expanded and industries are developed ...”(Padung 222). Padung compared Pasighat with cosmopolitan cities of India by referring that as mini India. He discussed both advantages and disadvantages of such place. (Padung 222). Within less than hundred years the town has experienced birth of literary societies, who published Magazines (*Arsi*) periodically. AdiTosina Bane Kebang or ATBK (an organization for welfare of the Adi community) since 2001 has been articulating the changing socio cultural issues. TaringTabi wrote that before ATBK, the Bangos and BogungBokangKebang (BBK) looked after the welfare of the Adis to settle major issues confronting them. He mentions further that Apart from that BBK, members took initiative for the formation of organizations like AdiAgomKebang, Adi Cultural and Literary Society, Donyi – Polo YelamKebang. People of Pasighat acknowledged that it was not only the town of Adis but to all people connected with it. Most of aged educated persons of Arunachal Pradesh belong to any tribe had Pasighat connection either for academic reasons or for professional reasons.

T. Mize wrote on demographic dynamics of the town, enlisted names of prominent personalities like BapekJamoh, BamutMoyong, TagoliJamoh, BangkinApum, MatbangTamuk, GongayingEring, Tanari Dai, DayingEring, Basudeo Singh, JaynarayanHardas, Ganga Singh, BhimlallBanskata, who remained as example for their selfless contributions. All of them were not tribal. These people were not much educated but remained in social memories for their involvement. Mention may be made of a Nepali person, called Banskota, who lived on the western side of the town, near Pane-Korong stream. The present village Banskota, adjacent to the administrative area of Pasighat, is a settlement named after that Nepali gentleman. He, for the first time in the region, had reared cattle and supplied milk to the Assistant Political Officer and the Commandant. In course of time, he cultivated potatoes and various other vegetables. He ploughed the land with his bullocks and he, in fact, taught the local people how to do so. Not

only that, he introduced the practice of Wet Rice Cultivation. In his honour, the place of his residence was named by the locals as BanskotaBasti.” (Mize 76) In 2011, Rukbowrote :

Pasighat is synonymous with her worthy sons and daughters of the soil like late DayingEring, the visionary politician, BakinPertin, the great parliamentarian, TalomRukbo, the founder of the Donyi-Poloism, BoteMoyong the freedom fighter, Lummer Dai, the acclaimed writer, and Padmashree Omen MoyongDeori the social worker, to name a few, who had contributed immensely in their lifetimes to the welfare and wellbeing of the state. (Rukbo 60)

The Making of Lubro Tower

In 2011, the administration of Pasighat town, District East Siang, Arunachal Pradesh, India, officially announced the news of centenary celebration year of birth of Pasighat town. The theme of the Pasighat centennial was “Honouring the past, visioning the future” (Rehman 2011:116). The department of tourism of that state was ardent in celebrating the occasion by attracting tourists to the Pasighat town from all over the state and also outside. A gala event was also planned. Accordingly, East Siang District administration, Forest department, and Tourism department started working for the celebration. Officers from all the departments under the leadership of the District Commissioner made preparations. It was finalised to conduct a few days programme in the second week of January. Advertisements of the programme were published. The infrastructural setup for celebrating the programme was ready. It included a big temporary stage in the main ground as the main venue of celebration, galleries for exhibitions, food stalls and tents for ethnic food. Since the beginning of the month of January, administrative staff of the town, NGO members, political workers had become very busy in organizing the programme. The Public Works Department apart from making temporary constructions in different points, constructed the Lubro Tower near the market at a park to mark the occasion. Public Works Department repaired the roads and highways. Shining black top roads now beautified the landscape of the town. The mighty Siang adjacent to the town, with its divine beauty, received a garland in the form of the newly completed bridge which had taken more than two decades to be completed. The Government buildings were white washed to give a facelift to the town. Hoardings and posters were displayed on the way to and inside the town announcing the nature of events, including river rafting competitions to be held in the Siang river. The names of invitees became the talk of the town. People were eagerly waiting for the arrival of famous movie actors, and singers, invited for the show. It seemed that every nook and corner of the town was decorating itself like a bride in her parlour waiting for her wedding. The way to Pasighat meanders through the lap of nature, attractive for its geographical location in the foothills knocking the portico of Great Himalayas. Wide pale yellow paddy fields tossing on each other can remind one of Wordsworth’s “Daffodils.” It is skirted by different shades of green scenery and perennial water sources. The entire stretch of hills, both near and far, seems to guide the road towards the town. Every corner of the cultural landscape, indicating agricultural prosperity of the people, could make any traveller happy.

Field Diary

On 13th January, we started for Pasighat, with the anxiety of not finding a befitting place to stay in. Our team comprised seventeen students of Anthropology with one faculty member and one cook. Thankfully Rajiv Gandhi University had provided a bus for conveyance. We reached our destination; the MirbukMusup (the word Musup means dormitory for men) in the evening. SubasMibang, one of the students, had reserved this place in advance for our staying because the district administration was not providing any accommodation for common people. Since, November 2010, the team had tried to arrange lodging, anywhere within the town; the target was that the students would conduct field studies on the 'Cultural dynamics of the place, on the eve of centenary celebrations.' For accommodation, the Principal of Jawaharlal Nehru Government College, Pasighat was contacted. Being the first college in the region, it has residential facilities. In the first week of January, the Principal expressed his inability to provide any accommodation and sent a message that the District Commissioner of Pasighat town had already reserved all lodging facilities for the forthcoming program.

In spite of all odds the first evening in Musup was quite exciting. Traditionally the Musup was the heart of village administration and security. Hundred years ago these Musup(s) were places to organise meetings (Kebang), to plan any social, economic, administrative, or political matter for the village. Mushups were also used to equip boys with life skills. As and when required, decisions on secret strategies of wars were also taken here. The Musup was the venue of the Kebang.^{vii} After reaching there, we received a warm welcome from Ms. Oimang Megu and Ms. Radhe Yampi. The young lady was my former research scholar and a resident of that village. Their cordial behaviour reminded us of peerless typical tribal hospitality. She personally honoured us by arranging firewood for us. The second lady was a Research Scholar of North Eastern Hill University. During our stay at the place, I found the initiative and sense of responsibility shown by my students to be praiseworthy. The first visitor was an elderly lady who came to welcome us. Next was a young man, who came like an angel, to inform our half-starved souls that we could purchase chicken from him if required but he would love to donate the chicken for our next day's lunch. In the meantime, Oimang whispered to me that there was a meeting going on in the village in which the residents will decide a date for an urgent ritual and we would have to leave the Musup for that reason. I readily complied with her. After about an hour, the village Secretary and other members came to meet us and politely requested us for the same. I assured them not to be worried. I was confident that in some way or the other another lodging could be arranged. But at the same time I felt grateful to my Adi students who made this arrangement at least for the first night. I was fascinated to find traces of gender equality in the Musup (Men's dormitory), where women now have access and participate in decision making.

Professor Tamo Mibang (the then Vice Chancellor of RGU, who happens to be a resident of Pasighat, arranged an alternative lodging for us at the outskirts of the town in a residential school, some twenty kilometres away. Just after our dinner was over Prof. Mibang's son

Mr. Goutom Mibang came to see me. I was excited to meet Gautom after a long time. He is also an alumnus of our university. At present he is the District Supply Officer of East Siang. The next afternoon he shifted us to the St. Francis School in Diking Village. It was a Missionary residential school. The school compound was located at the backside of Mirbuk and Mirku villages. On the whole our stay in Pasighat was remarkable for many reasons. Goutam Mibang not only settled us there, but also supplied us with the first round of firewood. A jeep trailer fully loaded with firewood from a saw mill came to us. The driver asked us whether we were from the state's only university and he replied himself, "That was the reason my sir took extra care, because you belong to his father's university". Indeed, I was privileged and this feeling made us overlook the upcoming crisis. Our cook started using firewood unrestrainedly, and within four days we had to make an enquiry for firewood and came to know that all saw mills were closed as per instruction of the local administration. In fact all schools and colleges were also closed for the occasion. Pasighat is a small town with not many hotels. Hence they planned to use schools, college buildings and hostels to accommodate guests.

On 14th January morning, we went to see the town and villages on the other side of the river. Crossing the mighty river Siang, we picked up a straight road in the valley. We reached Mebo dissecting forest lines through this path. Mebo is a century old famous village and at present is known as the 'Rice Bowl' of the whole region. It constitutes a hilly area, bordered by the river Siang. We met a few officers and local level political leaders in the courtyard of the Mebo Inspection Bungalow. Our plan to stay at the Bungalow fell apart when we learnt that it had the reputation of being a haunted house. Though I was ready to take the risk but because of my students I missed the rewarding experience of staying in a haunted house. Hence, we returned to Pasighat straight away.

On that Sunday, in the main celebration ground of Pasighat town, people were very busy in different works since sunup. While labourers, government officials, supervising staff, members from Non-Governmental Organizations, all were involved in their work, a good number of school children were engaged in dance rehearsals. We met engineer Mr. D. Padung and his team members on that field. We took a lot of photographs of the stage rehearsal of the celebration. We came to know many things about 'Lubro Tower' from Mr. D. Padung. He gave a pamphlet that describes the tower in the following words-

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



Cultural stage undergoing construction before the centenary celebration



Food stall being constructed for centenary celebration



Food and exhibition stall constructed in the shape of war hat



Hornbill model for decoration during centenary celebration



Front of Cultural Stage



School students readying for dance rehearsal

In fact, symbols like War Hat (Lubro), beak and feathers of the hornbill, and teeth of wild boar were tangible manifestations of the indigenous culture of the place chosen for the celebrations. The same symbols were artistically depicted through bamboo and wood crafts in the stage decorations.

Starting from the roof tops of the shops, galleries for exhibition, food stalls, dining spaces to emboss on the pillars were decorated in the same artistic vein. Use of bamboo for constructing temporary stage and other places showcased the innovative architecture, around the main ground. The stage was also made of Bamboo and wood. To give it a special look and to create an association with the cultural surrounding different species of bamboos were used to build the stage.

From 15th January onwards when our students started going to government offices for collection of basic data on the district as well as on the celebration, it was gradually revealed that the date of celebration had been postponed. There were strong rumours in the air that the then Education Minister (who was also a resident of Pasighat) of the state was not getting the appointments of VVIPs from Central Ministry for the occasion. In the meantime, we tried to meet the District Commissioner but failed to get an appointment. After a week we met a students' leader in a house warming program. He argued about the probable name of the newly constructed bridge and expressed his agony that politicians will hijack the name of bridge by inaugurating it during the centenary celebration. He added that the history and sentiments of the local people would hardly be manifested in the naming of the bridge. The naming of the bridge created differences in opinion within locals. Gradually, we got exposed to different opinions of Civil Society members. The government employees expressed their ignorance about the postponing of the celebration. A section of Social Workers felt that the program was not notified in advance. A section of intellectuals had the feeling that it may termed as a celebration of hundred years of colonial history.

On 23rd January 2011, we reached Kasturba Gandhi Middle School for Girls', situated at village Yagrung, native village of MatmurJamoh. The principal of that school Ms.MitiGao was my former student. She invited us on the birthday of another great patriot of India, NetajiSubhas Chandra Bose. The popularity of Netaji as an unsung hero is understood in India by the fact that Indian parents love to name their child after his name. His birthday is widelycelebrated throughout the length and breadth of India.Matmur is revered in a similar fashion in Arunachal Pradesh. We reached Kasturba Girls' School before 9o'clock at morning to celebrate the program. This was a residential middle school for girls. Students made speeches on NetajiSubhas Chandra Bose. MitiGao spoke on the relevance of Gandhiji, who likeLord Buddha was compassionate and preached the concept of peace in the modern world. On the other hand, NetajiSubhas is still perceived as a great son of India, who had followed the path of war against the colonisers. So, intellectuals in India always found it relevant to speak on Subhas contrasting him with Gandhiji.

It was a remarkable experience for us to visit the village of MatmurJamoh, the great patriot and meet his great grand-daughters in the school. Therefore, I reminded the students in my speech that 1911 was the year of the resistance movement of the Adis and 2011 is noteworthy as centenary year, for commemorating the resistance movement for freedom under the able leadership of MatmurJamoh. While I spoke, I felt that somewhere Subhas and Matmur had a similar fate in history, as antihero, because both of them took up arms wrest freedom for their mother land. After the school's program was over, we set out for the historic village to see Matmur's house, a pilgrimage for us. Unfortunately nobody was there in the house. We were told by MitiGao, that perhaps they had gone with other villagers to attend a marriage ceremony in the same village.

During our stay in Pasighat we learnt about the "Rice Bowl". People say that the development programs of more than fifty years coupled with personal initiatives of the indigenous inhabitants have borne fruit by yielding many new varieties of paddy along with the traditional varieties in the region. The names of these varieties stand testimony to the oral history of migration.

History in Interface

This writing locates multiple discursive interpretations of organizing the centenary celebration of a town. At the outset a sense of cohesion was visible in the dialogues between organisers and participants, bringing all residents of Pasighat together. Necessity compelled a section of people in and around the town of Pasighat to avail certain scopes of earning during the celebration. The Administration wished to promote multiculturalism to attract tourist and indigenous people as well. Postponement of the date might have caused disillusionment and created an idea among the people that the centennial program was designed exclusively for bureaucrats, ministers and politicians and not of and for the indigenes, autochthones and tribes. The voice of the people was echoed in the article, "The Long Wait", by senior journalist, TongomRina: "Waiting long for a celebration is a painful moment. Wait for Chief guest from central government as typical Arunachal syndrome to depend on others for every little need, ...even to celebrate something as important as hundred years of a histories' of town."

In this article she discussed the effort of the poor villagers, who prepared food and beverages... and she concluded that it's rather the presence of the chief guest who takes the centre stage that matters, not the mass people (The Arunachal Times, Vol.22: 228, p-1). A section of intellectuals, retired IAS officers had the feeling that it may termed as a celebration of hundred years of colonial history when British administration defeated tribe (their forefathers). The insider-outsider interface was echoed further in the poem Birthplace; I quote Mamag Dai:

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

There were no strangers/ in our valley. / Recognition was instant /as clan by clan we grew, / and destiny was simple / like a green shoot / following direction / like the sun and moon.” (97)

Conclusion

The celebration program of the state to honour hundred years of a town encompasses a history of heroes in interface in oral narratives, literary activities and performances. Images of MatmurJamoh and his associates as unsung heroes, symbols of resistance against colonial aggression in social memories, reverberated on the eve of the centenary celebration. Except the book, entitled, *Song of Siang*, published to commemorate the hundred years, and a seminar held in Kebang village in the month of December 2010, thenames of these freedom fighters were missing in popular imageries and metaphors of celebration. History, in visual manifestation and decoration of venue, in planning of the monument for the occasion, depicted tangible artefacts representing the war-like-spirit of the people of the town. The State used such cultural artefacts for reclaiming the history of hundred years of the town, however there was no trace of MatmurJamoh in the visual imagery of the celebration.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱRetired officer Indian Administrative Service, a resident of village Mirku, Pasighat

ⁱⁱProf. Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri, dept. of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Ronohills, Itanagar, at present Director, IGRMS, Bhopal, India, in personal communication told this account. This is yet to be published.

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith (1999: 53) wrote on British colonial and administrative vocabulary of nineteenth century the word 'stockade' means 'boundary'.

^{iv}Reason for not establishing habitats might be connected with cultural ecological experiences. Siang River in that area changes its courses. People had experienced the same during the great earth quake of 1952.

^vThis is a translated version by Dr. D.P. Nath of the novel *MounoMukhAruMukharHriday* from Assamese language to English

^{vi}A very prosperous Buddhist tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

^{vii}In words of OyinMoyong the kebang political organization of the Adis was “Citadel of Wisdom”. He adds that philosophy of the Kebang, the oral narratives reveals that since the nomadic way of life “might was right” and “survival of the fittest” exist”. Gradually people came together as a result they established villages. Need of security to property and for welfare of the village Kebang was emerged. Kebang also educated the people to take care of language used in the Kebang. Everyone was restricted to use un-parliamentary word in Kebang. Norms of a village Kebang was to train each member a responsible person in society. Kebang membership (Moyong 2011: Ibid) started from “MUSUP/DERE KO” (teenage membership). As a member of “MUSUP YAAME”, he must attend kebang (Musup) regularly at night to learn discipline and responsibility. Full-fledged and active member of village Kebang was “KEBANG MILUM” After MUSUP YAAME one became KEBANG MILUM, and took greater responsibility, participate in judicial decision making on disputes. Moyong (Ibid) wrote on the rituals connected with the kebang. Ritual of the village is performed on a community basis; hence ritual, which are directly connected with it were, *Pator* (means defence gate)^{viii} and *Peki*^{viii} (verbal trial of truth). With changing time the Musup is redefined as community hall, with its traditional appellation, and some of the activities. At present, this Musup building is made up of cement, bricks, and tin roof.

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