Chapter 6

IMPACT OF EARTHQUAKES ON CULTURE
On a question such as that of the positivistic character of a concept, the anthropologist can rely on a physicist's judgement, it is Niets Bohr who states that "the traditional difference of (human culture) in many ways resemble the different equivalent models in which physical experience can be described".

It is a known fact that any great fear has a far reaching impact in human mind. To fight any invisible fear human being has so far given birth to so many deities. Now it is an established fact that most of the pagan deities are nothing but the outcome of highly local belief system to please the angry nature specific to the localities. The sun, the moon, the wind are thus the object of worship in many belief system. Human being are in continuous struggle with nature in furthering their existence on the earth. In the process at times men

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have become quite close to nature, when in most of the situations it has been competing with the nature since the dawn of his arrival on the globe. So, it is expected that North East India – the region fraught with so many natural calamities would certainly have their impact in moulding the culture and traditional set up of the people. The description below is an exercise to bring out the possible specific observed influences of earthquakes (elaborated in bygone chapters of this study) have left in the region.

TRADITION AND CULTURE

North East India happens to be one such seismic area and we do find the record of several earthquakes in the recorded history of the region. It is natural that such natural disaster would certainly leave an impact on the living pattern of the communities associated with the disaster and would also influence their belief system, particularly, in the making of community myths, legends, folklores etc. Even today earthquake create an awful fear-some impact on the living beings due to its sudden occurrence without any iota of hint. The societies in North East India had also gone through such dreadful experiences in the past.

MYTH/FOLKLORES

Thus, many a earthquake myths, i.e., sacred or religious tales whose content is concerned with the origin or creation of natural,
supernatural or cultural phenomena\(^2\) as well as other associated folktales could very successfully be traced in various communities of the region, which could very interestingly manifested the grave fear and concern of the people of this region for this particular natural calamity.

The Garos were generally thrown into a state of solid bewilderment by the earthquake. After 1897 earthquake they left their fields, and retired into their village houses tearing further catastrophes.\(^3\) The Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills gives us details of a myth while reporting the effect of the Great Shillong Earthquake of 1897:

The Garo belief is that the world is a square flat body, hung up by a sting at each corner. There is a squirrel always trying to gnaw these strings, but to prevent it, a demon was appointed. This demon, however, neglected his duty and in order that his attention might not in future be diverted from his work, he was struck blind. Now that he can't see, the squirrel of course has the best of it, and is feared that when one or two of the strings are gnawed, the earth will be turned upside down.\(^4\)

Another interesting legend was popular among the Garo people which indicates mixed view of fear and resistance on the foreign rule. This was also described by the then Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills with his personal comment as well:

Her most gracious Majesty, not content with the last earthquake, has ordered another and more vigorous one to be followed by a cyclone. That it is in the power of the Maharani to do so is never doubted. One man

\(^3\) Howell, A A, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
asked for a parawana to forbid the hill behind his house from slipping down to him. Had the houses of the European officials in turn not been wrecked, the Garos would have made up their minds without doubt that the recent catastrophe was the work of the Sahibs, and excited by the wild stories in common circulation they might have given some trouble.\footnote{Ibid.}

After 1897 earthquake the people of Shillong were so terror stricken that their bewilderment was obvious. The jail building along with other public buildings had fallen, and the panicky prisoners spent the night in the open and they were so terrified that none of them attempted to take advantage of his freedom. This fear had its root in the beliefs and religious structures. Such belief was further strengthened due to some miraculous events that took place during the Cachar Earthquake. A small Hindu temple - a mall, which lay under a large banyan tree, was not damaged. The people attributed the occurrence to the power of its deity. The small temple nearly a square cell, of solid heavy masonry and stood undamaged in front of the ruin of the jail and Silchar bazaar, further strengthened the myth of its protecting powers. The earthquake of 12\textsuperscript{th} June, 1897 being one of the greatest of its kind has also left its impact on the psychology of people. Many stories were being constructed as well as circulated for general consumption. One such story reported by the than Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup is quoted below:

\begin{quote}
It will be interesting to note here a rumour which the Sub-Deputy Collector reports spread fast, and was widely believed in this district for sometime after the earthquake. An edict came from Jagannath Kshetra some days after the shock of the 12\textsuperscript{th} June, that an
earthquake far more terrible than the one of 12th June, would occur on Saturday, the 3rd July, and that the earth would collapse and disappear under water. The people were seized with alarms, they prepared plantains rafts to float them in case of the deluge taking place, and sat outside their houses for the whole night on that date, either under trees or under temporary shelters. Cattle were kept on high places or on public roads, tied to pegs driven into the ground. There was Harinam in the villages, both in the daytime and in the evening. The people were all in despair and their lives and property, and nothing would persuade them to believe that the prophesy was false.\(^6\)

It was testified by H W G Cole that during the occurrence of the shocks miles of valleys and hill slopes kept echoing with wild shouts of the Nagas working in their fields, who were terribly alarmed. Several Marram Nagas, who were talking to him at the time, kept on making frightful weird noises.\(^7\)

In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills also folklores are still available to depict vividly the impact of this disaster in the psychic world of the people around.

In the village of Syndai, about one day's journey on foot from Jowai in the K&J hills, there appears a stone inscription. It is believed to be the detail of an earthquake. Incidentally, Jaintia Hills including Jowai and its surrounding were very badly damaged by 1897 earthquake. The old folk there believed that in the past earthquakes passed through it – the Khasi Hills being much exposed to the earthquakes – causing an enormous loss of lives and damage. And so at this village many persons, cattle and goats were killed; the

\(^6\) Gurdon, P R T, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
terrain and orchards were upturned. The village people were at a loss. Prayers were offered, sacrifices were performed, rituals was conducted but no solution came. They later constructed a story that there was a Monster living nearby, who, when was in peaceful mood sat reclined quietly folding his hand but when he was angry he used to rock and swing causing the quake. It was because of this that the hills shrunked, the precipices were torn, the vegetation was upturned, the people and livestock also perished. A durbar was convened to work out a method to deal with the Monster. They knew a war would not be able to defeat him. It would bring more trouble and at the same time they also knew that it was useless to reason with him. When the durbar was at the point of being dissolved, an aged man stood up and proposed to send a lady to visit his place on the pretence of collecting orchids. The Monster might be enamoured of her which would weaken him and would be killed by armed men following her. The whole Durbar agreed to try the idea.

An attractive lady was found. The lady then in the name of collecting orchids started her visit to the giant’s place everyday. The giant at the first sight was struck with her beauty and was completely overwhelmed. But the Monster preferred to be silent fearing that the lady would be scared of him and run away. Soon a batch of warriors accompanied the lady to the giant’s domain and this time seeing those warriors, the giant thundered – “What business have you got to do here in my dominion?” Just when he was about to stretch his
arms, one of the warriors said "Uncle this lady likes the place and she brought us to see it." The lady told the Monster, if he harmed her man, she would commit suicide. The Monster immediately agreed to let go but expressed his deep love to the lady. The lady seeing him trapped also offered her love. They agreed to marry. At that point an elderly man asked the Monster, "All which you spoke shall be fulfilled. But tell us first how do we believe your?" The Monster replied, "Whatever you demand I'll do for my sweetheart's sake". The men then requested him to agree to be tied to that big stone so that his in-laws would not be fearful of him. He agreed to the request and they bound his hands and feet on the stone, and enquired from him, wherein his body his power was located. The giant immediately told him that it rested in his fingers. The men then cut his fingers one by one. Giant's request to keep at least one of his fingers was also rejected. The foolish Monster, tied by a creeper plant, soon succumbed to the injuries. But before he died, the perjured lady was seen going back with the male escort, thus playing treacherous tricks upon his innocence. Thus, the village of Syndai had since been free of the tremors.8

The stone inscription in the form of a frog still seen in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills suggesting another story on earthquake which centres around the frog. The story goes like that: in the beginning earthquake used to be very severe, and the world was like a round

plate resting on four stone pillars, which themselves were planted on U Jumai (the God of earthquake), who had the appearance of a frog. Because of the great weight of the earth, U Jumai often stirred, thus shaking the earth. Finally, God bound him and cut off four fingers of one of his hands. From that time, U Jumai no longer shakes the earth as he used to do.  

There is a very deep seated ancestral belief in the Khasi Hills about this particular natural calamity.

Apart from this legend, our ancestors believed that God test and judge the Hynniewtrep race as is evident from the meanings of the word Jumai. The word Jumai was a combination of two Khasi words. ‘Ju’ meaning always or time after time and ‘Mai’ meaning to scold or to reprimand. Therefore, Jumai means that God reprimanded the Hynniewtrep race time after time. In fact the earthquake of 1897 was attributed to as the deed done by God to judge the people of Shela, a village situated on a steep slope on the left bank of the Umiam – Mawphlang. Before the earthquake, most of the Shela people, it is said, were successful traders and were the richest and the proudest lot. On market places like Sohra and other markets these people, it is said, would not touch or buy anything that have been touched first by the Nongphlangs or Highland Khasis. For instance, fishes kept and covered in baskets, only the fishes kept at the top of the baskets would be purchased by them whatever the cost. Incidentally, the maximum number of deaths, 116 was reported from Shela.  

The belief that earthquake – as an act of God – was reportedly so strong that no one expressed anything abusive about 1897 earthquake from among the Khasi community. Evidently, due to this belief the people were not heard to utter a word of abuse, oath or abuse.

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9 Simon, I M, Khasi and Janitia Tales and Beliefs, Gauhati, 1966.
filthy language on the Shillong earthquake of 1897, instead, they all prayed, cried and called upon God to shower mercy on them. Paradoxically the earthquake of 1897 had greatly influenced the people of Khasi Hills that it often acted as reference point of counting age or dates.\textsuperscript{11}

According to one of the folklore of Adi Community in Arunachal Pradesh, earthquakes have been described as the creator's expression of anger. The creator does so when He is not happy with the sacrifices given to him by the men.

In Assam following the great earthquake of 1897 musical verse had been composed. In lower Assam the song composed gave a description of the effects.\textsuperscript{12}

In Tripura the established folklore on earthquake goes like this:

The earthquake is caused by a deity called Banglai Raja. He is always concerned about all living things including human beings. He always desires their welfare. A worm called Khibuma moves around the earth and lives by eating human excreta. This worm keeps Banglai Raja informed about various living organisms on the earth since the worm has capacity to move on earth surface as well as can go below the earth. Since its main food is human excreta, whenever it does not get sufficient food it goes below the earth to inform Banglai Raja that human population is dwindling. But Banglai Raja does not always believe this worm. He, therefore, shakes the earth to verify the fact and when human beings start making "Ulu" sound, Benglai raja stops shaking the earth. This shaking of earth by Banglai Raja is earthquake.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Goswami, P, \textit{Ballads and Folk Tales of Assam}, Gauhati, 1860.
It is thus evident from the available myths, folklores etc. of the region, that this calamity has definite impact on the minds of the communities living by the region. A common expression of fear evidently had been manifested in almost every stories except that one of the Jaintia Hills where the demon was tamed if not wholly at least partially, by a young beautiful lady. The calamity was generally identified as the product of creator’s anger. And in this respect the region is no exception.

People in antiquity, therefore had to be prepared for continual threats from nature. One response was to try and attribute a particular significance to natural disasters, to place them within a comply system of communication between the gods and man. Earthquakes, for example, the most frequent and most severe form of natural disasters in antiquity given the seismotectonic conditions of the Mediterranean area, were seen by the Greeks as acts of Poseidon. Already, in Homer, Poseidon is called enosichthon and ennosigaios (earth-shaker) and even in Mycenaean times this function was probably associated with this god. The Romans, on the other hand, did not attribute earthquakes to specific gods, their expiatory rites followed the general phrase sive deo sive deae. Nevertheless, they did perceive earthquakes as sign (prodigia), foretelling a disturbed relationship between the gods and man.\(^{14}\)

The earthquake being so overpowering and regular in the region that most of the communities of the region had to combat it at the spiritual level through imaginary stories and they also admitted that even if this be a demon (as described only in one occasion), it should be given its due being very powerful and should not at all be faced head-on and certain diplomatic means should be applied.

TRANSFORMATION IN PRECOLONIAL TIMES

The role of fear in the development of religion is a known story. The awesome impact that a natural calamity like earthquake can instil has just been seen. But this was not all; a few striking historical records placed here under would bring to light the tremendous change that this natural calamity could bring into the life of a major section of the population of North East India.

Sanskritisation being a slow and gradual process had started quite early in the Brahmaputra Valley. The transformation of Ahom Kings to the Hindu order was finally completed after a severe earthquake which took place in the region during the tenure of Rudra Singh, i.e., between 1696 to 1774 AD. Edward Gate (A History of Assam) related the development as:

His (i.e., Rudra Singh's) Hindu proclivities increased as he grew older, and he at last decided formally to embrace that religion and become an orthodox Hindu. This involved the ceremony known as "taking the Sharan": the neophyte prostrates himself before the Guru, who teaches him a secret text, or mantra, and takes him under his spiritual protection. Rudra Singh could not bear the thought of humbling himself in this way before a mere subject, however, saintly. He therefore, sent to Bengal and summoned Krishnaram Bhattachariya a famous mahanta of the Sakta sect who lived at Malipota, near Santipur in the Nadia district. The Mahanta was at first unwilling to come, but consented on being promised the care of the temple of Kamakhya on the Nilachal Hill, just below Gauhati. When he arrived the King changed his mind and refused to become his disciple, and the priest departed again in high dudgeon. At this moment a severe earthquake occurred which shattered several temples and Rudra Singh, interpreting the

* The name of Rudra Singh under parenthesis in the above quotation has been put by this scholar for immediate clarity.
the phenomenon as an indication that the Mahanta was a real favourite of the Gods, hastened to recall him. He still hesitated to take the decisive step, but satisfied the Mohant by ordering his sons and Brahmans of his entourage to accept him as their Guru.\textsuperscript{15}

Had it been just a conversion of an individual to an alien faith, the situation would not have been that significant. But here the new religious order was called for by the greatest of all-Ahom Kings (who represented the state). The great tanks of ‘Jaisagar’ and that great temple of ‘Jaidaul’ at Sibsagar were constructed by Rudra Singh. Rudra Singh was also said to have received the submission of all the hill tribes of the region.\textsuperscript{16} So, his submission to a new religious order was certainly a new beginning for the expansion of Brahminic religious order in the region. The actions initiated subsequently in this respect by his eldest son Sib Singh, would further justify the settlement of the Brahminic order not only in the King’s palace but also among the public in general.

After the death of Rudra Singh his eldest son Sib Singh ascended the Ahom throne with the new name Sutanpha but as per the injunction of his father formally became a disciple of Krishnaram Bhattacharjya. As Gait put it, he was constantly under the influence of Brahman priests and astrologers. It was so much that he not only made lavish endowment to the temples, and Brahmans in the hope of averting the threatened calamity. On the influence of the priest, he further declared his chief queen Phuleswari, who assumed the name

\textsuperscript{15} Gait, E A, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 171.
Paramateswari (one of the name of Durga), to be the 'Bar Raja' or Chief King, made over to her the royal umbrella, the Ahom emblem, of sovereignty and issued coins jointly with her name. Sib Singh erected numerous temples and gave away land for the settlement to Brahmans and temples with all generosity of a new convert.\textsuperscript{17} Record further adds that thanks to his support Hinduism became the predominant religion, and the Ahoms who persisted in holding to their old beliefs and tribal customs came to be regarded as a separate and degraded class. The Deodhais and Bailongs resisted the change with all their might and succeeded for some time longer, in enforcing the observance of certain ceremonies, such as the worship of the Somdeo. But the people, gradually fell away from them, took Hindu priests, and abandoned the free use of meat and strong drinks.\textsuperscript{18}

Out of forty-eight inscribed copper plates and issued land grants by Ahom Kings to Brahmans, nineteen alone was offered by Sib Singh. The rest were: Gadadhar Singh – 3, Rudra Singh – 3, Pramata Singh – 3, Rajeswar Singh – 7, Lakshmi Singh – 6, Gaurinath Singh – 4, Kamaleswar Singh – 2 and Chandra Kanta Singh – 1.\textsuperscript{19}

Though the temple of Umananda on Peacock Island in the river Brahmaputra opposite to Gauhati was built during the reign of Godhadhar Singh, father of Rudra Singh\textsuperscript{20} and the earliest copper-plates, land grants by Ahom Kings to Brahmans or Hindu temples date from his reign, it could be seen that onward Rudra Singh, Ahom state

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 173-74. 
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 174. 
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 174.
became very liberal towards promotion of Hinduism in the region. Thus, if the arrival of Krishnaram Bhattacharjya has any role in spreading Hindu order in the region then the role of the disastrous natural calamity that took place during Rudra Singh's reign also cannot be ignored.

**TRANSFORMATION DURING COLONIAL TIMES**

1897 Great Shillong Earthquake also played a similar role in the expansion of Christianity in the Khasi and Janitia Hills, i.e., in the modern state of Meghalaya. The place called Shella, situated in the southern slope of the Shillong plateau bordering the present Bangladesh where a Catholic Mission was established in the early nineties of 19th century was completely shattered by the earthquake of 1897 and the Catholic Mission history of the North Eastern India records it like this:

> Among all the mission stations Shella, in fact, suffered most from the earthquake of 1897, since it was precariously perched on a step slope. What the earthquake had not destroyed was destroyed by the rocks rolling down to the valley.\(^{21}\)

The condition of the missionary there was such that they had to transfer the missionary station to Laitkynsew and the shift was done almost immediately after the great shock.\(^{22}\) Though this change of station from Shella to Laitkynsew on the top of a ridge was forced

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\(^{21}\) Becker, C., *History of the Catholic Missions in Northeast India (1890-1915)*, p. 188.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 189.
but just a year after in 1898 it was all changed and the change was for the best. The report received from Laitkynsew on 25th September, 1898, i.e., just after a year revealed not only just rays of hope but also a message of great beginning of an history of Catholic expansion in the tribal areas of North East India. A part of that report is quoted below to assert the impact of natural calamity in replacing the existing tribal belief by an advancing proselytising religion of an advanced society.

There was no hope of getting any help from the mission headquarters. Cut off from all other villages, I was entirely in the hands of Divine Providence, with a group of sisters and the orphans who had survived. Our trust in Divine Providence was not in vain. Now a year after the disaster, we have not yet achieved that degree of progress to which we had attained before the earthquake, but a good beginning has been made. The king who earlier did not want to give me even a hut, left me free to chose a large compound in spite of the objections of the Protestant pastors. With the help of some friends of the mission I was able to build a house for myself, another for the sisters, a school, and a few Khasi huts for the poorest of my Catholics.

What we missed most was the chapel. I used a part of my residence as chapel for the time being, though it was too small for the purpose, since, after the earthquake, the people were coming to the ‘church more frequently. I had never complained about their church attendance. But I could hardly believe, that the people of Shella who shirked every fatigue and trouble would come up the difficult path to Laitkynsew even in very bad weather to fulfil their Sunday obligations and to receive the Sacraments. Even the pagans were inwardly shaken by the earthquake. Thinly persons, mostly grown up, asked for Baptism and were baptised in Laitkyasew. If only I could utilise their present good dispositions! People come nearly everyday asking for teachers, catechists and schools for their villages. I was so sorry that I could not fulfil their desires.23

23 Ibid., pp. 192-193.
Another record of Shella about that very night of 12th June, 1897 reveals more baptism:

In the midst of the weeping of children and the dirges of women, Fr. Abele heard the confession of the Christians, gave Baptism to twenty Catechumens and prayed with them. Among the Christians none perished except an apostate. 24

Another missionary document while providing the justification has recorded the number of Christians in the Hills after the earthquake of 1897 at a much higher level.

The Christians faced the tragedy with courage and steadiness, which in turn impressed the non-Christians as it was in the case of early Christians' weakness during persecution and martyrdom. Without questioning or discussing the motive of the many who became Christians by 1899, the total number of Christians came up to 14,215 against 6852 in 1891. Nevertheless, there were also cases when non-christians blame the Christians for the disaster that happened. 1

The role of 1897 earthquake in the adoption of Christianity would be further revealed from the comparative statement of Christians in the K & J Hills since 1861 given below (Table 6.1): 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Christians</th>
<th>Churches</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>2024</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>6928</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>15885</td>
<td>411?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>25657</td>
<td>588?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 Ibid., p. 190.
1 Jyrwa, J. Fortis. The wondrous works of God, 2nd pub. 1998, P.34
2 Ibid. P. 143
These historical accounts seem to display an obvious psychic pattern to secure oneself first at the mental level. Thus, the insecurity followed by the development of belief and then the chain of surrender to the Almighty or fighting the Devil all appear to be the part of same consciousness. Historical development of myth making has brought to light another very innate human urge, i.e., the inbuilt desire to seek the causal relationship behind any happenings and in the process where the ongoing logic fails, those are being filled up by artistic means and so the myths, folk stories come into being and play their role. Thus the traditional and cultural expressions have one common interesting aspect and that is the search for expression of a causality. All these stories tried to weave the thread on the common platform of their contemporary understanding of logic.

The stories are of similar pattern – all of them have started with the depiction of the origin of this calamity and ended with a happy note of either appeasement or destruction of the source itself. The stories seem to emanate from the very necessity of reconciliation at least at the psychological level, since the calamity under consideration is too shattering to meet physically. From this point of view, the stores so far unearthed would fall under the category of etiological folklores. One more aspect of these stores is the utmost zeal of the human psyche to unfold the mystery to reveal the causality – may it be at the psychological level – the manifestation of innate human desire.
The stories very clearly reflected the social behaviour of man. Nowhere in the stories a particular individual has been made responsible for the occurrence of such an event, neither in any story the fight has been reduced to the individual level. Where earthquake has been treated as demon, there also it was a fight between the society and the demon – entire society jointly through democratic means worked out the plan to demolish the demon and wisdom of the senior was respected.

The stories have their individual characteristic as well. While analysing the Khasi myths/folklores, these have revealed the following distinct motifs:

1st Motif - Depiction of a non-human entity in the form of a demonic figure. The non-human entity is malefic.

2nd Motif – Allurement by a thing of beauty. In this case by a beautiful girl.

3rd Motif – (in both the stories) – Source of strength and their identification in the fingers.

4th Motif (in both) – An attempt at controlling the harmful effect of that strength.

In case of Tripura and Adi stories the possible motif as identified are described below:

1st Motif – The non-human entity is of divine nature and not malefic. It is non aloof from the society.
2nd Motif – The concern of such entity for the welfare of the human being.

3rd Motif - The case of Tripura story, earthquakes are caused to express that concern which is positive in content and nature. In the Adi story the deity expresses its anger when not given any sacrifice but the anger is not actually malefic in nature because the deity is close in touch with the human being and wants its share for helping them.

In both the stories the deity is therefore, not aloof.

4th Motif – In case of the Tripura Story the Uludhanni signifies symbolic gesture to the deity’s positive course of action for the mankind which is recognised by the human. It conveys the information sought by the deity that we are there and we are safe.

5th Motif – But in the case of Adi story, sacrifice forms the motif. Sacrifice is not only to keep the deity in good humour but also to guarantee his care for mankind.

The story of Samson and Delilah in the Judges part of Bible has a striking similarity with that story of the killing demon of earthquake in the K & J Hills who used to shake the earth at his will.

Samson also had a strength of unbelievable measure. For a part of his life, Samson used to live in a cave. Like this demon, Samson also fell in love with a woman. Most important of all, in both the cases love and hence the women were instrumental in causing the final death. When thousands of men had failed to overcome both the Demon and the
Samson, a woman succeeded. In both the occasions strength was located not in the whole body but in a particular part of the body; in case of Samson it was at the root of his hair when in the case of the earthquake Demon of K & J Hills, it was on his finger tips. Even Samson was also tied up with a rope once like that of Demon of the K & J Hills’ Story.

Thus, the stories on elaboration do come out with a number of meaningful observations:

(i) The Meghalaya stories give a devilish character to the non-human entity. It can very well be understood as a symbolic representation of social attitude towards the nature and the consequences of the earthquakes which often caused destruction of lives and property. Khasi and Jayantia Hills being highly seismic having the experience of a number of damaging earthquake the above symbolic representation of earthquake as devil appears quite objective.

(ii) The first story from Meghalaya which appears to reflect a possible influence from the Greek Mythology of Atlas which might have been derived through general European (and Missionary) discourses which begun to influence the Indian way of looking of the world in the 19th century. Can one also observe possible influence from the Hindu Mythology related to Basuki Nag
holding the world on his head and shaking the same on exertion,

(iii) In the case of the second story the allurement through a beautiful girl to know the secrets of the demon’s strength has a striking similarity with that of the Old Testament stories of Samon and Dalila.

There are many other similar stories of allurement from elsewhere in the world. Could it be that this story was formulated through colonial contacts.

Again, in 1897 earthquake, while European construction met with total failure (as discussed in the earlier chapter), the traditional huts of the region mostly escaped with little damage. Thus, the housing pattern, also a part of the evolving cultural expression of the communities of the region happened to describe the impact of earthquake on the habitats of the people of the region with a concrete physical evidence in hand. If housing pattern is a part of culture, than Assam type constructions of the region which evolved out of the compromise with the devastating earthquakes of the region. It may be treated as another distinct role that the earthquake has played in shaping the culture of North East India.