Chapter I
Introduction

North East India is known as land of eight sisters state which comprises Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Among these eight sisters states Arunachal Pradesh is the largest in size by covering a geographical area of 83,743 sq.kms and lies roughly between E.91°30' and 97°30' longitude and N.26°28' and 29°30' latitude. The North East India represents the richest ethnic region of the world and meeting point of several races including Austric, Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan who came from different directions at different historical times.¹ The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh belong to the Mongoloid racial stocks and speak the language of Tibeto-Burman family. Due to their geographical isolation and territorial distances from each other resulted in certain distinctive characteristics in language, dress and customs among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.² Geographically Arunachal Pradesh is four times bigger than the area of Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya while eight times bigger than Tripura and 500 sq.kms more than Assam.³ The word 'Arunachal' is a sanskrit word which consists of two words; 'Arun' and 'Anchal' which stands for 'Sun’ and ‘Border’ or ‘Edge’ where the Sun in its diurnal motion

first rises over India. It was the new name given to erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) during the time of giving the Union Territory status in the year 1972. The state is bounded by China on the north, on the east by Myanmar, on the south by Assam and Nagaland while on the west by Bhutan. The state has about 1630 kms long international border; of which 160 kms with Bhutan, 1030 kms with China and 440 kms with Myanmar. In general, it is predominantly mountainous with numbers of hills, valley and mountain ranges cover about 85 percent of the total areas. The Himalaya Ranges which originate in the Pamir Knot spreads to the east and covered most of the northern part of Arunachal Pradesh. The Pamir Knot range separated the Tibetan plateau from India and Patkoi Hills separating India from Myanmar. The Himalayan Ranges spread out at the eastern most point towards the south. The climate of the state varies from hot and humid to heavy rainfall in the Shivalik Range and has a rich diversity of different species of flora and fauna.

The forest of the state provides abundant bio-diversity with over 5000 species of plants, about 85 terrestrial mammals, over 500 birds and a large numbers of butterflies, insects and reptiles. As on now the state consists of 19 (nineteen) districts which are named after the major rivers and landscapes of the state. Since 1954 to 1972 Arunachal Pradesh was known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and its administrative control was placed under the

Chief Commissioner, stationed at Shillong, the present day capital of

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5 B.B.Pandey, _op.cit._, p.7.
6 _Ibid._
7 SAAP, _op.cit._, P.1.
Meghalaya. It was on January 20, 1972 the erstwhile NEFA was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh by the then Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi and declared the Union Territory under Union of India. The inaugural event was done at Ziro, the district headquarters of undivided erstwhile Subansiri District. After 15 years of Union Territory status, Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged 24th State of the Union of India on February 20, 1987 under the provisions of North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971 and attained statehood.\textsuperscript{8} The state is a home of 26 major tribes and numbers of sub-tribes who speak their own distinct languages and maintained an identical cultural institutions and practices. Due to distinct cultural identities and languages variation among the tribes in the state is endowed with affluent cultural mosaic and indigenous institutions.

These distinct cultural aspects attract people from outside the region especially the researchers from various disciplines to understand and explore these living cultural institutions. Besides rich cultural diversities, Arunachal Pradesh occupies a strategically important location of the country from geopolitical and geographical point of view among the eight sisters states of North East India. Due to this strategic importance and sensitive nature of problem, the state was directly administered by the Ministry of External Affairs till 1965. Subsequently, it was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs and placed under the Governor of Assam.\textsuperscript{9} Under this new administrative arrangement the erstwhile NEFA was administered under the

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
Ministry of Home Affairs through the Governor of Assam who in turn acted as an administrative and political agent of the President of India. The state is situated along the eastern Himalayan and north western slopes of the Patkai Range which provides an immense strategic significance in the extreme eastern part of the country. Numerous ethnic groups, multi-languages and multi-cultural lives offer a worthy of ample opportunities for researchers to carry out a research on various aspects of the tribes especially in social sciences. Since early days the tribes live in tandem with nature and learnt how to express their deep sense of symbiosis lifestyle towards the nature. Likewise, the tribes express their emotions and talent in the form of songs, dances, festival, folktales, arts and crafts which are also inspired by the nature. Most of the festivals are dedicated to Mother Nature for bountiful blessing of life sustenance of natural resources.

As the tribes practiced subsistence agriculture and are directly depended on natural resources so every traditional practices are related to the nature. After annexation of the Brahmaputra Valley, the British perhaps articulated the concept of north eastern frontier agency.\textsuperscript{10} It was with the development of road connectivity and means of transportation facilities enabled the outside world to access to the tribes by breaking age-old geographical isolation and began to interact with one another. As such, it is observed that the indigenous traditional institutions of the state is affected by tide of modernity and alien culture in the society due to easy access to far flung areas of the people. Earlier the rich culture and tradition of tribes were

\textsuperscript{10} Mahadev Chakravarti, \textit{op.cit.}, P.4.
the main area of interest among the outsiders, especially the researchers. However, these days growing awareness of ethnicity, conflict between indigenous people and settlers draw attention of scholars to the North East India.11 Due to influence of modernity the people with different ethnic backgrounds live together in given territorial areas which sometime created a certain ethnic problems. In the whole of North East India including Arunachal Pradesh it is observed that a considerable degree of social transformation has been taken place which are attributed to rapid development of means of transportation and connectivity along with spread of education. From the administrative point of view, the state is administered through nineteen (19) districts, twenty-nine (29) Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADCs) headquarters, ten (10) Sub- Divisional Offices (SDOs) headquarters, twenty eight (28) Extra- Assistant Commissioner (EACs) headquarters and one hundred ten (110) Circle Officer (COs) headquarters.12 The geographical location of the state provides an immense strategic importance and inhabiting numerous ethnic groups made the state a virgin area for ethnographical study for the researcher.

Among twenty-six (26) major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Singpho is one of them upon which the present study has been conducted. They are found in Changlang and Lohit Districts of the state and Tinsukia District of Assam. The Changlang District is bounded by Lohit District in the north, Myanmar in the south and Assam in the east and part of Tirap District in the

11 Ibid., P.1.
12 SAAP, op.cit., p.3.
west. The following table indicates the circle wise population of the Changlang District.

Table No. 1.1: Circle Wise Population of Changlang District as per 2011-12 Census Report.13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Name Of Circle</th>
<th>No. Of Household</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Khimiyang Circle</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>1527</td>
<td>1455</td>
<td>2982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Yatnam Circle</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>1463</td>
<td>1333</td>
<td>2796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Changlang Circle</td>
<td>1391</td>
<td>3724</td>
<td>3642</td>
<td>7366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Namtok Circle</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>3847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Manmao Circle</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>1361</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>2537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Renuk Circle</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Lyngok-Longtoi Circle</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Nampong Circle</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>3547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Tikhak-Rima-Putak Circle</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>1333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Jairampur Circle</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>1407</td>
<td>1235</td>
<td>2642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Viyojnagar Circle</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>2169</td>
<td>2214</td>
<td>4383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Miao Circle</td>
<td>3930</td>
<td>10258</td>
<td>9806</td>
<td>20064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Kharsang Circle</td>
<td>2836</td>
<td>7511</td>
<td>6932</td>
<td>14443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Diyun Circle</td>
<td>5943</td>
<td>16455</td>
<td>15462</td>
<td>31917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Bordumsa Circle</td>
<td>5605</td>
<td>14926</td>
<td>14041</td>
<td>28967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Rural Population 128736

Total Urban Population 19215

Total Population of Changlang District 147951

The district derived its name from the local word 'changlangkan', which means a 'hill top'. The Singpho believed that their ancestors had discovered a

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13 Statistical Handbook of Changlang District, Published by Economics and Statistics Department, Office of Deputy Commissioner, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, 2011-12, p.17. (Hereafter abbreviated as SHBCD)
herb in this hilltop, which they used for poisoning fish at the time of fishing in a river in the early days. The total population of the district as per Census Report of 2011-12 is 147951 out of which 128736 is rural population, 19215 is urban population, and literacy rate is 61.90 percent with density of 32 persons per sq.km.\textsuperscript{14} Besides, the indigenous people there are Scheduled Caste population who also live in the district and total number of Scheduled Castes living in the district is 372 souls.\textsuperscript{15} The district is administered through four (4) Sub-Divisions Administrative Centres namely; Changlang, Jairampur, Miao and Bordumsa with five (5) Block Developments Office (BDOs). These Sub-Divisions are further divided into thirteen (15) Administrative Circles namely; Changlang, Khimiyong, Yatnam, Namtok, Manmao, Nampong, Tikhak-Rima-Putok, Renuk, Lyngok-Longtoi, Jairampur, Vijoy Nagar, Miao, Kharsang, Diyun and Bordumsa.

The Statistical Handbook of Changlang District shows that there are three (3) towns and three hundred sixty two (362) villages in the district. These towns are Changlang, Jairampur and Miao which are well connected with the outside world.\textsuperscript{16} From topographical point of view the whole district is hilly and the height of the hills ranging from 200 mtrs to 4500 mtrs above the sea level. Among all the hills, Daphabum is the highest peak in the district which is 4500 mtrs above the sea level. There are some plain areas available in the places like Miao, Kharsang, Diyun, Bordumsa, Changlang, Vijoy Nagar, Nampong and Namtok. These places are located in lower elevation of the

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Sokep Kri, op.cit, p.12.
\textsuperscript{16} SHBCD, op.cit., p.9.
district and hence having hot and humid climate during summer while hilly regions are moderate and pleasant. The overall climatic condition of the district varies from place to place due to mountainous and valleys nature of the region. The principle river of the district is Noa-Dihing and its major tributaries are Dirak River on the left bank and Tengapani River on the right bank gives Noa-Dihing a perennial volume of water throughout the year. Besides rich water sources the district is abundant with variety of vegetation which varies according to altitudes of the places. The tropical and sub-tropical wet-evergreen and semi-evergreen forest in the lower reaches while mixed deciduous in the middle and temperate forest in the hills could be seen in the district. The following table indicates the classification of land in the Changlang District.

Table No. 1.2: Classification of Area of Changlang District as on 31-03-2012.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL.No</th>
<th>Type of Utilization</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Area in Hect.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Total Geographical Area</td>
<td>Sq.km</td>
<td>4662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Forest Area</td>
<td>Sq.km</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Land put to Non-Agriculture uses</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>4,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Cultivable Waste land</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>1,37,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Misc, tree, crops and grove not included in net area sown</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>3,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Permanent Pastures and grazing land</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Current fallow</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>2,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Old fallow</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>63,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Net area Sown</td>
<td>Hect.</td>
<td>24,873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 Ibid., p.20.
The important trees which are found in the forest are *hollock, hollong, mekai, jutuli, dhuna, michelia, champeka, oak, betula*.\(^\text{18}\) It is interesting to know that an endangered species like blue vanda and hoolock gibbon which is only found in India are also in the district. Besides, hoolock gibbon, the other important animals noticed in the district are tiger, elephant, clouded leopard, hog, dear, wild boar and large numbers of arboreal animals are found here. Among the huge numbers of arboreal animals mainly five species of monkey and six species of squirrels particularly the giant flying squirrel are found in the forest of these districts. Apart from the mammal species there are varieties of aerial species of which the most common is Indian hornbill. The district also witnessed a large migratory birds during winter like ducks and geese come to the water bodies like river, streamers and pool present in the areas.

The other important birds are kalaipej peasant, fragopan, forest eagle, moina, peasant, peacock, bulbul, wood piker, dove and pigeon.\(^\text{19}\) It is well known fact that the Namdapha National Park is situated in Changlang District is the best example of rich flora and fauna of the areas. It was upgraded to status of National Park in the year 1983 from the wildlife sanctuary and the project tiger was also launched in Namdapha in the same year.\(^\text{20}\) Besides, the rich flora and fauna, Changlang District is also rich in mineral and shale resources like oil, bauxite and coal. In 1973, oil was first explored at Kharsang Circle in the district by Oil India Limited and also developed exploratory wells at Kumchait, Manabhum and Kherem. Besides

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\(^\text{19}\) *Ibid.*, p.20
oil, coal was also being explored at kharsang Circle to develop the viable coalfield in the district. Apart from its rich natural resources numbers of tourist destination are present in the district which attracts tourist from different parts of the country. The important tourist sites like Namdapha Wildlife National Park and the Second World War fame Still Well Road in Nampong Circle is centre of attraction for outside world. This historical serpentine road started from Lekhapani in Assam to Yangon in Myanmar by passing through Pangsu Pass in Arunachal Pradesh. There is a Second World War graves yard of Taiwanese soldier in Jairampur Circle between Kovin and Hongkap villages. The district is having a numbers of Theravada Buddhist monasteries which has a historical importance to appreciate and understand the religious life of the people.

As the socio-cultural activities of the people are related to monasteries, so, it became the major source of information regarding their socio-cultural events. As after the people embraced the Buddhism the monasteries became the centre of their religious life and they began to organize all rituals and festivals in the monasteries. Thus, nowadays it became a major place where one could observe all the cultural and religious practices among the people. The territorial jurisdiction is concerned, the Singpho homestead is situated on the Patkai Range so the Pangsa Pass is the important mountain pass for them in particular and for Arunachal Pradesh as a whole. Since early days the Singpho used Pangsa Pass to transact their commercial and cultural relations with the Singpho living in Myanmar. In fact, passes of the Patkai Range

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served as connecting route between the people of India and East Asia since early days in this part of continent. Due to geographical location, the Singpho had the advantage of connection with two paramount powers governing on either side of the mountain laps of the Himalaya. This gave them to play a very significant role after the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 and since then they became very important for both the British and the Myanmarese. The Myanmarese tried to instigate the Singpho in order to create disturbances against the British and on the other hand the British decided to use them as strong and effective political buffer to any future Myanmarese aggression into the Brahmaputra Valley. Thereby the Singpho played a vital role in shaping the frontier policy of the British in the North East India and indispensible tribe for the British from the economic point of view. It is to be mentioned here that the strategic position of the Singpho made them a very important tribe for the Ahom, the British and the Myanmar.

**Statement of the Problems**

The present work is a research study conducted on the Singpho who is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The primary focus of the study is to understand and appreciate the tribe’s relation with Ahom, Myanmar and British along with rigorous interpretation of social and economic transformation of the society. So far, no systematic study has been undertaken to understand the history and culture of the community based on historical framework methodology with academic rigour. In this present work a humble attempt has been made to give a scientific analyses and interpretations of the collected source materials to establish a new findings, which could add to
existing knowledge of history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh in particular
and North East India in general. The chief difficulties in the process of
reconstruction of history of the Singpho is that the written sources are scantily
available that too only from early part of the 19th century. Indeed, there is no
dearth of source materials but systematic reconstruction of the history based
on available empirical data is a challenging task, as these records often
wanting correct and reliable information of the community. Although, there
are numbers of published works found in the libraries and museums in the
forms of monographs, gazetteers, books, essays and articles but most of these
works are largely catchy and truncated information on the tribe. Despite
limitation of these studies they provide useful information to understand the
people which still wanting a proper analysis and interpretation about the tribe
socio-economic and political aspects.

As such, these earlier works suffered from wanting of more in-depth
study and critical interpretation and analysis to construct history and culture
of the tribe in question. Thus, there are numbers of incorrect information and
scornful portrayed on the tribe are often found which obviously lacked a
proper understanding and observations have been reviewed and re-examined
based on empirical data. Among numbers of incorrect information Dr. Francis
Hamilton’s report could be taken as one of the glaring examples of the
incorrect information of the earlier works on the tribe. In 1810 in his report,
‘An Account of Assam’, Dr. Francis Hamilton wrote that:
South from the Abor, or Khamti, as I have said, is a country called Chingpho, which has a Raja independent of Assam, but with those people there is some commercial intercourse.\textsuperscript{22}

In the line of these arguments, this study has made a sincere attempt to give an adequate treatment on the vacuum left by the earlier researchers and tried to offer a plausible interpretation on the subject. Like other tribe of the state, the Singpho are having rich socio-culture life and they played a very vital role in shaping the colonial policies in the frontier owing to its unique geographical location lying between the Indo-Myanmar borders. A several studies have been done on strategic importance and socio-economic transformation of the tribe so far. In fact, these works could not throw a proper analysis on the forms of property relations to society of the community by integrating the process of economic transformation with socio-political changes. Based on these arguments an attempt has been made to study a comprehensive and critical analysis of the collected data.

Before discussing the various aspects of Singpho society, the nomenclature of the tribe has been discussed elaborately in the present study. The word 'Singpho' means 'man' or 'human being' which was said to have adopted by the people after they migrated to their present homesteads from upper Myanmar. They called themselves 'jingpho' and speak the 'jinphaw' language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family of the Mongoloid stock by race. Their habitation is bounded with Indo-Myanmarese border in international boundary on the east and state boundary in the west by Dibrugarh District of Assam. Thus, the geographical location of the

\textsuperscript{22} Francis Hamilton, \textit{An Account of Assam}, Department of History and Antiquarian Studies (DHAS), Gauhati, Assam, 1963 (First complied in1807), p.81.
Singpho territory provides them a strategic importance of the country. They also inhabited both sides of the Patkai Range on the Myanmares side and eastern part of Assam till these days. The Singpho have patriarchal joint-extended family system called *intana mitow* in tribe language. In the early days the chieftainship system was prevailed and central political authority vested with the chief of the clan, who was the territorial head of the people. Clan exogamy and tribe endogamy was the rule of marriage system practised by the community, although nowadays some changes in the old system is experienced in the society. Speaking generally, the Ahom government had a political and commercial relation with the Singpho to maintain a good humour with them. The Ahom king engaged an envoy known as *Kotokis* (go-between or interpreter) for conducting negotiations and liaising with the Singpho. It is generally believed that when the Ahom administration was crumbling down in the peripheral area with the decline of central power, the Singpho came via Patkai Pass most probably in the second half of the 18th century.

They came into limelight during the reign of *Gaurinath Singha* in the last part of the 18th century by joining the *Moamaria* rebellion against the Ahom monarch. As such, the Singpho drove out the Khampti from the lowlands areas under the Pakai Hills and settled themselves in Tengapani east of Sadiya; and in upper Buri-Dehing tract called Namrup. They brought under them the whole country watered by the Buri-Dehing, Noa-Dehing, and Tengapani Rivers. In the past, the Singpho got themselves involved in many wars which they fought among themselves or either with the Khampti and the
Ahom, while sometime with the colonial administration. Before the colonial powers finally subjugated them, they fought several times due to which they were branded as troublesome tribe of upper Assam in the Brahmaputra Valley. Despite of stiff resistance offered by the tribe before the colonial powers however they were humbled and brought under the active administrative control of the colonial powers. It was stated that the Myanmarese tried to instigate the Singpho in order to create disturbances against the British while on the other hand; the British used them as strong and effective political buffer to any future Myanmarese aggression into Brahmaputra Valley. It was after the discovery of tea plant in upper Assam the tribe became indispensable for the British from economic and commercial point of view. It is worthwhile to mention here that strategic position of the Singpho made them a very important tribe for the Ahom and the British as well as for the Myanmarese. As we know, they were once known for a formidable tribe but these days they are comparatively docile in their temperament and outlook. In fact, they are known for their peace loving nature and hospitality temperament. But it would seem that their physical strength have been decaying day and day for various factors.

A numbers of studies have been done on the tribe so far suggested that main cause for their social degeneration is due to their addiction to opium and tobacco. As they are addicted with these stuffs, but because of the government intervention and restrictions on the cultivation of opium is somehow neutralized and brought some changes in the society. Nevertheless, they used to collect it from other places for their personal consumption even after
restriction imposed upon the opium consumption. As such, the community had experienced many positive and negative transformation in the society and continue to thrive hard to remain at pace with the contemporary social and political development in the state. There are numbers of other tribes inhabit in the district along with the Singpho like the Tangsa, the Tikhak Tangsa, the Lisu and the Tutsa. The Tangsa (with its sub-tribes like the Moklum, the Yugli and the Longchang), the Singpho and the Lisu are the main inhabitants of the district.23 Besides these communities, the Tibetan and the Chakma-Hajong refugees who migrated to district in the recent past also settled here especially under Miao, Kharsang, Bordumsa and Diyun Administrative Circles. These tribes have their own distinct religious belief system and rituals practices which are expressed in the forms of numbers of festivals being celebrated in the district by respective tribes. Some of the important festivals celebrated in the district are the Moh (Mol) of the Tangsa, the Pontu of the Tutsa tribe and the Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi of the Singpho. These festivals were the most important traditional festivals of these communities living in the district which are still celebrated in traditional way these days. Despite of numbers of socio-cultural changes the people manifested their traditional belief systems and practices through these festivals.

The celebration of these festivals is important for the preservation of tradition and culture of the respective tribes. Moreover, from commercial point of view also it is significant for the people as colourful celebration of these festivals promotes tourism as well as attracts researchers from outside world to understand the culture and tradition of the people. The Tangsa and

23 Sokep Kri, op.cit., p.12.
the Tutsa follow their indigenous religious practice called *Rang Frang* however, these days a few members of the tribes embraced the alien religion while communities like the Singpho and the Tikhak Tangsa are the followers of the Buddhism. Amidst the onslaught of various alien religious practices the Singpho did not give up their indigenous belief system *Nhagun* which they practiced along with the Buddhism. On the backdrop of foregoing discussions it is observed that these indigenous festivals are largely connected to worshipping of deities of fertility and material progress. In this objective, an elaborate rituals with chanting of hymns are recited to propitiate the deities while in turn seek bountiful blessing for fertile human procreation and bumper agricultural production for the devotees.

**Objectives of the Study**

The present study attempted to explore and reconstruct history of the Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh by understanding their economic, political and social transformations. The study is based on empirical field study and treated the source materials in accordance with the canons of historical methods with trans-disciplinary approach. Therefore, by corroborating the data from historical documents, archaeology, linguistics, ethnology, oral traditions, political science and social anthropology the history of the tribe is reconstructed on the basis of the following objective:

1. To investigate the origin, migration and nomenclature of the Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To examine their traditional social structure in order to understand the nature of economic, political and social transformation of the society.

3. To understand the traditional means of subsistence livelihood activities as a process of material progress of the community.

4. To understand indigenous religious practices and impact of the Buddhism which resulted in evolved of a fusion cultural practices among the tribe.

5. To study the Ahom-Singpho relations vis-a-vis the British - Singpho relations.

6. To present a research findings and try to offer a plausible interpretation and analysis on the topic.

**Origin and Migration**

Myth is not a fiction. It consists of facts which are continually repeated and can be observed over and over again. Like every society, the Singpho also belief in numbers of myths regarding their origin. The myths which is popular among the people maintained that there was once a supernatural body called *Khi-Khukhop Bikukhop* which means 'a giant figure' floating in the space. He had a son called *Khop Ning Khan* who later on had two children with a son *Pangkam Waisun* and a daughter *Ningun-Cinun*. According to traditions it is believed that all the benevolent spirits that are still propitiated by the people were originated from these two children. *Pangkam Waison* and *Ningun-Cinun* later on had six sons and these sons were the deities whom in the

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present day the people propitiate and worship. The first son was named as Ceining Cang Faning Cang while the second son, Mathum Mathwa becomes the most powerful deity of the Singpho people. The third son was Snuneng who is also still propitiated by the people in the society especially to get male child in the family. The other sons were Mununo, Ningsela and Mataitang who are also propitiated by the people for prosperity of the family in particular and society as a whole. The myths say that the first son Ceining Cang Faning Cang could foresee the future happenings. After six sons Ningun-Cinun gives birth to seventh son who looked like a watermelon and was different from his siblings. His eldest brother Ceining Cang Faning Cang foresees his future and knows that from this watermelon a human will come out later on who will be the progenitor of his own kind. Thus, he asked his mother to give the watermelon to his brother Mathum Matwa who cut it into two halves. As soon as watermelon was cut a human being came out whom they named as Gumsen La Sbang whom Mathum Mathwa sends to the earth. Gradually, Gumsen La Sbang settled on earth away from his family who were living in the sky.

In the course of time, he learnt to survive as his needs also grew thus one day while searching for fire he unknowingly entered into a cave where he met a woman named Lapchan Kainang. Later on, Gumsen La Sbang married Lapchan Kainang and gave birth to six sons name Gam, Nong, La, Du, Tang and Yawng. This tradition of naming pattern is still maintained by the tribe about which K. Dasgupta writes that, “The Singpho name their children in serial

25 Lakhum La Singpho, 83 years, Public Leader, Bordumsa Village, Bordumsa Circle, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on September 9, 2011. (Hereafter abbreviated as LLSI).
26 Ibid.
order of birth.” The sixth brother Yawng is also known as Daru Tingli Yawng or Shapawng Yawng. According to another traditions current among the tribe, the Shapawng Yawng was the ancestor of the modern days Singpho people. As such, nowadays the community celebrates the festival Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi in the name of their mythical ancestor Shawpang Yawng every year with elaborate invocation of hymns and spiritual fervour. This myth narrates as how the celestial bodies brought human life on the earth and how the Singpho link their mythical origin. Besides the myth of origin their language, physical features and migration process are some of the interesting aspects of the people. About the Singpho language it is mentioned that; “The Jingpo language is a branch of the Zang - Mian language group of the Han-Zang language system of China.” It is observed that the Singpho were one of the earliest inhabitants of a place called Baoshan in Yunan Province of China where in some remnant population are still live over there.

In the Baoshan Museum in China, there is written record that the Singpho were originated from the ancient Di-Qiang group of China around 700-800 AD. Traditions also traced their root of origin to the confines of China or Tibet. Thereby, it would seem that the Singpho speaks a language group of Chinese language pattern. Racially, the Singpho is also of the Mongoloid origin like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Their physical

28 LLSI, op.cit.
29 Hpauje Kam Li Singpho, Who are the Kachin or Jingpo/Singpho People?, in (ed.) R.K.Sharma, S. Singpho, P.Kanmai et.al., Souvenir, Shapawng Yawn Manau Poi Celebration, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, 2009, p.32.
30 Ibid.
features are looked like other Mongolid stocks of the tribes inhabit in the state. Generally, they have very oblique eyes and eyebrows, wide mouth, high cheekbones and heavy square jawbones. The skin colour in both the sexes have been termed as ranging from yellow to dark brown.\textsuperscript{32} While describing the physical features of the Singpho E.T. Dalton, observed that; “They are generally a fine athletic race above the ordinary standard in height and capable of enduring great fatigue.”\textsuperscript{33} Like other Mongolid race, the Singpho are also having a black hair with meagre body hair with average in height. Facial bone structure and other features are of typical Mongolid look which Somesh Chowdury also noted that; “The Singpho are of Mongolid stock with elongated flat face with oblique eyes and eye brows. The cheek bones are high and massive, lower jaws are squarish.”\textsuperscript{34} Due to their different lifestyle, they also differ in appearance despite of a common Mongolid look and stout physique among the men and women. For example some of them do hard work for their livelihood which made them physically strong and sturdy. Thus, they have much darker skin texture and colour than those live in a comfortable life in the towns.

There are many oral traditions related to origin and migration of the Singpho. However, the most accepted oral traditions current among the tribe


\textsuperscript{34} Somesh Chowdhury, op.cit. p.131.

* The researcher will use the progressive nomenclature of new name ‘Myanmar’ in place of Burma in the present study. However, only in the quotation the old name ‘Burma’ will be used.
maintained that they migrated from Kachin state of the modern day upper Myanmar. The oral traditions maintained that human beings including the Singpho people started their life in a plateau called Majai-Singra-Bum which was located in present day Tibet (China). The place was said to have washed away by a river flowing in a southerly direction to the Irrawaddy in the early days.\(^{35}\) The word ‘Bhum’ or ‘Phum’ means a ‘flat mountain’ and thus the word ‘Majai Singra Phum’ stand for a ‘flat mountain’, which believed to be situated in Tibet (China). From this place, the Singpho migrated towards Hukang Valley in Myanmar an uncountable of years ago. One of the informants who is authority on tribes’ traditions narrated the migration route of the Singpho in the following lines:

The oral traditions of the tribe maintained that the Singpho migrated from Yunan Province in China to a place called Kakaburaji. The place was surrounded by the Himalayan Range, China and Myanmar border. From where they migrated to Tibet and got settled in a place called Majai Singra Bhum. Finally, they moved towards different places by following the Vijaynagar route or Chowkham Pass leading to Patkai Range.\(^{36}\)

A group of Singpho who first migrated to Myanmar and settled themselves somewhere in Myitchina in the Hukang valley of Upper Myanmar. From Myitchina, they migrated to Assam batch after batch in the early period by following Vijaynagar or Chowkham Pass, Pangsau Pass and via Manipur. Most of the Singpho who settled in Arunachal Pradesh took route via Chowkham Pass. After reaching at Chowkham they settled down in many places before they permanently settled in their present homesteads. It is belief that the Singpho who followed Chowkham Pass first settled in Khumuga


\(^{36}\) Rajesh Singpho, age about 45 years, Social Activist & Researcher, Inthem Village, Tirap transfer area, Tinsukia District, Margerita Sub-Division, Assam, interviewed on June 24, 2012. (Hereafter abbreviated as RSI).
village where they settled for long period and then later migrated to Tufaga in present day Myanmar. From this village they finally moved in different directions by group-wise and populated the places like Miao, Phup, Pisi, Kagam and Liwang.\textsuperscript{37} Nowadays these villages are under Miao Administrative Circle, which is one of the administrative circles under Changlang District of the state. The group who followed the \textit{Namjung Lam} (Pass) settled in \textit{Miao Kung} after crossing the Namjung River which is situated near Miao village. In Miao Kung they stayed for a while then later moved towards \textit{Wakhet Ku} and from where they drifted to different directions and established villages like Gilinja, Bordumsa, Haru and Dumsa. Now these villages are under the Bordumsa Administrative Centre for the people. Apart from the above, a few sections of the Singpho reached across Gandhigram and settled here for a long period. From Gandhigram most of them migrated to plain areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and a few remnant populations are still live in Gandhigram even these days.\textsuperscript{38} Regarding the origin of word ‘Singpho’ is concerned there are numbers of traditions are current amongst the tribe to explain the origin of the word.

A few numbers of earlier works mentioned about the Singpho nomenclature had attempted to explain the origin of the term ‘Singpho’. However, these works could not able to offer a plausible and convincing explanation of the word ‘Singpho’ so far. The different geographical sections of the people have their own interpretations of the word ‘Singpho’ and its


\textsuperscript{38} P.Kanmai, age around 43 years, teacher & social activist, Miao Township, Miao Sub-Division, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on September 6, 2011.
origin. It is said that in the past the Singpho called themselves ‘jingpho’ meaning ‘human being’ however due to prolonged social contact with other tribes in their present homestead the word gradually corrupted to ‘Singpho’. Regarding changed of the word, one of the informants explained in these lines:

When I was the member of the Legislative Assembly my colleague demanded that the old word jingpho should be revived instead of the word Singpho. However, I convinced them if we changed the Singpho to jingpho it would be creating problem and misunderstanding among the people. Most of the people did not know about the origin of word jingpho. Thus, people will think that the original term of the jingpho is Singpho.39

As stated about original word was jingpho but after settling in Arunachal Pradesh, many neighbours of the tribe could not correctly pronounce jingpho rather they pronounced it as Singpho. As such during the course of time the letter ‘J’ pronunciation was corrupted to ‘S’ sound. Hence, with the passage of time, this corrupted version of pronunciation of the Singpho was widely used by neighbours in place of jingpho in their inhabited territories. The word jingpho is composed of two words jing and pho. The word jing means developed and pho means open.40 So, the word jingpho denotes the people who are open to world and do not live in isolation. According to one of the informants who is considered as one of the authority on tribe’s traditions said that:

After a long discussion on the meaning of the word Singpho among the community members it was found that the word Singpho stands for the English word ‘man’. Although

39 Kumku Gam Singpho, aged about 64 years, Public leader and ex-MLA, Miao town, Miao 2011. (Hereafter abbreviated as KGS).
40 LLSI, op.cit.
there are numbers of interpretations on the word ‘Singpho’ but irrespective of slight variations in the interpretations the word stands for ‘man’ or ‘human being’.

In this regard, once Edward Gait rightly put it as; “The word Singpho stands for the English word ‘man’.” The Singpho is known by different name in different country wherever they live in. In India, the tribe is known as Singpho while in Thailand they are referred to as Jingphaw. In country like Myanmar, Laos and Malaysia they are commonly known as Kachin. In mainland China, Hongkong, Taiwan and Singapore they are called as Jingpo which stands for common meaning simply ‘man’. There is a slight variation in pronunciation among the Singpho living in different places due to geographical distances and local environmental factors. Regarding ethnic origin of the Singpho J.F.Michell linked them with the Kakus or Kakhyens of Burma. While his observation has been substantiated by S.K.Bhuyan who mentioned that; “The Singpho belongs to the Tesan clan of the Kakhyens living in Burma.” It is stated that the Singpho population in Myanmar is largely concentrated in the province of Kachin.

This is precisely what James S. Fletcher also noted that; “The Kachins were ethnically known as the Jingphaw people who migrated from

41 Siong Gam Singpho, 58 years, Public Leader, Bordumsa Township, Bordumsa Administrative Circle, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on August 10, 2012. (Hereafter abbreviated as SGSI).
Mongolia.” Even in the modern days the Singpho are having their kins and kins in Myanmar with whom they still maintain their connections despite live in India. Due to barrier of political boundary between India and Myanmar they could not contact one another easily these days. The same tribe is known by different nomenclature in both the countries while in India, they are known as Singpho and in Myanmar as Kachin or Chingphaw. After having discussion on Singpho origin and migration process, linguistic transformation, different nomenclature of the people in different places, it would seem that the people had undergone a vast economic, political and social transformation. By observing their interest towards own traditions, culture and custom it is noted that although the community is facing onslaught of modernity and materialistic culture they are still strive hard to preserve their age-old traditions and customs in the society.

Review of Literature

A number of writers have dealt with the history and culture of North East India including various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh so far. Many administrators, explorers, ethnographers and travellers have written about the tribes of North East India including the Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh. These works are informative and useful in nature but often found that these studies wanting of comprehensive understanding and analysis about the real tribal world. In fact, the colonial administrators never attempted to prepare a comprehensive account of the different tribes of the state as well as region as a

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whole. The books, memoirs and monographs on various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh written by earlier ethnographers and researchers used the information and source materials based on the third persons, interpreters or informants. In this way, these earlier ethnographers and researchers were largely a chair-writers and authors.

Such collected information were interpreted and translated by novice who does not know the language, culture and tradition of the concerned tribe. Many of these earlier researchers hardly went to interior places to collect the empirical data of the people. It is observed that outcome of such researches often remains truncated information on the concerned people. When we meticulously go through these works, we usually find they are suffered from inability to appreciate the traditions and customs of the tribes in right perspective. So treatment and analysis to the subject remains factually inadequate and suffers from some kind of bias and prejudices. In the context of the Singpho there are numbers of studies have been done but all these works still wanting in-depth and critical reviewing in order to reconstruct the history and culture of the community. However, there are two important monographs written by colonial administrators like; A. Mackenzie’s work, The North East Frontier of India (1884) and Robert Reid’s History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam From 1883-1941 which covered the major portion of historical period is under review.

To some extents, these works also reflected their attempt to project their notion of white man’s burden in colonised Indian societies. While the work of R.B. Pemberton The Eastern Frontier of India (1835) gives information
regarding trade and commerce activities of tribes of North East India including the Singpho. In this work, he noted the presence of Marwari traders in the Singpho inhabited territory and commodities being traded between Hukang Valley in Myanmar and Assam is discussed at length. Apart from commercial aspects, the book does not deal about historical issue and other important social organisation of the tribe. Rather it contents a brief discussion about the Singpho traders who were engaged in trade activities in Upper Myanmar and did not touch anything about economic and political institutions. There is no denying of the fact that these works are useful to understand the economic conditions of the Singpho during the colonial period. There are some important works, which deserve to be mentioned here like Edmund Leach’s work The Political System of Highland Burma (1954) discussed about Kachins of the Shan population of northeast Myanmar including the Singpho. The concept of ‘Other World’ among the Singpho community is described in this book. It helps to understand origin and migration of the tribe, but the whole book is based on anthropological and ethnographical studies in nature. It would seem that the work is devoted to understand the people from anthropological perspectives and definitely lacked any historical interpretation.

While William Robinson’s work, A Descriptive Account of Assam (1841) mentioned about the Singpho as most powerful tribe bordering on Assam Valley for several generations. The book gives useful information on tribe, which is nowadays used as reference text to understand the social and political aspects of the people. Robinson also mentioned about plundering of
plains, fighting among the Singpho Chiefs, division of society, funeral rites and other aspects of the society. All these aspects are discussed briefly and most of this information was taken from John M'Cosh's work *Topography of Assam* (1837). As such, this work is helpful but it did not give an adequate treatment to socio-cultural and political transformation of the society from historical perspectives. Meanwhile E.T. Dalton's book, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) deals with physical features, language and racial issue of the tribe but did not discuss about social institution, customs and political ideas of the Singpho society. J.B. Neufville's book *Geography and Population of Assam* (1835) discusses briefly about migration, clan system, slave trade and religious life including geography of the Singpho territory. As this work is compilation of important information on tribe used for administrative purpose thus, it is devoid of any analytical study on the subject. Similarly, *The Tribes of Brahmaputra Valley* (1887) is a work by L.A.Wadell which also briefly deals with the Singpho and noted that they were daring fighter who stubbornly resisted to the British in the war for occupation of Upper Myanmar in 1886-87. Francis Hamilton who later on known as Francis Buchanan compiled a report on Assam under the title *An Account of Assam* in 1807, which is considered as one of the earliest works done on North East India. In this work, he described the Singpho as Chingpho denoting territory not as tribe.

Describing the Singpho as territory not as tribe is a glaring evidence to show how those colonial writers and ethnographers often used an inaccurate and distorted facts to depict the native tribes. Such works need a critical review and is to handle with great caution while reconstructing the history of
the people. This limitation could be seen as an example to show that the
works done by the colonial researchers, surveyors and ethnographers were
not based on empirical data and field study. Rather they brought certain
informers and according to their information, they could brought out books
which sometime lacked in-depth insight into the subject matter. Apart from the
above mentioned works there are other important works which were
published by erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) administration
which are quite useful and helpful in many ways to understand the colonial
and post-colonial society of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Among these
important publications under the NEFA administration were Verrier Elwin’s
A Philosophy for NEFA (1959) Democracy in NEFA (1965) and P.N. Luthra’s
Constitutional and Administrative Growth of the North East Frontier Agency (1971)
deserve some attention to understand the history of Arunachal Pradesh as a
whole and also about the individual tribe. Verrier Elwin’s work A Philosophy
for NEFA is mainly concerned about the tribal affairs of the erstwhile North
East Frontier and discussed about the problems faced by the tribes. Further, it
also discussed about appropriate approach and scientific ideals to be taken in
order to deal with the problems by bringing development activities in the
tribal areas.

In his another work Democracy in NEFA Verrier Elwin tries to provide a
general picture of the tribal indigenous political institutions and traditional
councils of Arunachal Pradesh including the Singpho. However, these are the
products of officials and political thinking; as the first book contents the
directives to the Agency Officials while the second one is practically a
compendium of notices published from time to time with a brief history of the growth of administration in the state. Although, numbers of monographs were prepared on the individual tribe by the Department of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh which are being discussed below elaborately. Among these monographs, we find a brief mentioning of the Singpho while there are other works which have dealt on the Singpho some extend exhaustively. In this way, Parul.C.Dutta’s *The Singphos* (1990) and Tapan Kumar M.Barua’s *The Singphos and Their Religion* (1977) published by Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong deserved a mention here as valuable works on the Singpho. In his work, T.K.M.Barua discusses about the indigenous belief system, practices but the work did not discuss regarding the Buddhism and its impact on the Singpho society. Juri Mahanta brought out a monograph on the tribe titled *Singphos of North-East India* (2011), which proves to be helpful for the present study as it touches every aspect of the Singpho society including history. However, from the historical perspective the work lacks in-depth study and critical analysis in handling history of the Singpho rather the work is done from social and educational point of view. Hence, this work lacked a proper analysis and interpretation of subject matter from historical point of view.

M.N. Bordoloi in his monograph *The Land of the Hornbill and the Myna* (1964) briefly discussed about a few historical events in the Singpho country and discussed about their sense of patriotism and unity. This work indeed comes to handy to do research on the Singpho but is mainly based on the secondary sources, and did not use the primary sources in the work.
Moreover, his works is virtually based on sociological studies and devoid of historical interpretation. While J.N. Choudhary’s books *Arunachal Panorama: A Study in Profile* (1992) and *Arunachal Pradesh: From Frontier Tract to Union Territory* deserves some attention, which is based on secondary sources and discussed extensively about administrative development of the state. Besides the above mentioned works, there are some scholars from North East India who made a sincere attempt to throw sufficient light on historical research of the region as a whole and on the area of the present study. These include H.K.Barpujari’s *Problem of the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier: From 1822 to 1842*, and *Problem of the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier: From 1843 to 1872* and M.L.Bose’s *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency* (1979). H.K. Barpujari deals with the factors and forces in moulding the British policy towards the tribes of the North East India and frontier region at some length and also mentioned briefly about the Singpho. Despite of his lengthy discussion there is no adequate analytical treatment on the community as the work is based on general study of North East India. While M.L. Bose’s work is also worth reading and provides very useful information about the various dimensions of interaction between the colonial power and society in the Himalayan frontier.

Nonetheless, in some respect formulations are sketchy as the work is occasioned by outcome of seminar and academic conference. While S.K.Bhuyan’s *Tungkhungia Burnaji* (1990) provides information about the Myanmarese invasion of Assam in which the Singpho participated from Myanmarese side and exerted military cruelty upon the plain people of
Assam. It also mentioned the carrying away of plain people by the Singpho whom they enslaved later on at their homesteads. Furthermore, the work described the giving of a girl to Singpho Chief Bisa Nong by the Ahom in order to establish a friendly relationship with the tribe. Hence, the work is essential to understand political importance of the Singpho during the Myanmarese invasion of Assam. Although, it did not mention other aspects of the Singpho but the main content of work is attributed to political history of the Tungkungia dynasty of Ahom. As such, the work could not provide a systematic analysis of the Singpho during the period covered under the study.

Lakshmi Devi’s work *Ahom-Tribal Relation: A Political Study* (1968) is also an important work to understand the history of North East India and information about days of the Ahom period and its relations with frontier tribes. In the context of Singpho she wrote briefly how they emerged as powerful ally of the Moamaria during the reign of Ahom ruler Kamleshwar Singha. Other than these depictions, the work did not mentioned much about the Singpho so it is also to some extent devoid of any comprehensive study on the tribe.

Besides these works and monographs there are few unpublished dissertations on the Singpho brought out by native researchers which are submitted to the Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills like Debotang Yupang’s *Buddhism Among the Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh* (2007) in which he discussed about religious life of the Singpho while Ong La Umon’s *Marriage System of the Singpho* (2004) discussed about unique marriage system among the Singpho. Meanwhile, Nongja Singpho worked on *Forms and Functions of Folk*
Narratives in the Singpho Society (2005) discusses about the role of the folk narratives and oral traditions in the Singpho society. These research works are indeed very informative and valuable for the present research work as it enable to understand about basic characteristic features of social structure and cultural life of the tribe. However, these researchers used the sociological and anthropological methods of analysis and interpretation of the Singpho society. Other work by Won Khya Pomoung Social Life of the Singphos (2004) tried to provides some basic information of social life of the people and the study is based on interdisciplinary approach. In fact, these research works proved to be very informative and helpful for the present study. Nevertheless, it is important to know that these studies are more or less suffered from certain limitations and shortcoming if we are to understand the Singpho from the historical point of view. We are to appreciate that these works are based on anthropological approach and methods of analysis is obviously different from canons of historical framework. As these anthropological works concerned with pattern of social structure, institution and population dimension which is obviously lack of historical perspectives.

Apart from these published and unpublished dissertations we have some gazetteers, journals and bulletins which were published during the colonial period and postcolonial period. Journals like Asiatic Journal of Bengal, Asiatic Researches, Journal of North-East India Council for Social Sciences Research (NEICSSR), Journal of the Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh (RESARUN), Arunyoti, Journal of Dibrugarh University dealt with the tribe in the form of articles and essays which are informative in nature.
Although, these essays and articles are often inadequately dealt with specific aspect and subject matter. Therefore, an extensive field study has been conducted under the research work in order to construct comprehensive history of the Singpho and also to fill the gap left by these earlier researches. While preparing this thesis a thorough consultation of all these works have made and sincerely attempted to reconstruct the tribe's history proper based on empirical data and field study.

**Research Methodology**

The present study attempted to introduce the readers to the subject matter and tried to explain the broad contexts of the research; and outlined briefly the essentials of the research design. Under the research methodology in general sense a reference to both theoretical and empirical aspects of the field research is being highlighted. Both the primary and secondary sources have been utilized for the preparation of present research work. The secondary sources in the form of published materials like books, monographs, ethnographic reports, articles, essays, survey reports, research reports, field diaries, etc., had been consulted extensively. Besides, the above sources, other regional sources related to *Buranjis, Ahom* epigraphs, literature of medieval Assam also had been consulted while analysing and interpreting the subject matter. The primary sources which are in the form of archival materials such as military reports, memoirs, tour diaries, political and secret proceedings, official correspondences of the British period had been consulted thoroughly while analysing the present study.
In fact, the available rich variety of primary sources on the topic was one of the important reasons for undertaking this research work. In order to collect primary sources and archival materials, the researcher has consulted the important archives, museums and libraries across the country. These archives, museums and libraries are the State Archive and museum of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, State Archive of Assam and Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies, Guwahati, State Archive of West Bengal, Asiatic society of West Bengal, National Library, Kolkata and the National Archive of India, New Delhi. The researcher also consulted the source materials available at National Museum Library, Teenmurthy Library, Jawaharlal Nehru Museum and Library of New Delhi. State Research Library and State Central Library, Itanagar, Branch Library Naharlagun of Arunachal Pradesh, the Library of Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Doimukh and District Library, Changlang of the state had been consulted while preparing the thesis. Besides the libraries, museums and archives, the researcher has also used the office records of the Department of Economics & Statistics, Department of Higher Education, the Directorate of Research cum Museum and Department of Art and Culture, Government of Arunachal Pradesh in order to corroborate the primary sources related to subject.

Tertiary sources such as myths, legends, folktales, oral traditions and other form of folk literature have been collected through structured interviews with the people of the study area. Such structured interview was designed in scheduled and participatory methods. Both the structured and unstructured interview was conducted to collect the tertiary sources on the topic. The
research tools like questionnaire, scheduled interview, unscheduled interview, audio-visual, etc., were utilized for recording and collection of data. The other tools for the study was the suitably designed and partially structured questionnaires- cum-interview schedule meant for the informants was used during field study. It was designed in easy and understandable English words and whenever necessary the words were translated into local language at the time of administration. All the collected data was scientifically analyzed to corroborate the facts obtained from primary and secondary sources to establish a worthy of hard-core facts to interpret a history proper of the Singpho. In accordance with the objectives of the study, for collection of empirical data the researcher have used mainly interview and observation methods. Some key informants from both the sexes were selected by which the tertiary data was being obtained from them through interview and observation method. The field study was largely concentrated at the Singpho inhabited areas especially in the Bordumsa Administrative Circle of Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh where the concentration of Singpho population is high. Interviews with the priest in formal and informal discussion within the villages were conducted to gather the first hand information. The researcher gave much stress on the participation observation and has participated in social activities like festivals, rituals and sacrifices where the priest narrates myths and legends about the tribe. Still camera was also used for capturing photographs to support the field study and has used for corroborating the events, places and settings while analysing the thesis.
After the collection of the primary, secondary and field data sources, the researcher has processed all the samples and data in chronological order to establish a credible and worthy of the facts. The most general point and perhaps the most important was to examine the key aspects of the research design especially, data collected, data analysing and ethics question while preparing the present thesis. On the strength of all collected empirical data the researcher has employed qualitative data and no attempt had been made to employ a probability sample. Basing on this research methodology and tools, the researcher has made a critical interpretation and analysis of the various aspects of the Singpho tribe so as to establish a comprehensive history proper. The arguments and critical analysis has been corroborated with numerous maps, photographs and figures to authenticate the validity of facts as interpreted and analysed the thesis.

**Area of the Study and Periodisation**

The Singpho is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh who are at present inhabit in Lohit and Changlang Districts. The Changlang District lies between the latitude 26°40 and 27°40 North and Longitude 95°11 East and 97°10 East.\(^{47}\) The district was created on November 14, 1987 with Changlang as its headquarters by carving out from the present day Tirap District with an area covers about 4662 sq.km. Hence, the Singpho village in the Tirap District is considered as their oldest settlement place. After creation of Changlang District no Singpho is settled in the Tirap District and virtually re-grouped themselves in the new district. They settled sparsely in different places of

\(^{47}\) SAAP, *op.cit.*, p.10.
Lohit and Changlang Districts of the state. The major concentration of the Singpho population could be found at Bordumsa Administrative Sub-Division of the Changlang District. Bordumsa area has been taken as study area for the present research work. Under Bordumsa Administrative Circle the important villages are Bordumsa, Goju, Waketha, Wagun I, Wagun II and Inthem where the field study was conducted for the present work. The villages like Miao and Pisi under Miao Administrative Sub-Division and the villages like Piyong Village in Lohit District under Chowkham Administrative Circle and Namsai Sub-Division were also covered under the study area. The tribe occupied here the plain foothills of northern part of the district under Miao and Bordumsa Sub-Divisions along the Buri Dihing and Tengapani Rivers. A few Singpho villages are found on the banks of Tengapani River at Namsai and Chowkham Circle of Lohit District. While some are settled in the districts of Tinsukia, Sibsagar and Karbi Anglong in Assam. Like other tribes of the state, they are having a strong and distinct cultural homogeneity that bounded them together even in these days. They are largely settled at Changlang District by maintaining the pristine cultural practices and traditional institutions.

The period of the present study would be from 1800 to 1947 which significantly marked the limelight of the rise of tribe in the economics and political sphere of life in the Brahmaputra Valley. The reason for this periodisation is that the Singpho joined Moamaria rebellions in the first half of the eighteen century and by the beginning of nineteenth century, they proved to be a strong political ally to the Moamaria. Both the Ahom and Myanmarese power realised the tribe’s geo-political importance as the Singpho homestead
situated in between the Ahom and Myanmarese kingdoms. Therefore, in 1805
the Ahom Prime Minister Purnananda Burhagohain gifted the Singpho Chief
Bisa Nong a girl named Rangili in order to win him in Ahom side. However,
the Singpho Chief turned down his proposal by gifting away the girl to the
Myanmarese king Budawpayya and openly shows their political inclination to
Myanmar. The Singpho Chief Bisa Gam made a request to the Myanmarese
power on behalf of the Matak ruler Bharat Singha in the same year 1805,
which the Myanmarese power accepted. Although the Bisa Gam was a tribal
chief, his territory was inevitable for the Myanmarese power as the only way
back to Myanmar from Assam was via Singpho territory. During those days,
like other neighbouring tribes the Myanmarese also considered the Singpho as
turbulent frontier tribe inhabiting between the Ahom and the Myanmarese
kingdom. Moreover, if the Singpho joined with the Ahom then they would be
used against the Myanmarese, and hence the Myanmarese power was
compelled to accept the Bisa Gam’s appeal for military assistance to the
Moamaria. During the first half of the nineteen century, the Singpho joined
Myanmarese troops during the invasions of Assam and plunder the plains of
Assam. The Singpho plunderers carried away thousands of native plains
people and enslaved them later on in their homestead, which resulted in
intensification of institution of slavery in Singpho society.

Apart from political happenings, the tribe experience a sea change in
their socio-cultural life as the people began to adopt the Buddhism from the
eyearly part of the 1800. As such, since 1800 onwards a numbers of political and
social happenings could be observed. So far the early record of the Singpho
presence in the Brahmaputra Valley is concerned we have the only British records, which speaks about the Singpho raiding of Sadiya in 1825. It is said that the Singpho band shut-up the Sadiya Khowa Gohain within his stockades and attacked the Bor Senapati. Owing to which the Moamaria and Khampti pleaded the British for assistance which resulted in the direct encounter of the British with the Singpho.\textsuperscript{48} For instance, Francis Hamilton mentioned the Singpho and their territory in his work "Account of Assam" after a survey was undertaken from 1808 which was continued to 1814. The second version of the compilation was published in June 1820 in the Annals of Oriental Literature.\textsuperscript{49} So, it is found that the available British records mentioning about the Singpho are from the beginning of the nineteen century. Therefore, the periodisation is made from 1800 to 1947 when India as a whole attained Independence and the Singpho in particular from the colonial rule.

\textbf{Characterisation}

The present research work is an ethno-historical in nature and made an earnest attempt to reconstruct those aspects which were not adequately treated in the earlier works and tried to give an updated interpretation based on new findings with scientific and academic rigour. On the basis of collected data from the primary, secondary and tertiary sources the present study has been organised into seven chapters including introduction chapter. The first chapter is the introductory part of the thesis where in an attempt has been made to introduce the readers to subject matter by explaining the broad


\textsuperscript{49} Preface to second edition by S.K.Bhuyan, in Francis Hamilton, \textit{op.cit.} p.x.
context of the work and outlined briefly the essentials structure of the society. The chapter dealt with the geographical aspects, flora and fauna of the Singpho inhabited areas. Further, it also discussed about the physical features, language, review of literature and research methodology which is used for the study.

The second chapter throws light on various aspects of social life of the community. It also deals with social organisations and institutions like family system, clan system, marriage institution, social structure, position of women and institution of slavery. Besides these aspects, an attempt has been made to discuss about opium addiction among the people from economics and social perspectives. In this chapter an attempt has also been made to give a critical insight into the agent and mechanism in order to understand as to how the society underwent a changes and still able to continue the culture in the contemporary period.

The third chapter highlights the traditional subsistence livelihood activities of the people with reference to their agricultural productions, barter system, hunting, fishing, gathering, trade and trade routes. It also deals with their traditional trade items, materials and commodities which were used for trading with Myanmar, the plain people of Assam and later on with the British. The discovering of tea and the Singpho participation in the tea estate commercial activities; and coming of traders from different part of India to their homestead is also discussed extensively in this chapter.
While fourth chapter deals with the traditional political institutions and various other aspects of political life of the community. It also discussed the administration of justice and other important aspects, which supported the traditional political institution. The role and status of the chief along with composition and function of the village council is elaborately discussed in this chapter. Other important political aspects like customary laws, oath and ordeals system and according of punishment to guilty persons are discussed in the chapter. The role of slaves and commoners as militia of the chief's defence mechanism in the village who played a deterrent role in the safety and security of the citizen has been elaborately illustrated here.

While chapter five deals with religious practices along with the indigenous religious institution prevailing among the people. The role of the indigenous priest, Buddhist monks, traditional and Buddhist festivals have been discussed vividly with illustration. The chapter also attempted to examine the indigenous religious practices by highlighting the nature of rituals practices and facing threat from the alien cultures and religions. The chapter further discussed how an embracing of the Buddhism affected the traditional way of life among the people and how they could maintain both the Buddhism and indigenous religion simultaneously in the village-city-state.

The chapter six of the work is devoted to examine the British-Singpho Relations from 1825-1947 and subsequent unfolding of political events after annexation of the Brahmaputra Valley by the colonial power. Besides the British-Singpho relations the chapter also discussed about the British-Singpho relations as backdrop of the British policy towards the tribe.
The conclusion chapter is devoted to summarise the interpretation and analysis made in all the chapters of the study and attempted to give new findings on the subject. Based on the collected empirical data and source materials relating to any new findings and interpretations has been summarised here to throw a new knowledge to existing knowledge on history and culture of the Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh.