Chapter III
Traditional Subsistence Livelihood Activities

The traditional agricultural practice is the mainstay of subsistence economy of the Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh. As we know, the most of traditional economy of the tribes in the state is largely influenced by nature of geographical factors and land pattern. In the lines of this reality Verrier Elwin writes that; "...the greatest problem facing the agricultural Department is the hard, strange, hostile environment, with its heavy rainfall and steep hillsides."\textsuperscript{130} As a whole, the state is mountainous terrain, which determines the development of agricultural practices and is added by lack of plain area derived people to practiced \textit{slash-and-burn} method of shifting agriculture. The Singpho are largely settled in plain areas of the state and generally practiced a traditional method of shifting agriculture to produce the barest necessity of food grains. It may be stated that their homestead is often affected by seasonal flooding during the months of monsoon which caused a deposition of sands and pebbles leading to unsuitable for agricultural purpose.

Besides the geographical harsh terrain most of the plain land are placed under reserved forest by the government restricting for any cultivation in the areas. As such people are finding difficulties for alternative suitable agricultural land in their territories. Hence, by describing the paucity of suitable land for cultivation B.K.Roy Burman once stated that; "...during the British rule this land was affected by expansion of tea plantation and creation

\textsuperscript{130} Verrier Elwin, \textit{op.cit.}, p.76.
of reserved forest.” Other than geographical constraints and restriction imposed by the government, the tea plantation which had started during colonial period is tremendously affecting the expanding of agricultural activities in the areas. Due to this obvious ground reality, there are very limited cultivatable lands available for the people causing less production from the agricultural sector. The total forest area of the district is about 3,200 sq.km of which reserved forest covers an area of about 2574.20 sq.km leaving a marginal portion of virgin forest for the community. Despite of less land for cultivation, the Singpho are considered as an advanced agriculturist like other tribes of the state. Their method of preserving seeds were said to have very systematic and farmers from different parts of upper Assam used to collect their seeds from the Singpho. Before they migrated to Assam they lived in hilly region of Myanmar, where they practised only shifting cultivation by using *slash-and-burn* methods of clearing the jungle for sowing seeds. This method of agricultural practice is ascertained by one of the informants in these words:

Before the Singpho migrated to Assam they were living in hilly areas of Putao region which is in Hukang Valley in Myanmar. During those days they practiced only shifting cultivation and did not practice wet rice cultivation due to lack of plain areas in their homesteads.

Since they lived in hilly area they do not have enough plain areas for wet-rice cultivation (WRC) in Myanmar, therefore they were not knowing the

134 Phuin Nongsia Singpho, 46 years, Local intellectual, Bordumsa town, Bordumsa Administrative Circle, Changlang District, interviewed on June 24, 2012. (Hereafter abbreviated as PNSI).
knowledge of wet-rice cultivation method of agricultural practice. It is maintained that after they migrated to their present homesteads only then they began to practiced wet-rice cultivation at their settlement areas in low-lying lands of Noa-Dihing, Buri-Dihing and Nampuk Rivers banks. These low-lying lands of river banks are largely marshy lands with fertile soil served as suitable for agricultural activities including practice of wet-rice cultivation in the areas. However, not all the low-lying areas are fertile and hence, wet-rice cultivation is generally practiced in limited areas, which are sparingly divided among the people for their sustainable subsistence economic life. Wet-rice cultivation is also practised at other places but it is limited to a few field inhabited by the Singpho.\textsuperscript{135} Their agricultural practice is not employed by any modern technology as a result they could produce only for their domestic consumption despite of fertile soil.

By and large their agricultural economy is highly labour intensive and traditional methods of practice devoid of using modern technology. The limited food grains produced from this traditional method of \textit{slash-and-burn} agricultural practice is supplemented by hunting, fishing, tapping and gathering. Before they took up for agricultural practices they used to catch elephant for trade and their economy was mainly based on hunting and gathering about which Chaturbuj Sahu noted that; "...traditionally the Singpho are hunter and gatherers."\textsuperscript{136} Besides hunting, they used to collect some seasonally forest produced edible items like yams, fruits, leafy vegetables and bamboo shoot which supplemented their required regular

\textsuperscript{135} GOIGAP, \textit{op.cit.}, p.101.
\textsuperscript{136} Chaturbuj Sahu, \textit{op.cit.} p.64.
diets. In this traditional subsistence livelihood activities of the tribe the nature played a vital role by providing seasonal forest products which served as safety valve for the livelihood of the people. Besides these products, the forest also provides a numerous raw material required for construction of houses, granaries, village road, bridges and other essential materials for livelihood. The natural perennial water supply from nearby streams provides the agricultural field a required irrigation for wet-rice cultivation without employing the modern technology and tool. Traditionally, they used to developed dam up nearby streams with the help of bamboo tube to irrigate their field in the village during cultivation. About this method of irrigation S.D.Choudhury noted that; "...bamboo tubes are used for the purpose of irrigation on the hill-sides."137 It is observed that in present day also there are no irrigational canals in the area so the cultivators are solely depended upon rainfall for irrigation for their agricultural fields.

A few wealthy individuals could build an irrigation canal for their own field but most of the farmers depend on natural rainfall.138 The cultivators whose field is nearby natural streams used the streams for irrigation of their fields with indigenous methods and techniques. Even in these days also the same old techniques and methods are used by the cultivators in the interior villages. Like other tribes of the state, the staple food of the Singpho is rice. Besides cultivation of rice, they grow varieties of vegetables like mustard leaf, spinach, onion, chilli, brinjal and potato for their domestic consumption. The

137 GOIGAP, op.cit., P.103.
138 SGSI, op.cit.
following table indicates the area and production of various crops in Changlang District.

Table No.3.1: Area and Production of Various Crops in Changlang District (Area in Hectare, Production in M.T. & Yield rate in M.T. Par Hectare.) last 2 years.\textsuperscript{139}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL.No</th>
<th>Name of the crops</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area(HQ)</td>
<td>Production in M.T</td>
<td>Yield (HQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>16825</td>
<td>52690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>1240</td>
<td>1364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Millet</td>
<td>2205</td>
<td>2161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pulses</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Potato</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>3816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oil seed</td>
<td>4527</td>
<td>3471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Spices &amp; Chilies</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td>7349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>7155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other Crops</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Turmeric</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Coarse grain</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28997</td>
<td>79968</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the early days, they used to collect tapioca, sweet potato and yams from the forest but nowadays these are being grown in their fields and kitchen garden.

\textsuperscript{139} SHBCD, op.cit., p.21.
The tribe's early form of agricultural implements were conventional and rudimentary in nature leading to low scale productions from their agricultural fields. The most common agricultural implements were dao, spade, hand hoe, ploughshare, weeding implements made of iron or bamboo and a crude type of garden rake. As such with these traditional implements it was not possible to do large scale farming and wanting for modern advance implements to produce a surplus products from the fields. Nonetheless, in comparison to other tribes of the state the Singpho were considered for using advance agricultural implements in agriculture.\textsuperscript{140} Despite of using traditional implements and conventional method of farming, the people could still produce a sufficient food grains which served as self-reliance economic life in the villages.

Reasons for this self-reliance productivity were stated to be improved in the traditional farming and fertility of the soil in the course of time. The low-lands areas occupied by the Singpho was extremely fertile, consisting almost entirely of a surface of rich alluvial earth, on a gradually basis.\textsuperscript{141} It was reported that the Singpho used the technique of ploughing the field with ploughshare fitted with iron tips for tilling the soil. This was substantiated by the writing of J.E. Gray who said that; "...bullocks are not use in the plough; this is done entirely by buffaloes, the females only being employed."\textsuperscript{142}

Besides buffalo and ox some people who possessed elephant, used to employ the beast for tilling their field. It is said that in the early days employing of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[140] GOIGAP, opcit., p.104.
  \item[142] J.Errol Gray's report on Trip to and Beyond Bor Khamti Country During the Year 1892-93, 1894, in Assam Secretariat, Arunachal Pradesh State Archive (APSA), p.9.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
elephant for ploughing field was a common practice among the Singpho. However, after the government clamped restrictions in catching wild elephant a very few people could owned elephant. So, the elephant was not commonly used for agricultural purpose in the village. However, it is told that even in these days also the elephant are used by a few farmers for ploughing the agricultural field by using a large size of ploughshare for tilling the field. In the early days, the people used the Myanmarese made ploughshare which was broader than the local ploughshare. So, the people prefer to use Myanmar made ploughshare, as it enable the farmer to till a large area.

Besides ploughing of agricultural field, elephants were used for other livelihood oriented activities like pulling of logs from the jungles. Although, these days very rarely use the elephants for ploughing purpose due to declining number of elephants in the village. In the past, the people could keep elephant as much as they could catch and trained, which was sometime used for ploughing purpose in the field. The community is having a great passion for keeping elephants with them irrespective of high and low. They are having a strong traditional form of technique for catching wild elephants from the jungle that is known as "mugukiho" (elephant trapping) and elephant is called gui. Since pre-colonial time they used to catch wild elephant for domestic and commercial purpose, but later on they were exposed to the colonial administration leading to catching elephant for trade and commercial purpose. Therefore, elephants played a vital role in the Singpho traditional

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143 Ongdu Jum Singpho, 36 years, Pisi village, Miao Sub-Division, Miao Administrative Circle, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on September 4, 2011. (Hereafter abbreviated as OJSI).
economy and even in these days, it is used for transportation, collecting firewood, pulling big logs from the jungle and ploughing the field.\textsuperscript{144} Immediately after catching the elephant, a name is given first which is followed by systematic training of elephant till it is tamed. In the initial stage of giving training, a trainer repeatedly calls each elephant by their names so that they could remember their names. Gradually, elephant learn to response their names and began to perform the task for which they are being trained. Traditionally, elephants formed a vital work force for its owner’s family as they could perform task right from bringing firewood to tilling of agricultural field in the village. Perhaps, this might necessitated to consider elephant as one of the important movable assets of the people in the villages.

Possession of elephant among the Singpho was reported by J. Errol Gray; "...he owns three or four elephants and had a newly caught one in training."\textsuperscript{145} However, during the colonial period catching elephants was declared illegal and banned officially for good, which has a tremendous impact on domestication of elephants among the tribe. Moreover, due to rapid urbanisation and clearing of the forest for human settlement led to disruption of elephants habitats and illegal poaching of tuskers affected the breeding of this magnificent animals. Besides possession of elephant, a wealth of a person consists of slave, land, beads, cattle, Myanmarese gun and gongs. In the early days, there was no currency available but all the transaction of economic activities was done on largely by barter and exchange system. So, wealth of individual was measured in term of kind not in cash, which was reported by

\textsuperscript{144} IGSI, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{145} J. Errol Gray, op.cit. p.9.
one of the travellers; "...he is reputed to be wealthy, that is for a Singpho, with whom ready cash is generally a rare commodity, their riches consisting in slaves and copper gongs."\textsuperscript{146} Before the introduction of monetization of traditional economy the tribe practised a barter and exchange mode of transactions system for all practical economic activities in the village-city-state. They generally bartered their wrap skirt and bag with the Tangsa fishing net as equivalent cost for each items in the villages.\textsuperscript{147} Likewise, their barter and exchange economic relations was maintained with neighbouring tribes and with the people of Assam.

As such, the Mishmi used to bartered opium with the Singpho to get Myanmarese items like Myanmarese cloth, \textit{dao}, metal bells, knife and gun. It is said that in the past the Singpho usually procured opium from the Taraon and Kaman Mishmi who cultivated opium in their villages.\textsuperscript{148} Even in these days, they obtain opium from the Mishmi who still cultivate opium plant in their areas despite of government banned. As we know that in the past, chiefs generally possessed large numbers of slaves whom equated with property and formed a workforce in the family. In some cases, these slaves were given as fine or mortgaged for the offence committed by a master and were employed as warriors for their masters. We are told that those people who possessed a large numbers of slaves even were even sold to other masters by which they earn huge profits. While observing the slave trade practiced among the Singpho H.K.Barpujari rightly noted that:

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} LLSI, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{148} GOIGAP, op.cit., p.134.
The captives became their slaves whose numbers increase in manifold so they began to sell the unwanted slaves. The number of captives carried off amounted to many thousands, of these the great part was sold to the hill Singphos, Khamtis and Shams etc.\(^{149}\)

In the later part of 19\(^{th}\) century, the colonial administration abolished the slavery system in the areas and emancipation of captives were implemented. This abolition of slavery system from the Singpho society has caused a deep economic impact on the community. Thus, nowadays it is observed that due to decline of numbers of elephant and abolition of slaves from the society the kith and kin formed a major workforce for the tribe. The relatives extend their cooperation during agricultural season in reciprocal manner as and when each party wants. They used to hire labourers for all menial works including agriculture and other household chores. Some of the family keep labourers in their field on share-cropping system to divide the total produced of the field.\(^{150}\) In the past, they used to have a large numbers of slaves at their houses to do all menial works including cultivation of agricultural field and hardly hire any labours from outside. After abolition of the slavery, they began to hire labourers from outside for all kind of works in their houses in the villages.

**Forest Resources**

The forest is open to all villagers for gathering, hunting, fishing and trapping. There is no individual claiming of owning any particular area in the forest. The common village property that is owned by a village as a whole is the nearby forest area, mountain, hills, streams, gorges and rivers. These

\(^{149}\) H.K.Barpujari, *op.cit.*, p.67.

\(^{150}\) SGSI, *op.cit.*
common properties of a village are regarded as natural resources ground for all bonafide villagers. These natural resources are only permitted to use for a concerned villagers which outsiders are not allowed. The tribe resented any kind of trespasses by outsiders and the village authority maintained the rules relating to the village boundary strictly and firmly. The village territory has boundary which is defined by natural geographical features like hills, deep gorges, streams, mounds, river and narrow passes in the forest. The land within the boundary of the villages' elephant, cow, buffalo, goat and other domesticated animals are allowed to move freely and graze throughout the year.\footnote{Ibid.} For using the community forestland neither any restriction is imposed nor any tax is to pay by the villagers.

Except the agricultural land and some portion of land, which are earmarked for construction of houses and kitchen garden are owned by village in common. As, the tribe practiced a subsistence agriculture needs to largely depended on available forest resources like wild animals, roots, fruits and leafy vegetables to supplement their meagre food production. Besides forest products, their livelihood was also supplemented by aquatic produce like fish, shrimp, crab and varieties of aquatic species which were available nearby their villages streams and rivers. Apart from the agricultural production of food grains the people used to go for hunting, foraging and fishing to supplement their required protein diets. They were also known for catching wild elephant for domestic and economic purposes.\footnote{Tapan Kumar M.Barua, op.cit., p.39.} Even in these days, the Singpho are considered as an expert elephant catcher among the
tribes in the state. During traditional hunting expedition, they generally used bow, arrow, gun, spear and dao for hunting barking deer, gazelle, birds, squirrel and other small games. Sometimes they hunted big games like tigers and wild boars by organising a group hunting expedition of experts and experienced hunters from different villages. This kind of group hunting expedition was noted by Colonel Woodthorpe in these lines:

A party of Singpho passed through tiger-hunting. A tiger had killed one and severely mauled another of a party of Singpho traders between Kumki and Dapha River. The men comprising the party were all well armed with spears and daos, and had 13 old flintlock muskets with them. On being asked, I gave the men a little ammunition.

In the past villages usually situated near jungle, thus sometimes they had to face havoc due to presence of tigers in nearby forest areas. These tigers used to kill the domesticated animals and sometime even attacked the human. It was reported that a tiger had killed many villagers during early days in the remote villages causing a lot of panic among the people. Due to their unsophisticated weapons, they could not hunt down such ferocious animals so, they preferred to go for group hunting expedition in case of hunting a big game like tiger or leopard. Booty of such game was either shared among the hunters or sometime consumed the meat by organising a community feast. Other than group hunting the people also preferred to community fishing in which all the villagers used to participate without any discrimination. With the passage of time, it is observed, that there is changed in execution of hunting, trapping and fishing among the villagers. Now the people prefer to go for individual

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153 OJSI, op.cit.
154 Colonel Woodthorpe’s Account of Colonel Woodthorpe’s Expedition to Bor Khanti 1884-85, in Assam Secretariat, 1886, p.3.
hunting rather than group hunting and catch of game is either shared with kith and kin or sell in the local market. It is seen that these days’ people usually hunt for commercial purpose and not for organising any community feast.\textsuperscript{155} It is stated that when barter activities was in vogue among the people these hunters used to exchange their game flesh for essential food commodities from other villages. Hence, in the early days the hunters occupied important position like a priest in the community. Being strong enough to hunt and could provide meat to his fellow villagers the hunters generally commanded a considerable degree of respect in the society.

Moreover, the people considered him as brave and courageous person who could protect them from any outsiders attack or animals like tiger.\textsuperscript{156} The hunters generally shared his game with whole village, as there were no commercial activities in the absence of monetised economy. It is maintained that in the bygone days people organised trapping and fishing for sheer consumption; and sometime for a common community feast in the village. A condition is not the same as it was earlier these days the hunter solely hunts for commercial motive not for any community feast or social purposes. It is told that rituals and rites were performed before any hunting expedition was undertaken but these days no such rituals and prayers are followed rather hunting spree are observed. The only restriction for a hunter imposed by the village authority is that he should not go beyond the village boundary. Despite of changes in hunting, trapping and fishing techniques people still considered it as an important part of their subsistence livelihood activities.

\textsuperscript{155} MNSI, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{156} SGSI, \textit{op.cit.}
Besides agricultural activities hunting, fishing, trapping and gatherings substantiated their subsistence traditional economy. It would seem that people were depended on abundance of forest resources like wild animals, roots, fruits, leafy vegetables and aquatic produce of streams and rivers of village vicinity where they lived in. There is no doubt that the Singpho depended on forest resources for major part of their daily consumption in addition to their subsistence agricultural production.

Even after adopting intensive agricultural practices hunting, trapping, gathering and fishing continue to be an important livelihood activities among the Singpho till these days. The majority of villagers are an expert hunters and skilled trappers who used to employ different methods of hunting, fishing and trapping. The hunters used common hunting weapons, but sometime they poisoned the arrowheads made up of iron in order to kill a big game and ferocious animal. They also employed other methods of hunting like baiting, stalking, setting traps and laying down of poison in a particular area. While individual hunter employed the technique of stalking and trapping which was easy to execute and catch the game. Many hunters employed different hunting methods according to situation and kind of game they aimed to hunt down. While hunting big game like elephant they used a kind of trapping technique and dig a large pit to match the size of the animal. The hunters go after a young elephant and make a loud sound by beating some metal instruments so that the elephant could run out of fear towards the pit and fall into the pit.\textsuperscript{157} The hunting of elephant required a large numbers of hunters and weapons.

\textsuperscript{157} LLSI, op.cit.
Besides trapping of big game individual hunters also used to employ other trapping technique to hunt small animals. In the early days, the Singpho associated with success and failures of hunting expedition with religion and rites. Hence, people observed many taboos from beginning of a hunting expedition to till hunters returned safely with their game at home.\textsuperscript{158} Before organising hunting expedition, the hunter including all villagers used to conduct a ritual in order to seek blessing from the hunting deities living in the jungle.\textsuperscript{159} The people believed that if they invoked the spirit then a hunter shall be blessed with strength, speed and swiftness to hunt down the game.

If the hunting deities are not satisfied with ritual, then a hunter will become lazy and cannot chase any animal to hunt down.\textsuperscript{160} In these hunting, trapping and foraging women did not play much role expect preparing food and drinks for these hunters at house. Even in cooking also, women were restricted and those who were having her period were not allowed to prepare food and drinks for the hunters. These days such taboos and restrictions are virtually absent among the tribe as practice of hunting also getting declined day by day however in the remote villages such practices are still prevailed. Besides hunting the Singpho were also known for their skill in blacksmith and process of smelting of iron.\textsuperscript{161} Even though their smithy technique was in the form of rudimentary, they used to produce quality implements and weapons for their day-to-day requirements. The blacksmith produced were dao, spears,

\textsuperscript{158} IGSI, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{159} LLISI, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{160} MNSI, \textit{op.cit.}
crossbow with arrows, which were known for its durability.\textsuperscript{162} It is observed that nowadays there is no blacksmith shop in Singpho area due to availability of readymade implements in the market regarding which one of the informants said that:

Nowadays people buy implements directly from market and no one is interested in buying local made implements. Moreover, from market people could purchase good quality implements in cheaper rate. Hence, the business seems to be non-profitable and it is an extremely laborious work due to which no one is interested in blacksmith business.\textsuperscript{163}

Similarly, the women were also known for weaving skill since time immemorial. These days also women used to weave their outfit and are known as one of the best weaver among tribal women of the state. They sell their weaving products like wrap skirt, waistband, turban and bag at nearby local markets and support their family income in the houses.

**Pre-Colonial Trade Activities**

Apart from foregoing discussion of subsistence livelihood activities, the Singpho used to trade with the Myanmarese and the Chinese traders. In this trans-border trade transaction, the traders followed a certain trade routes that were used since early time by the tribe. The pass through \textit{Shucndanggi Range} provided intercourse between the Singpho and the Myanmarese.\textsuperscript{164} There were number of passes (routes) through which the Singpho traders transacted their trade with Myanmar and Tibet (China). These traders had direct commercial contacts with the Myanmarese traders through passes, which run through \textit{Shucndanggi Range}. It is stated that in the pre-colonial period all the

\textsuperscript{162} GOIGAP, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{163} MNSI, \textit{op.cit.}

trade activities were transacted at a place called Bhamo in Myanmar which was the busiest commercial centres at that time. In general, some tribe of the state had trade relations with neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Myanmar and Tibet (China). These tribes carried out a trade relations with these countries according to their proximity to international boundary by following a traditional routes or passes. The tribes like the Monpa, the Khamba, the Memba, the Apatani, the Nyishi, the Tagin and the Galo who belonged to western zone of the state had trade relations with Tibet (China) and Bhutan since early days by using passes through their areas of the state. These tribes largely used these passes to carry out their trades with the traders of Tibet and Bhutan with varieties of exports and imports items quarterly or annually. Likewise, the tribes inhabiting eastern zone of Arunachal Pradesh like the Nocte, the Tangsa, the Khampti and the Singpho also had trade relations with Myanmar by using several traditional routes (passes) at their respective territories. Among the tribes of eastern zone, the Singpho were the most active traders who used to act as intermediaries between traders of Assam and Myanmar. Due to prolonged trade relations with these countries, some degree of influence in socio-cultural lives could be observed among the tribes of the state.

The influence could be observed even these days as most of the tribes in the state value and use the Tibetan and the Myanmarese items like beads, bells, gongs, swords, plates, bowl and tiara as their precious legendary

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properties of the family. In the context of the Singpho, it is stated that they maintained a trade relations with Myanmar and China due to their cultural affinity and racial proximity. Since they had migrated from Myanmar, the tribe did not face any difficulties in transacting commercial relations with the Myanmarese traders. Besides Myanmar, sometime the Singpho maintained trade relations with the Chinese traders because a certain section of the Singpho still inhabited in the Yunnan Province of modern China. These Singpho traders from Yunnan Province also participated in the trans-border trade activities by selling their stuffs in Bhamo market of Myanmar. On this account, it became easier for the Singpho to carry out a regular trade relations with China and Myanmar in this part of the country. These traders used to imports materials like old Royal Myanmarese coins, dao, cloth, metal piece, sword, ornaments, fishing nets, jade, amber and gun. These imported items had a good market in India so in return traders sell these items to their neighbouring tribes of the state and Assam. As we know, the Nocte, the Tangsa, the Khampti and other plain tribes of Assam highly valued the Myanmarese made items like gun, beads, dao, coin, gong, traditional outfits, metal bowl and metal plate.

These traders earned huge profit from this trans-border trade as they buy these items from Myanmar bazaar at low price and sell them at high price in the Indian markets. The traders seem to be benefitted by earning high profit from the triangular trade transaction between India, China and Myanmar. A few markets of these countries were connected to some traditional routes of places like Sadiya, Hookong Valley, Mogang and Bhamo up to Ava and
Yunnan in south-west China.\textsuperscript{166} It is observed that the Singpho traders carried out a profitable trade with Myanmar since early days. Most probably, it could be because of easy accessibility to country where they could purchase commodities at cheaper rates from Myanmar markets. Traders from different places including the Chinese regularly visited the Myanmarese trade centres in general and Bhamo in particular.\textsuperscript{167} These Chinese traders including the Singpho traders of the Yunnan Province had good market for their stuffs in Myanmar so they were interested in having trade with Myanmar. While Singpho traders were interested in buying Chinese items that were highly demanded in India. They used to buy the Chinese items from Bhamo market in Myanmar and sometimes directly imported the items like jackets, thread, shoes, undergarments and cloths from China. These stuffs had to be brought through a numbers of market point before it reached to the Nampong market, the present day administrative circle of Changlang District of the state.\textsuperscript{168} From Nampong the traders purchased the items and brought them to Ledo, Jairampur, Jagun and Margherita markets and sale the items directly to customers. These customers were largely from neighbouring tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam who were random to visit these markets.

Other than neighbouring tribes, the Myanmar traders also used to buy some of these items from Ledo market at cheap rate and then they sell it back in Myanmar especially in Myitchina bazaar at higher rate.\textsuperscript{169} These traders from Myanmar also buy Chinese products from the Singpho traders, as it was

\textsuperscript{166} Gurudas Das, \textit{Ibid.}, p.47.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Ibid.}, p.46.
\textsuperscript{168} LLSI, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{169} IGSI, \textit{op.cit.}
easier and cheaper than to go to China for purchasing these products. While discussing trade network of the Singpho one of the informants said in these lines:

The Singpho traders used to import Chinese products and sold it to their neighbouring tribes and Myanmarese traders. Traditionally, markets like Ledo, Margherita and Lekhapani were very important trade centre for the Singpho and the Myanmarese traders.\textsuperscript{170}

It is seen that nowadays because of government restrictions the Singpho of the state could not have direct trade relations with Myanmar and China. However, Indo-Myanmar border area in Nampong Circle of Changlang District a trade fair is organised every alternative year to facilitate the traders from both the countries to sell their goods and products. In this trans-border trade fair the Myanmarese traders sells their goods like cloths, garments, bags, dao, amber, jade and timber products which are great of demand in Indian market.\textsuperscript{171} The tribes of the state especially who inhibit in the eastern zone are interested in this trans-border trade fair. The people could purchase their day-to-day requirements goods and commodities, from this biannually held trans-border trade fair which are not available with them.

\textbf{Trade Relations with Plains and Neighbouring Tribes}

It is stated, before migrating to Assam, the Singpho used to maintain a trade relations with plains people of Assam who inhabited adjusting to Indo-Myanmar border. Before introduction of monetised economy, the Singpho said to have practiced barter economy with plains people of Assam and other neighbouring tribes. It may be noted here that during the exchange and barter

\textsuperscript{170} LLSI, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{171} JKSI, \textit{op.cit.}
economy system trade was transacted not for any profit motive rather it was to obtain direct goods and services for their essential requirements. In strict sense of the term their traditional economy was not driven by profit-oriented on the ground that trade was transacted largely on the basis of barter and exchange mode. In early days, like the Singpho, other tribes of the state also procured their essential commodities through barter and exchange system without fixing a specific price and place of exchange. Before money economy was introduced to tribal areas traders from highland and plains met and exchanged each other’s wares on a barter basis.\textsuperscript{172} In this trans-mountain barter activity, many tribes come down to plains of Assam from very faraway places to barter their items. It is noted that some of tribe’s traders who hailed from far distant do not know the trade routes and location of trade centres in plains. Hence, sometime they need assistance from other tribes who have better knowledge about the routes leading to trade centres situated in the plains of Assam. As such, some tribes like the Khamba, the Nyishi, the Mishing, the Mishmi, the Khampti and the Singpho acted as intermediaries between different groups of traders.\textsuperscript{173} Besides doing the trans-mountain trade activities the Singpho also acted as intermediaries for the other traders of the areas.

In order to carry out successful trade these passes acted as gateway for the hill traders to reach at exchange centres in the plains. It is found that sometimes hill tribes attacked plains people which had disrupted the trans-

\textsuperscript{173} J.B.Ganguly, \textit{ibid.}, p.13.
mountain trade activity. In order to tackle such situation of disturbances the Ahom rulers introduced the *posa system* for the hill people. The *posa system* was a payment for annual grant in kind to the chiefs of concerned tribes as a *quid pro quo*. In return, the Ahom Government also received certain forest products as goodwill tributes from the hill people participating in the trade activities. The Ahom were also concern about smooth conduct of the foothill trade activities in the plains during their reign. Later, during the colonial period the British administration continued the legacy of the Ahom by conducting trade fairs in the foothills of Assam in order to popularise monetised trade economy among the hill men. The hill tribes of furthest east namely the Adi, the Mishmi, the Khampti, the Singpho, the Tangsa, the Nocte and the Wancho were resorted to Sadiya fair which was conducted in Sadiya Frontier Tract. The colonial administration strengthened the commercialising of trade activities by continuing trade fairs at foothills, which facilitated the hill tribes to come closer to one another during trading at trade fair.

During reign of the Ahom, the tribesmen brought stuffs like rubber, wax, musk, amber, ivory, rhinoceros horn and took in return stuffs like eri-cloth, broad cloth, rice, cattle, opium, iron pan, brass utensils and beads. The Singpho traders brought stuffs like Chinese cloth, iron implements, Myanmarese metal stuffs, silver, jade and amber. They maintained trade relations with plains of Assam since the Ahom days and used to collect silver.

copper and lead from across the Patkoi Range for the Ahom. Before monetisation of barter economy, the Singpho maintained their barter trade with neighbouring tribes, people of Assam and the Myanmarese traders. Along with the Singpho traders other tribes of their homestead also had trade relations with Myanmar which S.D.Chowdhury noted that; "...in exchange of handloom products, tea leaves, salt, beads, etc., the people of this district imported from Burma daos, iron implements, fishing nets, spears, penknives and also Burmese garments." It is stated that even these days some degree of barter activity is done in these items in the villages among the people. Apart from this trade connection, the Singpho used to purchase salt from the Nocte who is one of their neighbours and sale it in the Bhamo market. We are told, there were a numbers of traditional salt springs were found in the Nocte area so they regularly supplied salt to the people of Assam. Still there are numbers of brine wells and salt springs are found in the Nocte inhabited areas. It is said that during the pre-colonial period, the Nocte of Tirap District supplied salt to all other traders including the people of Assam. The brine wells were once the main source of salt in the Tirap Frontier Tract.

The people of adjoining areas entirely depended on the salt produced by the Nocte of Tirap. This is not the same situation these days because of availability of factory product salt in the local markets so the people are no longer interested in extracting salt from these brine wells by traditional methods. With the development of means of communication and

178 GOIGAP, op.cit., p.133.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., p.124.
transportation, salt is brought from different parts of India, thus brine-wells and salt springs remained ideal these days. Nevertheless, regarding the Ahom and the Singpho trade relations during pre-colonial period there is no systematic and detail account available, however, some evidences show that they had a trade connection with the Ahom before they migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley. Since early days, Myanmar was known for its rich natural resources like precious gems, stones, good quality of timber, salt springs, flora and fauna. Salt was found on the north and south sides of the valley.181 As such, traders could supply the required demand of salt at Bhamo market. The salt springs were found in Myanmar and hence the Singpho traders purchased at cheap price and sold it to their neighbouring tribes with higher rate. Apart from the salt trade, Myanmar was known for other valuable minerals like gold, silver, amber and jade which were found abundantly in the upper Myanmar while gold was found in large quantity in the Kamdup and Namkwun in Myanmar.182 Nowadays also, jade mines are found in a place called Hpakan in Kachin Province in the Upper Myanmar.

Platinum and some silver mines are also present in the north of the valley.183 It would seem that the Singpho traders could fetch huge profits by trading these precious minerals items with their neighbouring tribes for a long period of time. Due to limited flow of capital, most of the people were engaged in agricultural production activities rather than trading business. Despite of availability of precious minerals like gold, silver, amber and jade in

182 Ibid.
183 Ibid.
Myanmar the Singpho could not get themselves involved in commercial activities of these items. In fact, there were very few Singpho who engaged in trading activities of buying and selling items like ivory, opium, amber, jade, silver and gold. It is also observed in the last part of 19th century some of the Singpho started in doing rubber and opium trade. It is stated that among the frontier tribes, the Singpho traders had developed a lucrative trade in opium with Myanmarese.\footnote{Gurudas Das, \textit{op.cit.}, p.46.} In the network of rubber trade, the Singpho participated as raw rubber collectors and sold it to rubber traders at nearby markets. In the villages like Samun, Wakhet and Bisa rubber collectors sold raw rubbers after tapping it directly from jungle.\footnote{GOIGAP, \textit{op.cit.}, p.133.} In the latter half of 19th century rubber trade gradually declined in the North East India due to introduction of bidding system in rubber trade. The other reasons which led to decline of rubber trade were attributed to traditional and unscientific methods of tapping which was uneconomical and quality of rubber was not up to the mark.

As early in 1879, the government \textit{mahals} (rubber collection centre) were auctioned off to highest bidders with open competition.\footnote{H.K.Barpujari, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 61.} Moreover, during the colonial period, Indian rubber, which was commonly known as \textit{caoutchouc}, was discovered and large-scale plantation started. It is said that this newly discovered rubber was of better quality than the Singpho traders used to collect from jungle. In the course of time, many rubber traders from Assam also started to do rubber collection business, which affected the rubber collectors of the tribe. Despite of stiff competition, a few Singpho could
continue small-scale rubber trade within their homesteads, to eke out their livelihood. Besides rubber, trade of the Singpho was opium, which was in vogue in the villages.\textsuperscript{187} They had an opium trade relations with Myanmarese traders and procured opium for their personal consumption from the neighbouring tribe Digaru Mishmi. It is maintained that other than opium trade, the Singpho also practised a slave trade since pre-colonial period in their territories. In the early days when they practiced barter economy the slaves were items of barter trade among the traders.\textsuperscript{188} We are told that during Myanmarese invasions, the Singpho raided the plains of Assam and carried away a large numbers of captive whom they later on enslaved and kept them for in breeding. As the population of slaves grew rapidly some of them got settled in the Myanmar territory while many were sold even too far off China.\textsuperscript{189} It is maintained that practice of slave trade was considered as very lucrative business especially doing in Myanmar by the tribe.

As such, the slave trade was rampant in Myanmar until the colonial administration abolished the institution of slavery system in India and particularly in the Singpho territory. During the pre-colonial period, the Singpho considered slaves as their movable property and even sold them as trade item to neighbours. These sold slaves and other slaves in Singpho territory were used as load carriers to the British officials whenever required.\textsuperscript{190} When the tribe came into direct contact with the colonial power,

\textsuperscript{188} LWSC, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{189} H.K.Barpujari, \textit{op.cit.}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{190} Amrendra Kumar Thakur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.19.
the institution of slavery system was rigorously suppressed by the British administration and taken a several measures to free the captive people. In this way, the practice of slave trade was gradually checked in the Singpho areas although they still kept domestic help in their houses as family members.

**Subsistence Livelihood Activities During Colonial Period**

After the treaty of Yandaboo, the colonial power virtually controlled the major portions of the Brahmaputtra Valley and reduced to mere vassalage of the last king of the Ahom. The annexation of the Brahmaputtra Valley by the colonial power was driven by their sole objective to expand the economic activities, exploring of the natural resources and to understand geography and ethnology of the region. As such, the East India Company had undertaken a numbers of survey and exploration mission in North East India to understand the first hand knowledge on people and places. One of such survey report stated that; "...the surveys would be a very good opportunity for making many useful inquiries and is a matter on many accounts most desirable to be undertaken." This surveys were done in order to extend their economic activities to Myanmar, China and other East Asian countries. It would seem that in order to materialize this economic policy the colonial administration had to established friendly relations with the eastern frontier tribes including the Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh. As Arunachal Pradesh occupied a unique position of commanding routes to Tibet, China as well as Burma. Hence, the people of Arunachal Pradesh become inevitable in the

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191 Proceedings on the extension of the Provisions of Act XXXIII, Shillong, October 5, 1872, Judicial Department, in Bengal secretariat office.

process of commercial expansion of the East India Company due to its geo-
political factors. Most of the important traditional passes and routes, which
lead to Myanmar, Tibet (China), and mainland China, run through Arunachal
Pradesh. So, after detail conducting of surveys, the colonial power realized the
importance to maintain cordial relations with tribes of the state in general and
the Singpho in particular. The Singpho homestead also commands trade
routes leading to Myanmar and China. The line of trade after Sadiya passes
via Bisa run across the Patkoi Range of mountains up to valley of Hukang.
This route leads to markets at Mookong* (Mougang) which is situated in a
navigable branch of Irrawady River called river Namyang. As such, the
British were compelled to establish peaceful and friendly relations with the
Singpho as they were planning to expand their commercial connection to
China via Myanmar. Besides geographical significance of the Singpho
homestead, the people have good knowledge about the routes due to their
prolonged trade relations with Myanmar. Moreover, the tribe could provide
load carriers to the British officers and other traders on their way to Myanmar
and China. Thereby, the British administration became concerned in
establishing cordial relations with the Singpho, which Francis Jenkins once
noted that:

These districts formed the settlements of the Khamptis until they were
driven in before the Singphos, but since their expulsion from them the
communication depends upon the goodwill of the Singphos and cannot be
considered available for extensive traffic until the later people submit to
our paramount authority.  

193 John M'Cosh, op.cit., p.11.
* Mookong meant for ‘Mougang’ in Myanmar.
194 Francis Jenkins, op.cit., P.4.
The East India Company had trade relations with China especially in tea which have high demand in the markets in England. However, their counter parts Chinese traders were not interested of the British commodities and goods. Therefore, the British did not get markets in China, as the Chinese developed no reciprocal appetite for the British goods.\textsuperscript{195} At that time tea business was monopolised by China due to which the British were interested in having trade with China though they were not receiving reciprocal commercial attitude from the Chinese traders. As the British did not have good markets for their commodities in China, they had to pay the Chinese in gold bullion. So, the East India Company needed constant supply of gold, which they brought from Tibet particularly for their China trade.\textsuperscript{196} It was only because of gold bullion supplied from Tibet the East India Company was able to continue their trade relations with China.

As the British understood commercial importance of Tibet where they could reach through the route that runs through Arunachal Pradesh. Because of the Chinese trade the East India Company were facing financial constraints, which resulted in commercial urgency to find out an alternative lucrative trade. Largely they were searching for alternative tea supplier or some money spinning stuffs in order to make up their losses in Chinese tea trade. This commercial urgency has been solved with discovery of tea plant in Assam in 1823. The Singpho Chief, Beesa Gaum was credited to be a person who introduced tea bushes to the British Officer Robert Bruce and told him that the

\textsuperscript{195} Sudatta Sirkar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.213.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}
tea plant grew wild in their homestead. In a very short span of time tea became one of the stuffs, which have highest demand in the markets starting from local to international. As the business was growing rapidly, the British and other tea planters need more and more lands to establish a new tea estate. Since the Singpho homestead was contagious to these tea estates so they were highly affected by this new plantation business. Moreover, fertile land of the Singpho homestead attracted attention of the British to start tea plantation in the areas. In their territories, the soil was fertile and land was plain which provided a suitable place for establishment of tea estate. Apart from abundant of virgin land, the planters were not suppose to spend much in bringing tea samplings from other places as it was available in nearby places.

According to traditions current among the people, it is said that they did not compete with European planters as they did not possessed money to run a tea estate business. Rather, the people willingly donated their lands on lease to the planters and were satisfied with amount they received as lands rent fees. The tribe virtually did not participate in tea business however, Ningru La was the only Singpho tea farmer who said to have participated in tea business. Ningru La was considered to be the first tea farmer among the Singpho who exported tea to Calcutta before 1842. During the colonial period, tea business dominated the economy of Assam and Ningru La was the only Singpho who was actively participated in the tea business. In the year 2011 during the Assam Sahitya Sabha held in Ledo in Assam Ningru La was acknowledged for his

198 Ibid.
199 SGSI, op.cit.
200 Juri Mahanta, op.cit., p.50.
contribution and participation in tea business during the colonial period. In initial stage, the British administration tried to keep the Singpho people in good term and encouraged them to participate in tea plantation business. Gradually business became highly lucrative and since 1860’s, the number of tea estates was on the increase due to which planters required more lands. As the business proved to be highly profitable, the planters were getting huge profit due to which they wanted to extend their plantation business. Hence, the planters required more lands in order to make more profit out of their tea plantation business. This resulted in encroachment of the Singpho lands by the planters especially during 1860’s and had experienced a perceptible change in the attitude of the planters. It was during the Singpho uprising of 1843 they exposed the reasons for their discontentment towards the planters.

It was found that the major reason for Singpho discontentment was illegal land encroachments by the planters and their exploitative behaviours upon the people. After the administration came to know the causes for the Singpho uprising it was realized to stop annoying them further as the tribe occupied a vital place of trade relations with Myanmar. In order to create friendly atmosphere the British administration began to organise trade fairs in the foothills to cater the needs of the hills people. In these trade fairs, traders from hills and plains of Assam could exchange their stuffs in the exchange centres. The Sadiya trade fair was organised at Sadiya Frontier Tract in which the Singpho traders also participated. While discussing the participation of the

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201 SGSI, op.cit.
203 Ibid.
Singpho at Sadiya trade fair L.N. Chackravarty writes; "...after the troubles were over the Singpho Chiefs to meet annually at the full moon of the month of Magh (last part of January and first part of February) at Sadiya along with the Adi, Mishmi and khampti."204 After the last Singpho uprising was suppressed by the British in 1843, they started to come down to Assam during the trade fair season as a trader. Simultaneously the tribe visited the British administrative centres to show their allegiance and submission to the British authorities. The trade fairs proved to be successful as the hill tribes including the Singpho responded to trade fair policy positively.

Consequently, participation of the Singpho traders increased and it was estimated that in 1876 there were about 3000 the Mishing, the Mishmi, the Khampti and the Singpho at Sadiya.205 In this trade fair the traders from different places shared mutual commercial benefits and facilitated a friendly atmosphere between the tribes and the British administration. In the fair, these tribes exchanged their trade items and visited the British officials who received offerings and gave them small presents in return.206 Besides tea business, Indian traders, British traders and other European traders had developed a lucrative trade in opium with China and Myanmar. As the Singpho were involved in the opium trade since pre-colonial period, they began to act as intermediaries in the opium trade. However, during the colonial period the British administration introduced a license system so that only the license

205 Verrier Elwin, op.cit., p.3.
206 L.N.Chkravarty, op.cit., p.85.
holders were allowed to do the trade.\textsuperscript{207} Although the British administration introduced a license system and declared opium trade as illegal while the smuggling of opium was increasing in alarming rate. Earlier China provided a big markets for opium but the Chinese Government declared opium trade as illegal and put strict restrictions on opium trade. Hence, the British were compelled to divert their attentions towards other countries to carry out their opium trade. As the British and other opium traders were not allowed to trade in Chinese markets owing to which they were looking for a new markets in other places especially in Myanmar.

Although the British were not involved directly in opium trade they were concerned about decline of opium trade with China which was expressed in these words; "...the great object of the Bengal Opium Agencies is to furnish an article suitable to the peculiar tastes of the population of China."\textsuperscript{208} The opium trade became highly lucrative for both the British traders and British administration; and hence, the later was interested in continuation of opium trade. On contrary, the Chinese did not show any interest to continue opium trade in their country. However, the British were trying to continue opium trade with China and even the British administration ordered the opium factories and agencies to prepare opium suitable for the taste of the Chinese people.\textsuperscript{209} The British adopted numbers of measures to save their opium markets in China and however due to strict vigilance of the Chinese Government they failed to continue their opium trade with China.

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\item[\textsuperscript{207}] LLSI, \textit{op.cit.}
\item[\textsuperscript{209}] \textit{Ibid.}
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Consequently, the British traders had to find an alternative market for their opium trade, which they found in Myanmar, as there was already widespread opium addiction among the people. This situation provided the Singpho to make huge profit out of opium trade as the British could not ignore their strategic importance. Because of their geographical location and knowledge about the old routes, leading to Myanmar the British could not stop the Singpho to get involved in this trans-border opium trade. Apart from their geographical importance, the Singpho provided load carriers to the traders in carrying loads from Assam to the markets in Myanmar. With the passage of time, the trans-border opium trade between India and Myanmar resulted in rampant smuggling of opium in both countries.

Largely the opium trade was carried out with the Kachins of Upper Burma. After the British lost their Chinese markets for opium trade, it became difficult for them to ignore the Singpho as their homestead was situated at strategically importance place for doing any trade business with Myanmar. Therefore, British could not annoy the tribe by putting much restriction upon them in carrying opium trade with Myanmar. After, commercialisation of opium it became easily available at Singpho homestead, which was accelerated by an illegal opium trade relation with Myanmar. Regarding commercialisation of opium and its impact on the Singpho society, one of the informants narrated that:

The British commercialised opium due to which it became easily available; thus the smuggling became rampant. The Singpho made huge profit out of this business but in return, they had to pay badly and they themselves become addicted to opium. Still today, opium addiction is rampant among the Singpho people irrespective of age and status.211

210 GOI GAP, op.cit., p.133.
211 RSI, op.cit.
It is observed that at present there is a widespread opium addiction among the Singpho. The Myanmarese also got addicted with opium after the British established opium trade with Myanmar due to which opium and liquor of various range became easily available to the people. Along with the locals of Myanmar labourers employed by the British administration in construction of government establishments like police stations, railways, roads and official residence in Myanmar also got addicted. As a result owing to widespread opium addictions among labourers, the British could not complete their projects in time. So, the British administration was compelled to put restrictive measures in order to check both opium trade and addiction in Myanmar.

Consequently, the Chief Commissioner has declared that excise arrangements of the Province cannot be satisfactorily made unless some regulation is passed. Many restrictions were imposed in trans-border opium trade with Myanmar, but it did not have any impact among the Singpho traders. In Indian side, the Singpho collected opium from their neighbouring tribes especially from the Digaru Mishmi who used to cultivate opium plant in their localities. Nowadays also, they still use to cultivate opium and the Singpho get their required opium from them. Apart from opium trade the Singpho were doing the rubber trade since pre-colonial period as a raw rubber supplier. During colonial period the British introduced a license system for doing rubber trade and declared it illegal to carry rubber trade without a

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213 Mirim Du Singpho, Local Priest, 78 years, Waguun II village, Bordumsa Circle, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on August 8, 2011. (Hereafter abbreviated as MDSI).
proper license. The introduction of a license system in rubber began to affect the Singpho economy and on the other hand, it became highly lucrative for the British administration. At Bisa market of the Singpho area the rubber was sold at ₹ 50 per mound.\textsuperscript{214} During that time, the Singpho fetched good profit out of rubber trade without much competition. It was during colonial period the Singpho rubber collectors had to compete with other rubber collectors from Assam. Similarly, the government rubber firms and private rubber firms had to compete with one another in the rubber business.

After discovery of Indian rubber, the rubber firms from Bengal also got involved in rubber business in Assam. The Indian rubber was said to be fine, fetching sometimes ₹ 58 in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{215} When rubber trade became highly profitable, the competition among the firms also grew rapidly in which the government firms gradually lost the bidding. This created concern among the government about which W. Schlich noted that; “If the Government offered less than the market price, people would sell the rubber to the competing private firms.”\textsuperscript{216} Though the administration put restriction on rubber collectors and traders by introducing a license system, the rubber collectors hiked its price, as they understood the high competition among the rubber firms. This compelled the government firms to pay high in order to win the bidding for raw rubbers. As such, the British administration planned to put restrictions upon the Singpho rubber collectors which W. Schlich further noted:

\textsuperscript{214} GOIGAP, op.cit., p. 134.
\textsuperscript{215} Captain R.C. Money’s Note on the India-Rubber Trade on the Frontier of Bhootan, Judicial Proceedings (Judicial Department), Bengal Secretariat Office, File no.536, 25th February 1875.
\textsuperscript{216} Letter from W. Schlich to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Rubber Trade in the Luckhimpur District, Assam Commissioner’s paper, 1870-73, p.2.
...the restriction to be put upon the Khampti and Singpho of bringing the rubber to the Government depot for sale would only be observed as long as the rates offered by Government are at least equal to those offered by private parties.217

After many attempts to gain profit from rubber business the government found it uneconomical and non-viable to sustain further. The administration realized not to continue rubber trade due to uneconomical tapping process, low quality and high competition. Moreover, in the markets it proved to be an uneconomical business. So, later on the British administration decided to discontinue rubber trade but the Singpho continued in small-scale rubber business at their territory to support their livelihood activities.

Role of Women in Livelihood Activities

One cannot overlook the role of women in the Singpho society. Women play a vital role by participating in every economic activities of the family from agricultural work to household chores. It is generally maintained that in the early days women were an expert collectors and gatherers of the forest products and had sound knowledge about seasonal wild products. Similarly, the Singpho women proved themselves as collectors of seasonal forest products like fruits, wild yams, leafy vegetables, honey, mushroom and bamboo shoots. Even these days also they used to collect wild yams and other jungle products despite of subsistence agricultural practices.218 Besides these forest products, women used to grow vegetables like brinjal, potato, cucumber, chilly, ginger, mustard leaves in their kitchen garden. These kitchen gardens produces the vegetables required for daily domestic

217 Ibid.
218 Chaturbuj Sahu, op.cit., p.65.
consumption at house, which in turn saved money in buying vegetables from the local market. Sometime they could earn some amount by selling the surplus production of kitchen garden at nearby market, which served as cushion money for the family.\textsuperscript{219} Besides, subsistence livelihood activities like collection of forest products, growing vegetables and cultivation of the agricultural field the Singpho women are also an expert weavers. Whatever their weaving production at respective houses are sold at the market to add the family income. It is aptly said of the Singpho that their art is expressed mainly in weaving.\textsuperscript{220} They are generally known for their rich and beautiful traditional attires and ornaments.

Traditionally, the Singpho women weaved irrespective of age and status in the society and each woman are an expert weaver of their colourful traditional dresses at house.\textsuperscript{221} Being an expert weaver, these women could weave their different outfit like wrap skirt, turban, waistband, bag and other traditional attire, which are valued very high among the community. Women folk used to barter their weaving products with nearby tribes in order to procure the commodities, which are not available at their houses. It is observed, with the advent of colonial administration in the Brahmaputra Valley the traditional subsistence economy were monetised and accordingly weaving products of women were also commercialised in the areas. The most important weaving products of the tribe are bukang (wrap skirt), lungi (male

\textsuperscript{219} JKSL, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{220} Verrier Elwin, \textit{The Art of the North-East Frontier of India}, Shillong, NEFA, Department of Information and Public Relation, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1959, p.85.
\textsuperscript{221} SHBCD, op.cit., p.3.
attired), *bomban* (turban), *ningwat* (waistband) and *npeng* (traditional bag).222

Since early days, the Singpho women used to weave these products as Verrier Elwin rightly put it:

*The most valuable specimens of weaving among the Singpho are the turbans for men and women, women's skirt and waist band, men's lungi and handbags.*223

Apart from the local markets at Miao, Bordumba and Changlang these products are also marketed in Assam, especially at the markets of Jagun, Ledo, Margherita and Lekhapani. With the passage of time due to impact of modernity, a numbers of manufactured stuffs are available in the local markets with cheap price and good quality which are more refined than the woven stuffs have affected the importance of traditional items. As such, at local market people buy directly manufactured bag, cloth, and wrap skirt at cheaper rate than the woven traditional stuffs. Hence, local weavers faced a competition in the market to sell their weaving products because of available manufactured goods. Despite of these factors the traditional Singpho cloth, bags and rice are still in great demand in neighbouring Assam markets.224 In many ways in the local markets, these traditionally woven items are still popular among the people. It is observed that these days consumers are conscious about preserving and maintaining the tradition and indigenous weaving system in the society. In return, this consciousness among the local consumers gave a welcome feeling to the local weavers to sell their products. Therefore, women still engage in weaving activities and earned substantial

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222 JkSI, *op.cit.*
income, which supplemented annual income of a family. It would seem that the Singpho women are eager to walk on the path of progress so they are genuinely trying hard to make progress at par with their counterparts of their tribes' women in the state. Nowadays, a large number of Singpho women are educated and some of them are engaged in government jobs while other has started doing trade and commerce including as industrial entrepreneurs. These women are generally economically self-reliance and independent in the society in term of economic status. As a matter of fact, in comparison to women of other tribes they are still lagging behind in the field of education. Hence, they need guidance and encouragement from her family and society both in the field of education, economy and political life.

These women do their best to contribute their family income but according to customs they do not have right to inherit family properties. In the context of property inheritance, some changes have been seen among the people in the society in the recent past. It is observed that there is no hard and fast rule, which deters a girl to inherit property; rather it depends upon a family whether to give the family property to their sons or daughters. In general, people considered property inheritance as family issue, because of some family does not have any son or even if they have sons, they might not be able to take care of his family property. Therefore, because of different family issues these days the Singpho considered property inheritance as family matter. Because of this positive social attitude the Singpho women are not being neglected completely in the field of economic. It would seem

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225 K.S.Singh, op.cit., p.1081
226 SGSI, IGSI, RSI, KGSI, NCI, PNSI, et.al, op.cit.
that they are moving towards progress in every sphere of life because of education, government policies, administration, better communication and connectivity. In this endeavour, the most effective mechanism in improving the living standard of women in the society is the positive social change towards women in the community. In a nutshell, it is important to note that family of a woman, relative, society and other socio-political organisations must encourage them to participate more in decision-making process and other socio-political activities.

**Continuity and Changes**

A number of changes have been observed in the Singpho traditional subsistence economy because of various factors. At the same time, it is found that they still did not completely give up their traditional knowledge system and economic practices. Among all agents of change in the Singpho economic life was the introduction of monetisation of traditional subsistence economy by the colonial power, which brought about a drastic change in tribe’s traditional economy and livelihood activities. Like other tribal areas, a significant feature of economic trends in the Singpho homestead was the money economy.\(^{227}\) Immediately, after the introduction of money economy by the colonial administration in the Singpho territory has tremendously affected the traditional barter economy. As people found money economy more convenient to do business transaction than the barter system of transaction in the society. As such, the money economy has replaced the traditional barter and exchange system of economy in a short span of time. In barter economy,

\(^{227}\) GOIGAP, *op.cit.*, p.134
a trader must have stuffs like rice, cattle, land, fowls, gongs and beads in order to get their required commodities from other trader by form of exchange or barter, which could not quantify the exchange volume. Moreover, people had to carry their stuffs from faraway places up to the exchange centres in order to get their required commodities and goods. Sometimes, people could not procure their required items because of absence of goods to exchange or barter as *quid pro quo*. It is known facts that barter economy had several limitations of involving labour-oriented trading and in returned a meagre profit earned. Therefore, many tribes of the erstwhile Brahmaputra Valley frontier accepted the money economy instead of exchange and barter system of economy, which was not exceptional to the Singpho community.

In money economy, people only need a currency to purchase their all requirements without carrying any goods to exchange with other purchasers. So, the people found money economy was more convenient than the traditional barter system which gradually led to rapid decline of barter and exchange system of trade practice within the Singpho community. After the Independence, the government has introduced a numbers of development schemes, which have helped the tribe to broaden their economic activities. Through the execution of various welfare and development schemes, the government have created new employment opportunities for the people.\(^{228}\) Apart from the development schemes, the government machineries like administration, educational institution, better communication and transportation facilities are some of the factors brought about changes in the

traditional economy of the Singpho. As education is considered as an instrument of upward social mobility, it played an important role in modernising the tribal economy also.\textsuperscript{229} Earlier the government introduced pro-people developmental schemes but people could not avail themselves with these facilities due to lack of education and knowledge. Nowadays it is observed that due to spread of education, the educated youth are availing themselves with the developmental programmes introduced by the government.\textsuperscript{230} Besides availing themselves with these facilities provided by the government, educated youth are also engaged in sensitising the people about the government machineries and facilities provided to the people.

The most striking development in the field of economic activities could be noticed in tea business. During the colonial period, the Singpho did not enthusiastically participate in the tea estate business however, it is observed that these days they are participating in the tea plantation business in different capacity. While talking about the participation of the Singpho people in tea estate business at present days one of the informants said in these lines:

\begin{quote}
Nowadays scenario is totally different as the Singpho are also actively participating in tea business and earning their livelihood by this business. Especially the Singpho living in Margherita in Assam are growing tea and became expert traders in the field.\textsuperscript{231}
\end{quote}

Although the Singpho were not involved in large-scale tea plantation business but these days they are more inclined towards tea business for earning their livelihood. Many Singpho are engaged in tea business and is estimated that in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{229} Juri Mahanta, \textit{op.cit.}, p.53.  \\
\textsuperscript{230} PNSI, \textit{op.cit.}  \\
\textsuperscript{231} RSI, \textit{op.cit.}
\end{flushright}
Margherita about two hundred (200) youths are involved in tea farming.\footnote{\textit{Juri Mahanta, op. cit.}, p.53.}

Besides tea business, the Singpho are also engaged in other commercial activities to keep at pace with other tribes of the state. Some are running their own establishment like private schools, restaurant and some are engaged in betel-nut and pepper trade. Apart from these business activities, a numbers of educated Singpho are engaged in government jobs. Although, in comparison to other tribes of the state they are still lagging behind in the field of education.

The government economic policies and other developmental infrastructural facilities not only influenced economy in the towns alone rather it brought development in the village economies too. In the past people used to grow vegetables and rice for their personal consumption and not for any commercial purpose. However, these days people from different villages come to nearby market to sale their vegetables and rice products from their agricultural fields. These local markets are located in the towns like Maio, Bordumsa, Changlang, Diyun, Jagun and Margerita.\footnote{\textit{OJSL, op.cit.}} The main items of the villagers are meat, dry fish, bamboo shoots, leafy vegetables, betel nut, chilli, rice and yams. Besides these eatable commodities, the womenfolk sell their weaving products like wrap skirt, waistband, turban and bag in these markets and also nearby markets in Assam. It is maintained that many foreign traders from different places used to visit the Singpho territory for trading in which the tribe never averse to these foreign traders. Their homestead is generally endowed with natural resources like timber, coal, petroleum and tea, which attracted the outsiders to do trade in their territory. In 1826, Captain Wilcox
reported about the presence of small quantities of oil and natural gas on the bank of Buridihing River in Singpho homestead.\textsuperscript{234} Though natural resources were abundant in the Singpho homestead but these resources could not be commercialised due to lack of capital investment required in the business. Apart from these mineral resources, the tea plantation business was started during the colonial period. Regarding discovery of tea plant, the credit of first knowledge of existence of the tea plant in Assam goes to Robert Bruce.\textsuperscript{235} It is maintained that in 1823 Robert Bruce visited the house of Bisa Gam at Garhgaon in Assam who was then one of the Singpho Chiefs.

There is a popular tradition current among the people regarding visit of Robert Bruce and meeting the Chief Bisa Gam at Garhgaon. According to tradition, it is said that the Chief Bisa Gam welcomed Robert Bruce with a cup of red tea (hplap), at the residence of the former.\textsuperscript{236} After taking the tea Robert Bruce asked about the tea by enquiring where from it was obtained then Bisa Gam told Robert Bruce that tea plant was wildly available in the areas. Bisa Gam provided him some tea samplings, which were tested successfully in the laboratory, and since then tea plantation started in Assam as new avenues of business. The tea business proved to be highly lucrative commerce in a short span of time. This new business of tea plantation required a huge resource in terms of men, material and finance at different stages of mobilization. So in order to materialise this new business of tea plantation the British had brought

\textsuperscript{236} IGSI, \textit{op.cit.}
a large number of people from Bengal for clerical job.²³⁷ Besides the Bengali people, a large numbers of labourers were also brought to Assam from different places like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to engage in various tea estates in the Brahmaputra Valley. As such, the influx of foreign elements in the area brought about demographical changes, which has affected local economy and social life of the people. Some labourers began to search for an alternative work in order to earn more than what they were earning in the tea estate as menial worker.

During those days after the British administration released slaves from the Singpho society, they were in need of labourers for their domestic work especially to cultivate rice field in their homestead. As the Singpho villages were contagious to tea plantation estate, they could easily get labourers from these newly established tea estates. Moreover, the timber business in Singpho territory also attracted traders from different places.²³⁸ Tribe did not impose any restriction upon the outsiders from participating in timber and other business in their territories. With the coming of foreign traders in their localities the business activities and commercial connection of the Singpho traders rapidly began to grow. Gradually, some of the traders began to stay at Singpho homestead in order to carry their business activities that resulted in many changes in their socio-economic life.²³⁹ The tea estate business was done in plain areas of Assam while the timber business was done within the tribe’s territories, so many traders who were engaged in timber trade often used to

²³⁷ Priyam Goswami, _op.cit._, p.23
²³⁸ SGSI, _op.cit._
²³⁹ IGSI, _op.cit._
stay in Singpho area. The timber business like tea business was lucrative and traders used to supply timbers to wood-based industries in sawmills and Timbers Company in Lohit District and to plains of Assam.\textsuperscript{240} Later on, in timber and other business activities, the Marwari traders emerged as most successful traders in Assam. By virtue of their trading abilities, this community replaced all its business rivals in North East India in general and in Singpho territory in particular.

While mentioning about participation of the Marwari traders in timber business Jaugawng Pisi wrote that; "During the time of timber operations the Singpho were the owners but the huge profit earners were the outsiders or the Marwari traders."\textsuperscript{241} Besides timber business the Marwari gradually begun to control the commerce of other traditional trade item of Assam like mustard oil and pepper. Influence of the Marwaris in the trading activities in Assam was observed by W.W.Hunter in these words; "...the trade of Kamrup is almost entirely in the hands of Kyah or Marwari merchants and Muhammadan dealers."\textsuperscript{242} It is found that since pre-colonial period the Marwari traders were carried out the trade transactions between Assam and Myanmar. In this trade transactions, they used to import different type of Myanmarese cloth like broad cloths, muslin, long cloths, coloured handkerchiefs, chintzes and other commodities like salt, opium, liquor, glass, crockery ware, tobacco, betel nut and rice.\textsuperscript{243} The Marwari and other traders imported these items from Myanmar

\textsuperscript{240} GOIGAP, op.cit., p.136.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., p.58.
and bartered it with the hill people including the Singpho traders of Arunachal Pradesh. In return, from the hill people these traders received stuffs like gold dust, gold, ivory, silver, amber, masks, daos and several forest products. The traders who actively involved in trade between Myanmar and Assam acted as intermediaries for the Singpho traders and assisted them to participate in trading activities. Besides the Marwari businessmen there were other traders who hailed from different places like Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were also doing business in the Singpho area.

The Singpho traders used to bring items like silver, gold dust, cloth, ivory, amber, jade, etc., and bartered them with plain traders according to their requirements. It is also observed that these days traders like Marwari, Bengali, Assamese and Bihari are still doing business by staying in Singpho territory. These traders helped the local businesspersons in commercial aspects and maintained cordial relations with the natives population. Hence, the Singpho people did not hesitate to offer their buildings to live in and to start their shop on rental basis to traders who come from other places. As we know, in early days, the Singpho had trade relations with Myanmar and China without much restriction from the government. However, after post-Independence the trans-border trade activities got declined due to political boundary demarcated along the international boundary with the neighbouring countries. This new policy of the government imposing restriction on the trans-border trade has affected self-reliance trade and commercial activities of the tribe. Earlier it was easier and cheaper to procure their requirements from

244 LLSI, op.cit.
245 KGSI, op.cit.
Myanmar and people preferred to have trade relations with the Myanmar traders. Due to cultural affinity with the Myanmarese the Singpho required items like beads, dao, cloth, gong, etc., which they could easily procure from Myanmar market.

After demarcation of Indo-Myanmar border, these items could not be obtained easily as North East India became strategically important from the geo-political point of view. Regarding decline of trans-border trade activities Gurudus Das rightly put it as; “...with the transformation of the north east frontier into international boundary following the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962, the cross-country trade of the tribes came to a halt.” As the erstwhile North East Frontier Tract became an international boundary, the Government of India imposed a restriction upon free cross border movement in order to tighten the security of the region. The major reason for this restriction was the fall out of Chinese aggression of 1962 against India. Though restrictions were imposed due to strategic and political reasons which have also affected commercial activities of the people living along the international boundary including the Singpho. This restriction has definitely stopped trans-border trade transaction for the tribe especially with Myanmar and China. Owing to restrictions on trans-border trade, the tribe was compelled to divert their trade activities towards the plains of Assam as an alternative to continue their business. Nevertheless, there is some negligible volume of trade transaction is still carried out unofficially with the Myanmarese by the tribe despite of restriction. These days the Government of India also gives emphasis in

246 IGSI, op.cit.
improving trade connection with South East Asian countries including Myanmar. Thus, the government is popularising ‘Act East Policy’ in order to strengthened commercial relations between India and other East Asian countries in which Myanmar occupies a very important place from commercial and strategic point of view. In a nutshell, the economic policies adopted by the Government of India would likely to improve the trade and commercial relations with Myanmar including the East Asian countries through the Singpho areas of the state in the days to come.