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## A Comparative Analysis on the Potential of Indigenous Community Museums in Assam

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### ABSTRACT

History as a 'continuous dialogue' between the past and the present of mankind contains the heritage and cultural integrity among the world populations. Several sub-sections of historical study in relation with preservation techniques have developed since the last few decades. Museology is proven to be one of the pivotal sections among these variables, containing both tangible and intangible historical resources. With the growing civilizational discourse and globalisation; the recognition, preservation and protection of ethnic identity becomes the demand of time. In such a scenario, the concept of indigenous community museums is crucial. These organisations can help in the perpetuation of aboriginal traditions, historical remains, texts, folklores etc. with in-build facilities and expertise. In the global stage, several successful efforts on this ground come into limelight. These include the *Maori* community of New Zealand, *Navajo* community of USA, *Tana Toraja* community of Indonesia, *Maasai* community of Africa and so on. In terms of India, the *Warlis* of Maharashtra, *Apatanis* of Arunachal, *Toda* tribe of Tamilnadu, *Kalbelias* of Rajasthan show similar success with community practices. The North East India, as a heartland of ethnic population has great scope of such preservation methods including the governmental support and integrated methods of



museology. In this paper, specifically a comparative analysis will be made on the ethnic communities of Assam (the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley), viz a viz the population of *Bodos*, *Miisings*, *Tais*, *Rabhas*, *Deuris* etc. and their heritage preservation. By taking the inspiration from these innovative and impactful initiatives throughout the world, a few suggestions with probable framework will hereby be presented for future endeavours.

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## 1. Introduction

History as an academic discipline has multiple functional components for smooth research and understanding. After the institutionalisation of History as an academic subject, the perimeter of museological studies become an integral part of it. Similarly, to extract, preserve and protect the historical heritage for the future generations, museums are essential. In short these non-profit organisations acted as the repository of historical heritage and promote research and developments. As per the Socio-cultural aspects, the museums preserved the culture and traditions of ethnic communities along with their ancestral wealth. Only through proper preservation and study on these sections of marginalised society, their ethos and belief systems could gain proper attention in global stage. Thus the concept of Indigenous Community Museums should be taken with greater importance and responsibility.

Assam is situated in the extreme north-eastern frontier of India. It shares its borders with the hill states of Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya, and lies close to China and Tibet in the north, Myanmar (Burma) to the east and south, and Bangladesh to the west. Bordered by several states and sharing international boundaries, Assam has historically witnessed the migration of humankind over the ages. Throughout history, the region has welcomed waves of people from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. These successive migrations have significantly shaped Assam's demography and enriched its cultural landscape. As a result, Assam today is home to a wide array of indigenous communities, each possessing unique traditions, customs, and belief systems. However, in the face of rapid globalization, urbanization, and socio-political changes, the intangible and tangible heritage of these communities is increasingly under threat. Therefore, in this context of rich cultural plurality, the preservation and representation of indigenous heritage have become important. Museums play a crucial role in this endeavour. Community-based museums, in particular, are often rooted in local initiatives and reflect the voices, values, and lived experiences of the communities they



represent. These institutions not only function as repositories of cultural artifacts but also serve as dynamic platforms for identity assertion, and active community participation.

In this paper, an attempt is made to conduct a comparative analysis on the potential of indigenous community museums in Assam. The discussion begins with an overview of the concept of museums, with particular focus on community museums and their significance in historical studies. Special attention is given to how community museums contribute to the preservation of ethnic heritage among indigenous groups in Assam. To broaden the perspective and strengthen the comparative framework, examples of community museums from other parts of the world are also briefly discussed. Based on this analysis, the paper is structured to incorporate both informed insights and our own understanding, aimed at promoting cultural sustainability and empowerment through indigenous community museums.

## **2. Objectives**

- To have an idea on the origin and development of Museology as part of historical discipline.
- To make an assessment on Indigenous Community Museums worldwide.
- To analyse the potential of Indigenous Community Museums in Assam.

## **3. Methodology**

This research paper has been prepared through a historical analytical method. Secondary sources such as books, magazines, news-papers, reports, thesis, dissertations, articles etc. will be used for this research paper. As per necessity for conceptual clarity AI integrated URLs and Wikipedia are being concerned. All the data used in this paper are duly checked cited and referred with appropriate acknowledgements.

## **4. Area of Study**

This study comprises of the concepts of museology, ethnicity and preservation techniques. Particularly, after tracing the concept of museology as a part of historical discipline the world-wide view on Indigenous Community Museums is being presented here. For conceptual clarity terms like museum. Museology, ethnicity community, indignity, globalisation etc. are drafted from its roots. After having a wholesome idea on the trendy developments on these fields, an attempt is made to re evaluate the prospects of Indigenous Community Museums in terms of Assam.

## **5. Museums in History**



History as a discipline of Social Studies has a lot of potential to be studied about the people and civilizations. In short History is the study of mankind through its remains and ancestral properties. Academic history consisted of three major factors including Sources, historians and interpretations. The importance of museums or museology came into lime light through the preservation techniques and importance of sources. Basically, the archaeological resources and other remains are vital part of museums, which have server its purpose as a living heritage of the society.

As per the terminology, a museum represents kind of establishment in which historical artefacts are preserved and stored in a scientific way. The term has been originated from a Greek word ‘Mous’ and later popularised among the Romans as museum in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. By the 19th century “museum” was defined as “an institution providing instruction and enjoyment and serving for the preservation of objects for future generations”. This definition included new elements i.e. instruction and enjoyment thus shifting the emphasis from merely preservation to imparting knowledge through entertainment. A comprehensive definition given by the UNESCO is as follows : “A museum is a permanent establishment, administered in the general interest for the purpose of preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and in particular, of exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instructive groups of objects and specimens of cultural values, artistic, historical scientific and technological collection, botanical and zoological gardens and aquariums etc.” The ICOM (International Council of Museums) defined museum as – “A non-profit permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purpose of education, study and enjoyment.’ According to Britannica, museums are institutions dedicated to preserving and interpreting tangible evidence of humankind and environment. The In short, a museum has the functions of collecting, organizing and displaying the resources. Further historical research can be substantiating through the museums and archival resources as well.

Talking about the types, museums can be divided into several fractions according to their respective functionality. In this paper particularly the ethnic community museum will be taking on for consideration. Some of these are -

1. Art Museums – An art museum is particularly dedicated to the collection, preservation, and display of artworks, including paintings, sculptures, and other forms of visual art. For example: The Louvre Museum (Paris), The Museum of Modern Art (New York)



2. History Museums - The historical museums are part of the preservation process of human evolution. Especially historical artifacts, documents are preserved and exhibited here. Examples: The National Museum of American History (Washington, D.C.), The British Museum (London)
3. Science Museums - Science museums highlight the fields of science, technology, and the natural world. They often feature hands-on exhibits and educational programs to engage visitors in scientific discovery. For Example: The Science Museum (London), The California Academy of Sciences (San Francisco)
4. Natural History Museums - These museums are specifically related to the exploration of the natural world and scientific studies, primarily related with palaeontology, botany, zoology, and geology. Examples: The Natural History Museum (London), the American Museum of Natural History (New York)."
5. Ethnographic Museums - Ethnographic museums also known as the indigenous community museums focus on the cultures, traditions, and lifestyles of different ethnic groups, often with an emphasis on indigenous and tribal communities. In this paper this kind of museums will be evaluated. Examples: The Ethnological Museum (Berlin), the National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, D.C.)
6. Specialty Museums - These museums are specifically dedicated to particular sections of topics such as automobiles, aviation, technology, or even specific historical periods or figures. For instance: The Henry Ford Museum (Michigan), The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (Washington, D.C.)
7. Military Museums – As the term denotes the Military museums focus on the history of warfare, military equipment, and the lives of soldiers throughout history. The Imperial War Museum (London), The National WWII Museum (New Orleans) etc. are examples of such museums.

## 6. Development of Museology in Historical research

With the growing popularity of History as a academic discipline the importance of museology increase simultaneously. After the institutionalisation of history new historical trends and methodological developments ultimately led to the increasing demands of incorporating museology into history. The institutionalization of history was a gradual process involving the development of historical writing, the professionalization of historians, the establishment of historical studies in universities, the development of historical methods, and the influence of key scholars. In terms of museology, the Oxford English Dictionary defined it as - the science or practice of organizing, arranging, and managing museums. That means, museology simply represents the way of maintaining museums for both academic and non-



academic purpose. After the formation of the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century it compartmentalised museology in Europe and abroad. By 1977 AD the ICOFM was developed as an enlarged version of ICOM (International Council of Museums) ICOM founding members stated that its mission was to ‘further the exchange of cultural information across frontiers’ by means of ‘loans, gifts and exchanges of museum publications’ as well as the ‘international exchange of museum personnel’, which is later to be continued.

As described by Bruno Brulon Soares in his writings, the term ‘museology’ is originated from the term ‘Museologie’, in its German form, discovered by Peter van Mensch, in 1992, in Philip Leopold Martin’s Praxis work “The Practice of Natural History”, published in Weimar, in 1869 AD. In 1830, in Karl Ottfried Müller’s Manual of Archaeology the term ‘museology’ was mentioned in a different sense from ‘museography’(the practical application and methods used in museums, particularly related to planning, design, and presentation of exhibition). Which is later understood as ‘part of the systematic classification of antique art’. Following the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, gradually the concept of historical museums was popularised in France, Brussels, Belgium and Germany etc.

In the context of India museological studies had developed in the recent phases. Following the colonial administration the practices of preserving traditional knowledge and resources gained popularity. The formation of Asiatic Society of Bengal by Sir William Jones could be regarded as the 1<sup>st</sup> milestone development of museum studies in Colonial India. This society had launched a ‘Museum movement’ in India. In 1837, James Prinsep, secretary of the society proposed for the establishment of a museum but he could not receive positive response from the company government. After the establishment of the Indian Museum in Kolkata, many museums originated in different parts of India to house the curiosities. The heritage of the Mughal to Rajputs were the prime concern at that stage. Local administrations like the Madras Presidency also joined the trend by encouraging museological studies. Following the battle of 1857, the Celebration of the Golden and Diamond Jubilee years of Queen Victoria in 1887 and 1897 ushered in a new era of the rise of several new Museums often associated with her name not only in India but also in other parts of British Empire. Lord Curzan was another eminent Governor General in relation with the museology of colonial India. He had promoted preservation of historical heritage in a scientific manner. With the efforts of Lord Curzon and Sir John Marshall several site museums were established in the places including those at Agra(1906), Delhi fort (1909), Lahore fort, and an excavated sites of Ajmer(1908), Chamba(1909), Jodhpur(1909), Gwalior(1910), Khajuraho(1910), Nalanda(1917), Taxila(1918), Sanchi (1919), Mohenjodaro, Harrapa(1926) and Dhakka (now in Bangladesh) (1931) etc. The phases in relation with development of museology can be catalogued as bellow –



- Formative Phase (under Colonial Rulers) 1796 – 1858
- Second Phase (The Victoria era) 1858-1899
- Third Phase (the era of Lord Curzon and John Marshall)
- 1899-1928 Fourth Phase (pre Independence era) 1928 – 1947
- Fifth Phase (post Independence era) 1947 – 2017

In the last phase of Colonial rule the World war and other ant British movements restrain the development of museum studies into an extent. At the very last phase of non independent India Mortimer Wheeler was appointed as Director General of ASI (1944-1947), who had contributed largely to the excavation of IVC (Indus Valley Civilization) as well as museology. Prior to that in 1861 AD, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, was established for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation. In the context of post independence, the seminar at Guwahati organized by Museum Association of India in 1988 under the chairmanship of Dr. Nigam and leadership of prominent Indian museologist, Prof. Bedekar was an important event. The concepts like ‘New Museology’ and ‘Rthnomuseology’ are being cited for future use in this conference. Subsequently, the Guwahati Declaration on New Museology was adopted on 28th December 1988.

## 7. Concept of Community Museums

A community represents a social state or condition of a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. The Cambridge English dictionary defined community as – “the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality.” The term community can be derived from the Latin word ‘Communas’ meaning ‘united’. Several aspects, including historical correlation fostered in the process of forming a community or group of common peoples. As a result, each communities share common historical heritage and traditional values. Here the importance of ‘Community driven Museums’ picked out. To relate the concept of museum with the community, the concept of heritage community can be taken for consideration. A heritage community is ‘a community that consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.’ All this concern reflects the importance of community participation in the processes of preserving and safeguarding cultural heritage. For a successful conservation of heritage, the engagement of the local communities is a very important criteria. Every local area has some kind of unique identity that attributes, consequently guarantying the progression of its representative creation and



socio-cultural elements. In this present stage of globalisation, thus the preservation and protection of these community heritages became crucial. For a successful preservation of the ethnicity and historical heritage the concept of Community museums got prominence.

In the context of India, community museums play a vital role in preserving and showcasing the cultural heritage of specific communities, often focusing on local traditions, art, and history. Examples include the Banjara Virasat Museum in Maharashtra, the Patachitra community museum in Bengal, and the People's Museum in Kakching, Manipur. These museums help revitalize folk cultures, restore community identity, and increase visibility for local. For example, the Kathputli Colony, once a bustling hub of nomadic performers from across India, represented a microcosm of diverse cultures and traditions. Despite of their contributions to festivals and cultural institutions worldwide, this community remained marginalised and isolated and out of the governmental paradigm. Along with their struggle for recognition and dignity, they started some kind of community practices in 2017. Apart from making a set of commercial developments, they utilised community museum practices.

## 8. Indignity and Ethnicity

In the global civilizational discourses, the concepts of indignity and ethnicity are currently in limelight. In simple terms, ethnicity represents a kind of collectiveness based on common language, culture, common sets of ancestry, traditions, society, religion, history, or social treatment. The ethnic groups generally shared common genetic ancestry too. The term *ethnic* is ultimately derived from the Greek *ethnos*, through its adjectival form *ethnikos*, loaned into Latin as *ethnicus*. The inherited English language term for this concept is *folk*, used alongside the Latinate *people* since the late Middle English period. Alike ethnicity, indignity reflects native population. Etymologically, the term indignity is derived from an old Greek word '*indigena*', meaning 'to beget or produce'. It is part of self identification and cultural differences from other groups. As per the sources openly available in the web, an estimates of the population of Indigenous peoples range from 250 million to 600 million worldwide. There are some 5,000 distinct Indigenous peoples spread across every inhabited climate zone and inhabited continent of the world.

Etymologically, the term 'ethnicity' derives from the ancient Greek word *ethnos*, which denoted a group of people and is commonly interpreted as 'nation' or 'people'. The word 'ethnic' came into use in English language during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, denoting characteristics of groups that are not considered Christians or Jews. At that time this term was roughly equivalent to words like heathen or pagan. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term ethnic was increasingly used in its modern meaning as 'pertaining to or having



common racial, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics, especially designating a racial or other group within a larger system.

According to Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, "a group of people of the same race or nationality who share a common and distinct culture are called ethnics." The word, "ethnic" can be found only in the latest subscription of the OXFORD ONLINE DICTIONARY.

Helms and Cook defined ethnicity as "the national, regional, or tribal origins of one's oldest remembered ancestors and the customs, traditions, and rituals (i.e., subjective culture) handed down by these ancestors, which among the ethnic group members, are assumed to be their culture". According to Yancey, Aneshensel, and Driscoll, ethnicity characterizes individuals based on their membership in groups with common social, cultural, and historical heritage.

Actually, the concept of ethnicity is based on several factors, especially ethnic group and ethnic identity. Among these, the ethnic group is the most important, as it represents ethnicity at the collective level, while ethnic identity shows how individuals experience and understand their ethnicity. Overall, ethnicity is an abstract idea that includes both group and personal aspects.

In historical notions, both indignity and ethnicity reflects identification of particular culture and stages of evaluation. Thus, the study of ethnic communities and their rich cultural values and traditions are essential parts of academic history. Conceptually, notions like oral history, oral traditions and other similar historical genre are developed for the sake of this purpose. The archival resources and museums are integral part of such research works. Hence, the preservation process through indigenous community museums could be seen as the demand of the time.

## **9. Ethnicity in Global civilization**

The global demographic structure is composed of individuals who possess a wide range of diverse characteristics. People are identified and differentiated from one another through various factors, including race, age, social background, geographical location, nationality etc. Among these, ethnicity is the most commonly used factor for identifying and classifying individuals.

In recent times, ethnicity has become one of the most widely discussed subjects in all areas of life. It has become a part of everyday conversations among people. In the academic sphere too, the term is frequently used and studied by the Scholars of the various discipline of Social Science and Humanities.



The concept of 'everyday ethnicities' is also commonly heard. Eventually, ethnicity has emerged as a central subject of discussion and analysis in Global civilization.

### 9.1. Ethnic Group

In socio-historical studies, definitions of ethnic groups are largely based on the idea that these groups can be distinguished by a shared ancestry and common culture. Scholars note that this shared ancestry or culture may be either real or perceived. A key feature of an ethnic group is the members' strong sense of belonging. These characteristics are essential for defining the term 'ethnic group.' The use of this term is relatively recent; before the mid-1950s, it was rarely used in anthropology and often serve as a substitute for terms like 'race' and 'tribe,' or as a synonym for 'cultural group.'

Fredrik Barth's description is very important for understanding the concept of an ethnic group. His primary emphasis is that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristics of organizing interaction between people. Barth mainly defines ethnic groups based on four characteristics highlighted by Raoul Naroll in his work *Ethnic Unit Classification*, *Current Anthropology*. According to Barth, Naroll sees an ethnic group as a population with the following characteristics:

- (a) Is largely biologically self-perpetuating
- (b) Shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms.
- (c) Makes up a field of communication and interaction
- (d) Has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

Hutchinson and Smith define an ethnic group, or ethnic, by identifying six key characteristics, which include:

1. A common proper name, to identify and express the "essence" of the community;
2. A myth of common ancestry that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic a sense of fictive kinship;
3. Shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;



4. One or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, and language;
5. A link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnics, only its symbolic attachment to ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and
6. A sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnics' population.

Another most important modern definition of the ethnic group is being given by the Sociologist Max Weber. He defined it as, "human groups (other than kinship groups) which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides the basis for the creation of a community". According to Richard Jenkins, "An ethnic group is based on this view, on the belief shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent". This definition also seems to be very distinct and which speaks of a separate community.

Overall, an ethnic group has been defined in numerous ways. This is indeed a very interesting remark as the scholars now began to look at the ethnic groups in all the plural societies all over the world.

### **Dimension of ethnic groups**

Ethnicity can be understood as having both objective and subjective dimensions. The objective aspects include the existence of community institutions or organizations, a shared lineage of ancestors and descendants, and a central role in cultural transmission and identity development. Additionally, ethnicity involves a cultural "script" made up of customs, rituals, and shared beliefs, which shape cultural content, guide its transmission, and are reflected in visible patterns of behaviour. On the other hand, since F. Barth's work, the subjective aspect of ethnicity is understood through ethnic boundaries, which define who belongs to a group and who does not. These boundaries are two types, those from within the ethnic group (internal) and those from without the ethnic group (external). The internal boundaries are the area of self-inclusion in the group. They are closely tied to self-identity and reflect emotions like sympathy, loyalty, and a sense of belonging towards some group members. The external boundaries are the perimeter of exclusion of membership; it is the demarcation of the space of the outsiders. In multi-ethnic societies, where different groups interact and compete, internal boundaries naturally lead to the formation of external ones.



## **Types of Ethnic Groups**

The following is a partial classification of ethnic groups, based on group organization, self-awareness, interethnic position, and generational factors:

### **i) Primary and secondary ethnic groups**

The distinction between primary and secondary ethnic groups is based on their place of origin. Primary ethnic groups are those which exist in the same place in which historically they have been formed. They are indigenous groups. Examples are the French in France, Germans in Germany, etc., and also Native Indians in the Americas, Andalusians in Spain, etc.

On the other hand, Secondary ethnic groups are those which have their origin in society different from the one in which they currently exist, as for example, the Italians, Germans, etc. In Canada or the United States. They are transplanted groups which share their cultural and historical background with the society from which they emigrated, but which do not depend any more on the original society for their existence.

### **ii) Folk-community and nationality-community ethnic groups**

The distinction between the folk community and nationality community is based on the cultural self-awareness. Nationality groups are those which are culturally highly self-aware. That is, their members share an image of themselves as a collectively united by a distinct culture rather than by their kin or clan.

On the other hand, an ethnic group which is a folk community is one whose members are predominantly of peasant background. The character of social relationships among the members of the community is determined by kinship and close family friendships.

### **iii) Majority and minority ethnic groups**

In sociology, the concept of majority and minority groups are defined by power, not by numbers. Majority ethnic groups control the main political, economic, and cultural institutions of society. Their culture shapes the society's norms and laws, and minority groups often assimilate into this culture. Minority groups may keep their own culture and institutions to some extent or influence the dominant institutions, but usually, the main social framework is set by the majority group's culture.

### **iv) "Young" and "old" ethnic groups**



Young groups, i.e., those made up predominantly of the first - the immigrant - generation, and whose second generation is either small in size or young in age. The "old" groups are those already established in the larger society, i.e. they have at least a high proportion of adult second and adult third or consecutive generations.

## 9.2. Ethnic Identity

At the individual level, ethnicity is a social and psychological process that gives a person a sense of belonging and identity. It is one of several social factors that shape identity. Ethnic identity can be defined as a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems.

According to Elliot Oring, “Ethnic Identity, we might add, is the intellectual and emotional sense that an individual has of his relationship to the behaviours, ideas and values of an ethnic group. And by ethnicity we simply mean any speech, thought, or action based upon this sense of identity.”

Ethnic identity can be divided into external and internal aspects. The external aspects include visible behaviours such as:

1. Speaking an ethnic language and practicing ethnic traditions,
  2. Being involved in ethnic personal networks like family and friendships,
  3. Participating in ethnic institutions such as churches, schools, businesses, and media,
  4. Joining ethnic voluntary groups like clubs, societies, and youth organizations,
  5. Taking part in events organized by ethnic groups, including picnics, concerts, lectures, rallies, and dances.
- On the other hand, the internal aspects of ethnic identity includes images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings.

### **Dimensions of Ethnic Identity**

**a) Cognitive dimension:** This is about how people see themselves and their group. It includes knowing about the group’s history and important events or leaders that are meaningful to the group.

**b) Moral dimension:** This involves a sense of duty or responsibility towards one's group.



**C) Affective dimension:** This is about feelings of connection to the group.

The concept of ethnicity is based on the sense of the ethnic identity, which is closely linked to belonging to an ethnic group. Therefore, ethnicity can only be understood with relationship to the ethnic groups. For any kind of ethnicity, it is inevitable that some groups in the society will interact with each other. The members of any group always considers the members of other groups as different from themselves. The identification by the insiders and the outsiders is very important for developing the sense of ethnicity.

The sense of ethnicity often develops due to three main factors: nationalism, colonialism, and immigration. In the United States, immigration played the biggest role in shaping ethnic identity. However, this is not the case in every part of the world. In India, ethnicity must be understood from a unique and complex perspective. According to James Manor, "There are particular problems in analyzing ethnicity in India, the most heterogeneous and complex society on earth. Indeed, that complexity makes it harder and more risky to apply this word there than almost anywhere else". Factors like caste, religion, language, regional differences, and tribal identities all play a role in shaping ethnic identity. Additionally, India's federal democratic structure helps maintain and support ethnic identities. In Northeast India in particular, ethnicity is influenced by factors such as migration, economic conditions, politics, population changes, and geographical location.

Ethnicity, a multifaceted and deeply rooted concept in human societies, plays a crucial role in globalization. Ethnic communities function as strong social networks that provide support, solidarity, and a sense of belonging. These bonds promote social cohesion, mutual aid, cooperation, and the preservation of culture. Ethnicity also shapes political landscapes, influencing governance, representation, and advocacy for cultural rights and equitable resource distribution—thus contributing to democratization and pluralism. Moreover, it preserves unique cultural traditions, languages, and practices, enriching the global cultural mosaic. Diaspora communities, while embracing global citizenship, maintain strong ethnic ties, thereby promoting cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism. Despite its positive contributions, ethnicity can also generate significant challenges. Ethnocentrism the belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group, can lead to prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup tensions. Stereotypes and historical animosities often hinder interethnic understanding and cooperation. When grievances escalate, they can result in ethnic conflicts driven by competition over resources, political power, or past injustices. These conflicts may lead to violence, displacement, and socio-economic disruption, undermining peace and stability in societies.



On the other hand, in the era of globalization, ethnicity faces a range of significant threats. Assimilation pressures, urbanization, and migration contribute to the erosion of traditional customs, languages, and cultural practices. Additionally, cultural homogenization endangers ethnic identities, leading some aspects to lose their significance, become dormant, or gradually vanish. These challenges pose serious risks to the preservation of ethnic heritage and the overall cultural diversity within global civilizations, making it essential to protect and promote ethnic traditions in a rapidly changing world. Therefore, it is important to implement conscious efforts toward the preservation and promotion of ethnic heritage. By fostering inclusive environments and respecting ethnic identities, global civilizations can maintain cultural richness while promoting unity and mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **10. Preservation of Heritage among Indigenous Communities**

The indigenous peoples of the world have innumerable cultures, diverse ways of life, rich histories, and traditions, which form a significant part of global cultural diversity. However, the heritage of these communities faces increasing threats due to factors such as globalization, environmental changes, and socio-political pressures. Nevertheless, indigenous communities remain the strongest and most committed guardians of their cultural heritage. At the same time, they also seek support from governments, organizations, and others to ensure the preservation and promotion of their traditions.

### **10.1. In World Context**

Across the world, various indigenous communities have played a vital role in managing both tangible heritage and intangible heritage. Here, some well-known communities and their heritage are discussed -

#### **i) The Maori community**

The Indigenous people of Aotearoa or New Zealand, known as the Maori or 'Tangata whenua' (people of the land), are made up of many different iwi (tribes) and hapu (clans). Maori belongs to the Tahitic branch of the Eastern Polynesian language group which itself is a branch of the larger Austronesian language family.

The dialect of the Maori people, called Te Reo or simply Maori, is their traditional language. The Maori have rich traditions and customs. Their traditional food, called Hangi, is slowly cooked underground using hot steam from geothermal heat. In Maori culture, greetings are shared through a



warm and personal gesture known as the Hongi. The Powhiri is also a ceremonial welcome that highlights Māori hospitality and the importance of social relationships. Tikanga represents the traditional customs and guidelines for respectful behavior, observed across New Zealand. The Haka is one of the most well-known Maori traditions, symbolizing much more than just a dance. It powerfully expresses identity, pride, and strength.

The Hakari (feasting), is an important part of their culture and social life. Another distinctive feature of Māori identity is their traditional tattoos, known as Ta moko. The Māori observe several traditional rites. For example, at weddings, a relative of the groom traditionally challenges the bride's father to a fight. Instead of engaging in combat, the bride's father approaches the challenger and is warmly greeted, symbolizing peace and respect. The Māori also practiced what anthropologists call "secondary burial. Traditional Māori religion was centered around key concepts such as mana and tapu. Mana was viewed as a impersonal force or power, while tapu referred to sacredness, often determined by a person's status at birth. Ancestor worship also played a significant role in Māori spiritual beliefs.

According to Maori folklore, the origin of the universe is traced through a genealogical sequence called whakapapa, which goes back hundreds of generations. This sequence begins with nothingness and darkness, followed by the supreme god Io-matua-kore, the emergence of light, the creation of the physical world, the primeval parents Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatuanuku (Earth Mother), and the birth of their children such as the wind, forests, seas, rivers, and animals, leading up to the creation of mankind. The Maori way of life is deeply rooted in traditions that reflect a strong connection to nature, spirituality, and community. Thus, the rich culture and traditions of maori people remain alive in present day New Zealand.

## **ii) The Navajo people**

The Navajo tribe is the largest land-based Native American tribe in the United States, with a reservation spanning over 27,000 square miles across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The Navajo people identify themselves as Diné, a name that reflects deep cultural significance. Their language, also called Diné, remains an important part of their life and is still widely spoken.

The Navajo people have a rich heritage and strong cultural traditions. Their way of life includes traditional practices such as healing ceremonies, songs, and storytelling. Important places like archaeological sites, burial grounds, and sacred areas—where they have made offerings and gathered



natural resources like plants, water, and minerals—are essential to keeping their traditions alive. These customs have been passed down through generations, guided by their deities, the Diyin Dine.

One important sacred site is Dook’o’ooslííd, also known as the San Francisco Peaks, located on their ancestral land. Dook’o’ooslííd marks the western boundary of Navajo ancestral territory and is revered as a female deity who offers protection to the Navajo people.

An important ritual in Navajo culture is the Sweat Lodge ceremony, during which participants cleanse themselves both physically and spiritually in a small, enclosed structure heated by hot stones. Powwows are also significant cultural events large gatherings where Navajo people come together to celebrate their heritage. Artistic expression plays a crucial role in preserving Navajo cultural traditions while also providing economic opportunities for artisans. Among the most well-known forms of Navajo art is weaving, particularly the creation of intricate rugs and blankets. Navajo artisans are also skilled in silverwork, pottery making, and jewelry design, all of which reflect the rich cultural heritage of the community. Thus, the rich culture and traditions of the Navajo people remain alive and thriving in the United States.

### **iii) Tana -Toraja people**

The Toraja is situated in the northern part of South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, about an eight-hour drive from Makassar, the provincial capital. The term 'Toraja' refers to various ethnic groups with distinct languages and cultures who live in the Tana Toraja Regency and the later-formed North Toraja Regency. The traditional life of the Toraja people revolves around the practices of their traditional religion, Aluk Todolo, which literally means ‘the rules of the ancestors’.

The belief system of Aluk To Dolo includes various ceremonies to express both sorrow and joy. Rambu Solo’ is a funeral ritual symbolizing sadness, while Rambu Tuka is a naming ceremony that represents happiness. The people of Tana Toraja believe in Puang Matua (God).

The Toraja people have a rich heritage and strong cultural traditions. They celebrate many traditional festivals, including Buah Salah, a ritual to prevent crop failure, and Ma’badong, a traditional funeral dance. Every Toraja family belongs to an ancestral house called a tongkonan, which reflects their deep connection with their ancestors. Wood carving is an important art form in Toraja culture, seen in the decorations on tongkonan roofs and in bamboo grave figures called tau-tau. In addition to carving, weaving is also a vital traditional craft, especially in the Sa’dan region, known for the weaving village of Sa’dan To’barana’. Thus, the rich culture and traditions of the Toraja people remain alive and thriving.



The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has submitted the Toraja Traditional Settlements to the World Heritage Committee (WHC). These settlements are currently on Indonesia's World Heritage Tentative List. Heritage tourism, which includes visits to these traditional settlements, is often the main attraction for tourists in Toraja.

#### **iv) Maasai people**

The Maasai are one of the most well-known tribes in Africa. They are a nomadic and pastoralist Nilotic ethnic group living in northern, central, and southern Kenya, as well as northern Tanzania. The Maasai are widely recognized in East Africa, partly because they live near famous wildlife reserves like the Masai Mara in Kenya and Amboseli near the Tanzanian border. The Maasai speak a language called Maa, and their roots can be traced to Nilotic origins. They are monotheistic and worship a single God named Engai or Enkai. The traditional Maasai diet includes six main items: meat, blood, milk, fat, honey, and tree bark. Their clothing varies by gender, age, and region. Young men wear black for several months after circumcision. Red is the most favored color, though black, blue, checkered, striped, and multicolored African garments are also worn. Maasai women are known for weaving and beading jewelry, which plays an important role in their appearance and cultural identity. Traditionally, the Maasai people depend mainly on vocal music for their songs and dances, using instruments only rarely—such as large horns in certain performances. Their music features rhythmic group harmonies, led by the *olaranyani* (song leader), who carries the main melody.

*Adumu*, also known as the "jumping dance," is one of their famous traditional dances. Another key tradition is *Enkipaata*, an initiation ceremony that marks the transition of boys into warriors, known as *morans*. Although they face many challenges, the Maasai people continue to uphold and celebrate their vibrant culture and traditions across Africa. Their cultural identity endures with impressive strength and perseverance.

#### **v) Sami people and their heritage**

The Sami people are the indigenous inhabitants of the Sápmi region, which stretches across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. This region is often called Lapland.

Among these countries, Norway has the largest Sámi population. The Sami are descendants of nomadic people who lived in Northern Scandinavia thousands of years ago. The Sami people speak nine different languages. Three of these are mainly spoken in northern Norway. Sami languages belong to the Uralic language family, which also includes Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian. They are very different



from Norwegian and other Indo-European language. Traditionally, the Sami people have depended on animals for food and income. In the past, they hunted, farmed, fished, and most importantly, herded reindeer. Sami handicrafts are also a key part of their culture. Their traditional clothing, called gákti (or kofte in Norwegian), is now mostly worn during celebrations or special events. Modern brands like Topaz of Norway and Swedish Kero make stylish leather boots inspired by traditional Sami footwear. The traditional craft of duodji also continues to thrive in today's Sami communities. Another important tradition is the joik, a type of Sami song usually dedicated to a person, animal, or place. Cultural events like Sami National Day on February 6th help celebrate and promote Sami heritage. This keeps the rich culture and traditions of the Sami people alive and vibrant today.

## 10.2. In Indian context

India is a country of immense cultural variety, often referred to as a land of 'unity in diversity.' Within this diversity, various indigenous communities preserve and uphold their unique heritage and traditions. Here, some well-known communities and their heritage are discussed here —

### i) The Warlis

The Warli are an indigenous tribe primarily found in the districts of Mumbai, Nashik, and Palghar in Maharashtra, as well as the Dangs and Valsad districts of Gujarat. Their highest concentration is in the Dahanu Taluka of Palghar District. The Warli people speak a dialect that blends elements of Marathi and Gujarati. Though they do not have a script of their own, they use the Devanagari script for written communication. Culturally, the Warli are an agro-pastoral community, deeply connected to their land and traditional way of life. The Warli are traditionally non-vegetarian. Warli women typically wear a Lugden, a one-yard sari draped up to the knee. In some cases, they also wrap a loin cloth around the upper body. Warli men traditionally wear a loin cloth, accompanied by a waistcoat and a turban, which together symbolize their cultural identity. The traditional knowledge of the Warli people consists of artwork, folklore, music, dance and their rituals and customs. The Warli tribal community also worships a tribal deity named 'Isar,' whom they identify with 'Mahadev'. The Warli tribal community celebrates popular festivals such as Diwali and Holi. They also observe a traditional ceremony to propitiate Nara Dev, their local deity. During this ritual, the Warlis perform their characteristic folk dance as part of the celebration. Among the most popular dances of the Warli community are the Diwali dances, which are performed exclusively to the accompaniment of Tarpa music. Another notable form is the Shimga dance, performed solely by male dancers. These dances are accompanied by a musical ensemble featuring traditional instruments such as the dhol, timki, and pipori. Warli art is a vital part of the community's traditional



knowledge and bears a striking resemblance to the cave paintings of Bhimbetka in the central highlands. This cultural significance makes its preservation essential.

The Warlis live in forested areas and rely heavily on natural resources. They use Karvi stalks to built hut walls and collect medicinal plants, palm wine fuel wood, fruits and small game from the surrounding jungles. Thus the Warli tribe continues to keep their rich culture and traditions alive and vibrant to this day.

## **ii) Toda people**

The Toda are a pastoral community who live in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state of India. Their language, Toda, belongs to the Dravidian language family. It is now known that Toda is part of the southern group of Proto-South Dravidian languages and separated from South Dravidian after Kannada and Telugu. They traditionally live in settlements made up of three to seven small thatched houses, shaped like half barrels and spread across the slopes of the pastures. These huts are enclosed by walls made of loose stones. The front part of each hut is decorated with Toda art, a form of rock mural painting. Traditionally, the Toda people's main occupation is cattle rearing and dairy work. They are primarily vegetarians. Their staple food is rice, usually consumed with dairy products and curries. The religious and funerary rites of the Toda provide a social setting for the composition and chanting of complex poetic songs centered around the buffalo cult. They worship various gods, goddesses, and numerous spirits. Among them, Tiekirzi is considered the most powerful, believed to be the creator of the earth and humankind. The Todas are known for their traditional clothing. Both men and women wear a white garment called "poothukuli," made from a special fabric and designed with red, white, and black colors. They decorate shawls with fine needlework, done by both genders. The patterns on these shawls are similar to the tattoos once worn by the Toda people and look almost like weaving. Their art is closely linked to nature and their culture, often featuring designs of the sun, moon, and stars.

During the last decade both Toda society and culture have also become the focus of international efforts at culturally sensitive environmental restoration. Their lands are now a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO designated International Biosphere Reserve and is under consideration by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee for selection as a World Heritage site.

## **iii) Kol Tribe**

The Kol tribe is one of the primitive tribal communities of central India. They are an Adivasi ethnic group mainly found in the central and eastern parts of the country, including West Bengal,



Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. Smaller populations of the Kol community also live in the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. The language of the Kol tribe varies based on their location and historical background. Historically, the term "Kol" was used to refer to various tribes in eastern India, many of whom spoke Munda languages. There is no single language spoken by all Kols. Today, many members of the Kol community are belong to the Munda language group and may speak languages such as Mundari, Ho, or Santali.

The Kol tribe follows a mixed economy, mainly based on settled agriculture. They also engage in seasonal activities like collecting forest produce, hunting, and fishing to support their livelihood. They are non-vegetarians, and also rice (mandi) is their staple food.

Vibrant clothing is a key feature of traditional Kol attire. Kol men typically wear a simple dhoti made from coarse, hand-woven cloth. Women usually wear a coarse saree, accessorized with glass or silver bangles, beads, and silver anklets.

The Kols traditionally follow a form of polytheism, worshipping multiple deities. Their faith is deeply rooted in nature and is commonly known as the "Sarna religion."

Dance and music are vital parts of Kol culture. Celebrations and festivals play a central role in their lives, with dance (called Susun) always accompanied by music and song. The Kols create their own unique folk songs that reflect their daily life, work, festivals, and the changing seasons. They celebrate important events with special dances, including Maghe Susun for the Maghe festival, Ba Susun for the Ba festival, Andi Susun for marriages, and Hero Susun during the Hero festival. Thus, the Kol tribe continues to preserve and celebrate their rich culture and traditions, keeping them alive and vibrant to this day.

#### **iv) Angami Naga tribe**

The Angami Naga tribe is among the largest and most recognized Naga tribes in Nagaland, India. They mainly inhabit the Kohima district, with notable populations also living in Dimapur and Phek districts. Of Mongoloid origin, the Angamis speak the Angami language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is believed that they migrated from Myanmar over a thousand years ago and have since firmly settled in their present homeland.

Traditionally, they lived in hilltop villages protected by ditches and defensive walls. Their houses were arranged in a circle around a central courtyard and were mostly made of bamboo and wood, with roofs thatched with leaves or grass.



They have a traditionally agrarian economy. They are mainly farmers, with rice as their primary crop. They also cultivate millet, maize, and vegetables. Besides farming, the Angamis engage in hunting, gathering, animal husbandry, and handicrafts. They are skilled artisans known for making items like baskets, mats, and pottery.

The cuisine of the Angami Naga tribe is diverse and shaped by their cultural values, local climate, and geography. Their staple foods include rice, millet, vegetables, and locally raised meat. Popular traditional dishes include Galho (a stew of rice, meat, and vegetables), Akhuni (fermented soybean served with rice), Anishi (a rice-based dish made from fermented bamboo), Kuthu (stir-fried vegetables and meat), and Jado (a steamed rice cake usually eaten with chutney).

The Angami Naga are known for their vibrant traditional attire. Women typically wear a long skirt (pünem), a blouse (pukhrü), and a shawl, often decorated with beadwork and embroidery. Men wear a loincloth, a short jacket, and a shawl. Both men and women accessorize with jewelry, headgear, and traditional footwear.

The traditional beliefs of the Angami Naga are rooted in animism, the idea that all living things possess a spirit. They also believe in Tenyimi, the supreme creator god. The Angami Nagas are culturally rich, known for their colorful festivals, music, dance, and craftsmanship. Key festivals like Sekrenyi (festival of the dead), Peh (harvest festival), and Tsokhwe (festival of fire) play a vital role in their community life. Traditional songs and dances are commonly performed during these celebrations and gatherings, reflecting their strong cultural heritage.

#### **v) The Oraon People**

The Oraon people are one of the largest tribal communities in India. They primarily live in the Chotanagpur Plateau region, covering Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and West Bengal. Their language, Kurukh, belongs to the Dravidian language family and is spoken widely in parts of southern India.

The Oraon people have a rich and unique culture reflected in their way of life. They are mainly agricultural, growing crops like rice, maize, and millet. Traditionally, they live in small forest villages, where their homes are built from mud and bamboo with thatched roofs.

Apart from agriculture, the Oraon people are skilled in metalwork, pottery, and basket weaving. Their baskets are made from straw, bamboo, and reeds, while their pottery is known for red and black



clay with intricate geometric designs. They craft various vessels like bowls, pots, and figurines using traditional methods passed down through generations. The Oraon also produce metal items such as jewelry, tools, and weapons.

The Oraon people's traditional clothing reflects their vibrant culture through symbolic elements and intricate patterns. Oraon men typically wear a short kurta, a loose shirt, and a dhoti, often adorned with embroidery. They also wear a head turban, a gamcha (waist cloth), and a colorful pagri. Oraon women commonly wear cotton or silk sarees, decorated with geometric designs and colorful stripes, showcasing their unique cultural identity.

The Oraon people have a rich oral storytelling tradition, passed down through generations, that reflects their cultural values, beliefs, and history through tales of mythical beings and moral lessons.

Their traditional religion, Sarnaism—meaning "religion of the forest"—emphasizes nature and ancestor worship. Central to Sarnaism is Dharmes, the supreme deity representing the life force and cosmic order. Sacred groves, known as Sarna in Kurukh, are revered as the dwelling places of gods and spirits.

The Oraon perform rituals such as puja by offering flowers, fruits, and incense, often in homes or sacred groves. Animal sacrifices, especially of goats and chickens, are also part of major religious ceremonies to seek blessings and appease deities.

With the help of traditional instruments like drums, flutes, and gongs, the Oraon people preserve their culture. Their colorful and joyful dances showcase their vibrant cultural identity. Notable dances include the Sohрани dance during the cattle festival and the Karma dance during the harvest season. Shahrul, their main festival, marks the beginning of the sowing season and the new year. It is celebrated with reunions, feasts, and prayers for prosperity, usually in March or April. Thus, the Oraon people continue to uphold and celebrate their age-old traditions and customs.

### **10.3. In the context of Assam**

Assam is located in one of the greatest routes of human migration. Over the centuries, she has welcomed people of diverse origins, especially the Indo-Chinese and Mongoloid peoples, who contributed new elements to the region's population and cultural composition. As a result, Assam is home to a wide array of communities with varied heritages. Below are some communities and a brief overview of their cultural heritage –



## i) The Mishings

The Mishing, earlier known as Miri, is one of the many ethnic tribes of Assam that has greatly contributed to the region's culture. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman language speaking group of the great Mongoloid stock. Originally they are the inhabitants of the neighbouring hill state of Arunachal Pradesh, and lived along with the Adi tribe. In present time, the Mishings are primarily settled in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur, and Golaghat in Assam. They also inhabit the river valleys of the Lohit, Siang, and Subansiri rivers in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Mishings, being the second largest ethnic tribe in Assam, have a distinct linguistic identity. Their language, known as 'Tani Agom,' is part of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

Like other tribes, the Mishings have unique food habits. Two of their main traditional dishes are 'Namsing' (dried fish) and 'Purang' (boiled rice). They commonly use dried fish, leafy vegetables, bora rice, khar, wild herbs, pork, chicken, chili, ginger, and black pepper in their cooking. A special rice beer called 'Apong' is an important part of their daily life and is used in rituals and celebrations.

The traditional dress of the Mishings shows their rich weaving culture, especially among women. Men wear cotton jackets, Gonor ugon (dhoti), Mibu gālug (sleeveless jacket), Dumer (towel), Lingkāb (muffler), Gālug (shirt), and thick loincloths. Women wear clothes like Ége (skirt), Ribī (lower wrap), Gāseng (colorful striped shawl), Seleng gasor (light cotton wrap), Riyā (scarf), and Géro (waist shawl). A special traditional blanket called Gadu, soft on one side, is also made using a traditional loom.

The Mishings traditionally follow animistic beliefs, centered around nature worship. They believe in Do:nyi-Polo (Sun and Moon) and Se:di-Melo (creator of the universe) as their supreme deities. Their religion is known as the Do:nyi-Polo faith. In their rituals, they also worship various spirits like Urom uie (departed soul), Dobur uie (dobur puja), Taléng uie (sky spirit), Kum:sung uie (granary spirit), Yumrang uie (forest spirit), Asi uie (water spirit) and Péjab uie (duck spirit). These practices reflect their deep connection with nature.

The Mishings do not have written records about their origin and migration, but they preserve their history through rich oral traditions. Legends, myths, folk tales, and songs form an important part of their cultural memory. One such tradition is the Abang—a type of religious hymn—that helps them pass down their age-old myths and ancestral lineage from generation to generation.



The Mishing people primarily depend on agriculture for their livelihood. To preserve their cultural identity, they celebrate two major traditional festivals: Ali-Aye-Ligang and Po:rag. These festivals are held to seek blessings from Do:nyi-Po:lo, Sedi-Melo, Gumín Soyin, and their ancestors for a prosperous and successful harvest season.

The young boys and girls perform a traditional dance called Gumrag-So:man (Gumrag dance). Instruments like the dhol, tal, pempa, and gungang are used during the dance and musical performances. In this way, the Mishing community continues to celebrate and preserve its vibrant cultural traditions.

## **ii) The Thengal – Kacharis**

The Thengal Kacharis are one of the indigenous communities of Assam in Northeast India and are regarded as the “Sons of the Soil” (Bhumiputra). Racially, they belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group and are part of the eastern branch of the larger Kachari ethnic group. They share close cultural and ethnic ties with the Sonowal Kacharis, another subgroup of the Kachari community. Recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in Assam, the Thengal Kacharis are primarily settled in the Brahmaputra Valley, with major concentrations in the districts of Jorhat, Golaghat, and North Lakhimpur. Their primary spoken language is Assamese.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Thengal Kachari people. Rice is their staple food, and they are mostly non-vegetarian. Chewing betel nut and vine is a common cultural practice.

Their houses usually have a courtyard and a backyard. Traditionally, Thengal Kachari homes were made of bamboo and thatch.

Thengal Kachari women are skilled silk weavers, and silk rearing and weaving are important parts of their culture. Men typically wear dhoti and panjabi (a long half-sleeve shirt), while women wear mekhela and chadar.

This indigenous tribe has a rich cultural life with unique beliefs and practices that set them apart. Dr Jogeswar Bora has stated: ‘The Thengal Kacharis were originally worshipper of Lord Shiva and goddess Durga. They do not worship any idols of the gods and goddesses. But as a symbol of Lord Shiva a plant known as ‘Hiju’ is planted in the front side of the compound of the Thengal Kachari houses. Moreover they offered prayer in a place called as ‘Sal’ to appease the gods and goddesses and this is conducted by various rites and rituals.’ Like other tribes in Assam, the Thengal Kacharis are primarily agrarian. They celebrate Bihu, one of the largest festivals in Assamese culture, observing all three Bihus:



Rongali (Bohaag) Bihu, Kati (Kongali) Bihu, and Maah (Bhogali) Bihu. Additionally, they have a traditional pre-Bihu celebration called 'Tora-Chira' Bihu, as noted by Hemanga Neog.

Thengal Kacharis also celebrate other traditional festivals such as Suwa Utuwa Utsau and Pdnitula Sabah, which reflect their unique cultural identity.

To preserve and promote their rich heritage, the Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council has taken important steps. One such initiative is the establishment of the Thengal Kachari Museum at Titabar in Jorhat district, which showcases various aspects of their culture, tradition, and way of life.

### **iii) The Bodo people**

The Bodo tribe is an indigenous community primarily residing in Assam, India. They have a rich cultural heritage, a distinct language called Bodo, and unique traditions. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. However, the Bodo language is officially written using the Devanagari script.

The Bodo people mainly engage in agriculture, poultry farming, pig rearing, animal domestication, fishing, textile weaving, and firewood collection, which are all important parts of their way of life.

The Bodo people primarily eat rice, cultivating different varieties and consuming it three times a day. They also favor khar, a liquid dish made by burning the bark and root of the banana tree.

The traditional Bodo attire is colourful and rich. Men wear tribal gamosas, and women wear dokhona as their main dress. Women also use jwmggra (a scarf) to cover their upper body and aronai (a small scarf) for cultural events. These clothes have various designs and colors.

The Bodos follow Bathouism, an ancient faith. They worship the sijou tree as a symbol of the Almighty and also honour Lord Shiva as their ritual deity. Their rituals involve placing hen eggs under the sijou tree, performing dances, and offering rice wine and meat. With their rich cultural heritage and close-knit community, the Bodo tribe is a significant part of Assam's social and cultural fabric.

### **iv) The Rabhas**

The Rabha tribe is one of the important plains communities of Assam. They mainly live in Goalpara, northern Garo Hills, Kamrup, as well as in Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, and Darrang districts. Ethnically, they belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman family,



specifically the Bodo branch. Since the Rabha language has no native script, the Assamese script is used for writing it.

Similar to other plains tribes, the Rabhas rely mainly on agriculture for their livelihood. Those living near the Meghalaya border practice shifting cultivation, called 'Jhum,' to some extent. Rice is their staple food, and they also enjoy rice beer, pork, and dried fish powder.

Rabha women are skilled weavers who make clothes for their families, including men and children. Women wear 'Rifan' (a lower body garment) and 'Kambung' (an upper body cloth). Men wear 'Pajar' (a muffler-like towel), 'Phali' (an embroidered scarf), and 'Pasara' (a long scarf made mostly of cotton with some endi yarn).

The Rabhas follow Animism. Animal sacrifice is a common part of their rituals, and offerings of pigs, goats, and other animals are frequently made during religious ceremonies.

The Rabha people celebrate many fairs and festivals. One famous fair is the "Dadan mela," held at Ronchoi, about 35 km southwest of Goalpara Town, where there is a "Dadan" temple. They sing hymns to "Dadan" and "Marukhetri," great heroes of the Rabhas. They also honor "RisiBai," a respected Rabha goddess, with special prayers at the temple. People enjoy the fair happily while drinking homemade rice beer called "Janga." In the evenings, there is folk dancing with music from traditional drums called "Kham" and flutes called "Mukbangshi." Men and women dance together or in separate groups, creating a joyful atmosphere.

Their main community festivals are called "Khokchi" or "Baikho," based on their religious beliefs. This spring festival is celebrated from mid-April to mid-May. Like this, the Rabhas have many ceremonies and festivals, which they continue to celebrate and preserve in Assam.

#### **v) Tiwa community**

The Tiwa community, also known as Lalung, is an indigenous group mainly found in Assam and Meghalaya. In Assam, they mostly live in Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup, and Karbi Anglong districts. In Meghalaya, they are mainly found in the Ri-Bhoi district. A few Tiwa people also live in the Dhemaji area of Lakhimpur district. The Tiwas are divided into Plains Tiwas and Hill Tiwas, depending on where they live. These two groups have some differences in culture and way of life.



The Tiwa language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Among the Plains Tiwas, it has been influenced by Assamese. Tiwa is mainly an oral language, passed down through generations. Their literature is also oral and includes folktales, myths, legends, songs, and proverbs.

The Tiwa community mainly depends on agriculture, especially growing wet rice. In the hilly areas, they use shifting cultivation or jhum. Besides farming, they are involved in fishing, raising livestock, and small-scale trading. They are also well-known for their knowledge of herbal medicine and eco-friendly farming methods.

Tiwa women are skilled weavers and make beautiful fabrics on traditional handlooms. They use these to create traditional clothes like the Kasong (a wrap-around skirt) and Phaskai (a breast cloth). Tiwa people also wear various traditional ornaments, including Shap lo necklaces, Khaila and Khaidong earrings, Singli lo garlands, Ponmola necklaces, Khuri lo garlands made of cowry shells, Sigi lo garlands made from old coins, and Yastam rings.

The Tiwas follow a mixed religious system that blends animism and Hinduism. They worship nature, ancestral spirits, and Hindu gods. The Tiwa community celebrates several festivals that reflect their agricultural lifestyle and cultural richness. Pisu (Bihu) is their main farming festival, with unique rituals like Boka Nach and Gosai Utiwa. Junbeel Mela, held in Morigaon, promotes traditional barter trade. Wansuwa is a harvest festival to thank deities, while Sagra Misawa marks the start of sowing with songs and dances. Borot Utsav, celebrated on the full moon of Puha, seeks protection from disease and wild animals. Langkhan Phuja, observed twice a year, includes songs like Lo Ho La Hai and Lali Hilali Lai, sung during various ceremonies.

The Tiwa community boasts a vibrant musical and dance tradition, utilizing instruments such as Khram drums, bamboo flutes, Kali pipes, the indigenous violin called Tandang, and Thogari string instruments. Through these cultural expressions, they continue to preserve their heritage and customs.

Apart from all these ethnic groups, there are multiplicities of similar examples in the context of Assam. All of these communities have regional variations too. To satisfy all the preservation needs among these ethnic groups a scientific framework with proper utilisation of Indigenous Community Museums will be amicable. Despite of having multicultural demographic structure and 'diversity in unity' they did not get proper recognition in the national and international level. Similarly, the traditional values, ethnic practices, ethos, cultural rites, food habits and customs etc. all of such aspects are remained internal among these communities only. Although several initiatives (both Governmental



and Non – governmental) are made for the preservation of ethnic cultures and their heritage, still proper scientific approach with infused academic interests are missing. Hence, through this paper an attempt is made to suggest the proper implementation of community museums in Assam. Some of the key points, liked to be highlighted are as follows –

- 1) Particular and subjective initiatives should be taken as per different ethnic communities and their respective habitation.
- 2) Along with the preservation, simultaneous approaches should be promoted to educate and train new generations about the traditional discourses.
- 3) Special impetus should be given upon community engagement, i.e. – the involvement of skilled or learned personalities of the respective community in the preservation techniques.
- 4) Ultra regional features should be given utter importance. Even the same ethnic groups may have different variations of traditional wellbeing.
- 5) Educational institutions should make active part of the museological studies with the integration of appropriate curriculum as prescribed by NEP-2020.
- 6) Instead of developing one large scale preservation facilities, multiple small scale museums would perform better in terms of economic viability and proper utilization.
- 7) The sector of ethno tourism and such other opportunities might be integrated for an holistic and sustainable development.

## **11. Findings and Concluding remarks –**

After all the analysis throughout this paper, museums can be conceptualised as a non profit organisation with the utmost priority of preservation and protection of historical heritage. After the process of institutionalisation of history, museology became an integral part of historical studies, particularly in academic terms. The development of museum studies in the context of India can be traced back to the colonial rule. In the post Colonial era the legacy was maintained and continued as well. The concept of Indigenous Community Museums has its links with the traditional preservation techniques of ethnic communities. In the stage of globalisation, the protection of ethnic identity is the demand of time. Thus, through proper utilisation of the Indigenous Community Museums preservation of such cultures should be promoted. Especially, in the case of Brahmaputra Valley (Assam), these museological technologies can be proved as eminent for the sake of knowledge and continuation of culture.

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