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Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Conservation of Natural Resources among the Hill Tribes of North-East India: Arunachal Pradesh since the Nineteenth Century

This project focuses on the interface of culture, people, and ecology. In the first part of my work, I propose to examine the indigenous knowledge systems of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh before they came under the fold of modern state system. This knowledge is embedded in their local practices, belief systems, myths, sayings, and folktales. I would analyze the tribal cosmologies which provide a detailed account of the genealogies of the human and non-human world. How do these genealogies represent the integration of the human and non-human world? I would examine whether a mythological link between the natural and cultural worlds leads to more conservation-oriented practices. I propose to search for “sacred geographies,” and seek out to what extent particular rivers, soils, groves, and mountains are imbued with sacrality and, therefore, inspire people to be more careful and “ecologically” sensitive to the consequences of using their natural resource.

In the second part, I propose to deal with cultural policy followed and adopted by the policy makers of the post-colonial Indian State. This policy is generally known as the “Nehru-Elwin policy.” The development of the tribes along the lines of their “tradition and genius” was the crux of this policy. It was decided to “protect” their indigenous knowledge systems. “Local knowledge” was perceived to be significant from a conservation and sustainable development perspective. However, gradually a new social group empowered by “modern education” emerged in the society.

How do the changing tastes of the emerging educated social group affect their attitude towards indigenous knowledge systems? It is crucial to understand this. To what extent was “epistemic violence” exerted towards the indigenous knowledge systems?

I intend to study the various movements for cultural identity among different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. I propose to explore a series of questions in this regard. Was there any attempt to recover their history and reclaim their knowledge systems and strive for “cognitive justice?” Was there any attempt at dialogue with “universal knowledge” or an attempt to reinvent their traditions? To what extent was landscape and memory integrated into the movements for cultural identity?

With this project, I hope to contribute to the discourse on sustainability by providing insights into the indigenous knowledge systems and how we can learn from these traditions of interacting with the environment.

The sources will include both archival as well as ethnographic materials. Archival sources would include both official as well as unofficial documents.

This study encompasses a book project entitled *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Conservation of Natural Resources among the Hill Tribes of North-East India: Arunachal Pradesh since the Nineteenth Century*.