

**ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN  
INDIAN  
ART AND CULTURE**

**PART I**



**EDITORS**

**DR ABUL FOYES MD MALIK  
DR CHANDRABALI DAS**

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PART-I

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Dr. Abul Foyes Md Malik  
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**Edited by**

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14. Ethnic Boundary and Political Culture: A Comprehensive Analysis  
*Sujata Sarkar/102*
15. Racial and Ethnic Dichotomy: A Cause for Upsurge of Ethnic Movements  
*Ayesha Afsana/106*
16. Climate Change and the Marginalisation of Women -  
*Barsha S Misra/112*
17. Understanding the 'Primitive' Tribal, Aboriginal and Adivasi Identity Through the lens of Gandhi  
*Bhaswati Sonowal/118*
18. Embracing Freedom: Identity and Self-Discovery in Existentialist Existence -  
*Dechen Chuskit/125*
19. Shaping Identity in Early Childhood: Exploring Cultural Influences in India -  
*Dipjyoti Das/133*
20. An Ecofeminist Reading of YesheDorjee Thongchi's Novel Sanam -  
*Dr. Himakshi Kalita, Dr. Arindam Sarma/143*
21. Divergent Districts and Archetypes of Dissent: A Socio Economic Analysis of Identity in The Hunger Games -  
*Javairia Nousheen/152*
22. Men and Nature in Amitav Ghosh's Selected Novels: An Ecocritical Trajectory into the Ibis Trilogy -  
*Joy Paul/164*
23. A Critical Analysis of Child Labour in India  
*Dr. Kumar Chandan Jyoti/172*
24. Crossroads of Knowledge: Arabic Manuscripts and India's Cultural Tapestry -  
*Mansur Ahmed Hazari/181*
25. Socio Economics Status of Sakachep Tribe -  
*Mante Sakachep/188*
26. Cultural Diversity and National Integration in India and Its Impact on Education of India -  
*Mayuri Choudhury/193*
27. Diversified Indian Culture: A True Essence of Beauty  
*Minakshi Hazarika, Dr. Binita Baishya Kalita/201*

## Socio Economics Status of Sakachep Tribe

Mante Sakachep

### Introduction

Sakachep is one of the small tribes in the Kuki-Chin Community under Tibeto-Burman language family. Sakachep, which is also known as 'Khelma' is a small ethnic group inhabiting in North East India. "Khelma" is a term given by the British during their encounter with them when they administered North Cachar Hills, Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. Khamu and Langstieh (2009) asserted that the name Khelma is recognized only in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. In other districts of Assam and the neighbouring states of Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura, the community is known as the Sakachep community. According to SIL ethnologue (2003) the total population of this community is 25,000 (approximately) in the entire region of North East India. They live in all parts of North East India, for examples: Assam (Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Cachar districts), Meghalaya (Jaintia Hills district), Nagaland (Kohima district), Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Concerning occupation, most of the Sakachep are engaged in agriculture. More than 60% of the Sakachep is presently involved in agriculture. Coming to the religion the Sakachep practised a fusion of naturalism and animism. The main traditional Gods and deities of Sakachep are Angera, Debi, Moka, Saichkri, Rajaram, Mokol raja, Enu Devi etc. With the advent of Christianity, majority of Sakachep became Christians. But still, some of the traditional practices are inter woven with Christian beliefs and practices. In the sphere of education, the literacy rate of Sakachep community in Northeast is very low. Their economics status also low. Some of the Sakachep villages

are Bhangphiri, Buruatilla, Dorbinchip, Hatikali, Khelma Village, Khothar, Langkhercha, Langlut, Lungding, Pakala, Ronpur, Zailian etc. The Sakachep people are peace loving people no conflict or fight with their neighbouring villages.

### **Culture and Traditions**

The Sakachep follow the patrilineal line of descent, which is like the other tribes of Northeastern tribal people. The community regards the father as the head of the family, children acquire his surname and, likewise, the family's property is passed on to the eldest son who, in turn, is responsible for the wellbeing of his ageing parents. Succession pattern is such that after the father's demise, the eldest son takes on the rein of his father and, along with his mother, tends to the welfare of the family. Among the Sakachep, both joint families and nuclear families are found, but presently it appears that the nuclear family is increasingly preferred while the traditional joint family appear to be a dying institution. Kinship ties are used to define many kinds of social relationships, particularly relationships between owner, heir and successor. Among the Sakachep, the relationship between primary kin is of joking type. Their kinship system fall under the classificatory type where individuals need not necessarily bear genetic closeness but follow abstract relationship rules. For instance, if a total stranger marries into the society, they may simply be placed in appropriate class opposite their spouse. Kinship ties are secured amongst the Sakachep and the kin group members support each other in good times as well as in times of crisis.

Clan exogamy is followed and whoever breaches these customs are liable to be punished or even excommunicated from both the clan and the village. In such cases where the eldest son is at fault, the couple as well as the posterity are barred from the clan. Monogamy is the acceptable rule. In the past, it was mandatory for a Sakachep groom to offer 4-5 years of service to his father-in-law. Once it was completed, he could take home his bride, a system called maksa. Once maksa was completed, the father-in-law organises a feast where the groom's family gifts a pig to the bride's family, while its two hind legs are given to the bride's grand father. The whole day is celebrated with pomp and splendour and at dusk the couple goes to the groom's home where a

ceremony, including a feast called *moi ruai*, was organised to welcome the bride. The very term 'Sakachep' (Saka-pig's leg; Chepgrill made of bamboo) derives from the elaborate nature of their marriage system. Now a days, Christian marriages prevail but at the same time, traces of their age-old tradition continue to underscore their marriage system.

The Sakachep women don wraparound called *puanborn* which is fastened around the waist by a belt known as *kongkhith* and a breast cloth for the torso called *dropbom*. Black and white colours seem to be used most in their clothing. Traditional ornaments for women include earrings known as *kuarbet/toiah*, hairpins and combs called *lington*. The men, in turn, wear loincloths called *kaipereng*, a kind of dhoti called *diar*, *kherem* or wooden sandals and simple earrings. Their dress as a whole has a marked influence of Pnar material culture, all the way down to subtle details. Their dresses and ornaments do not indicate any clan or status distinction. This was different in the past when their traditional chieftains, called *kalim/kabur* had to wear a kind of headgear or turban called *lukom* in times of rituals and festivals.

Prior to the arrival of the British government in this part of the country, the traditional political organisation was headed by a *Kalim* (head priest) who was guided and assisted by *Uchoi* (community priest), *Kabur* (secretary) and *Palai* (messenger). The selection of *Kalim* was hereditary in nature and only males were entitled to this post. He was expected to be acquainted with traditional customs, laws and culture, and it was his responsibility to solve cases related to divorce, marriage, disputes between clans and other matters which were related to customary laws. In spite of the powers vested in him, the consent of the community was indispensable and in serious cases, the advice of the king (*Vaireng*) was sought in the village court (*Eitar Roeijak*). The functional role of the *Kalim* and his associates is curbed at present; however they are still entrusted with matters related to customary laws, marriages and other matters which are settled outside the sphere of the government. Till date, only men can become members while women are only allowed to attend meetings. When it comes to local governance it appears that gender equality, or for that matter even the participation of women, is still far removed from the daily reality in their society.

## Religion and Language

As was common among many tribal societies in the North-Eastern region, the Sakachep, too, practiced a fusion of naturalism and animism. They believed in one Supreme Being, the creator Angra who is thought of as living in the sky. However, during the last fifty years or so, almost all of them have embraced Christianity and their traditional religious beliefs have dwindled to a large extent. This is not to say, however, that their traditional culture has altogether disappeared with the coming of Christianity. The traditional religious practices are still continue in some Sakachep villages. The Sakachep have a dialect of their own which is akin to Hmar, Lushai group of languages and the Biata. These all belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The educated Sakachep can speak fairly good English, Hindi, Assamese and Bengali.

## Economics Conditions

Land was first acquired by reclamation, only later it became an immovable private property. The sale and purchase of land during the last few decades have brought about a new rule of inheritance in which land is often passed on to the eldest son. Apart from privately owned land, there are community lands where every individual has equal rights but which are neither heritable nor transferable. Like most tribal populations, the mainstay of the people is agriculture. They practise both settled and shifting forms of cultivation. Settled cultivation refers to permanent form of cultivation, which includes both dry and wet terrace cultivation. Jhum (slash and burn cultivation) was previously practised on a large scale and large tracts of forests were cleared, burned, cropped and then left fallow to recover. In recent years, however, permanent cultivation is predominantly practised among them. More than 60% of the Sakachep population is presently involved, in one way or the other, in cultivation. Some of them own large agricultural plots, while others are marginal landowners and numerable farmers are altogether landless. The predicament of landlessness has brought about sharecroppers who cultivate leased land. During harvest time, payment to landowners is made either by cash or kind, and mostly so on a one-third basis. The agricultural produce includes rice, maize, millets and vegetables. What is not consumed is taken to weekly markets in neighbouring villages and merchandised. A handful of



Sakachep are engaged in the government sector and some have opted for small-scale business, carpentry, poultry and cattle rearing. Besides the above, the production and trading of charcoal is something which needs to be mentioned. A significant number of men and women are now directly or indirectly involved in this round-the-year activity. The earnings from this merchandise have, by far, surpassed the income derived from agriculture and, in recent years, it has attracted a lot of people towards this business, but so at the cost of environmental degradation, which has turned into a serious problem in the region.

### **Conclusion**

The paper mainly focused on their social condition and economics status of the Sakachep tribe. They are still backward culturally, economically and all spheres. Their culture and lifestyle is unique more people should come forward to protect their culture and traditions. The government of India should also take more initiatives to protect and promote the indigenous people like Sakachep.

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