

## **Article: Adivasi Adi bimb: a tribal festival engaged in tribal revitalization and cultural osmosis: dismissing the theory of tribal absorption?**

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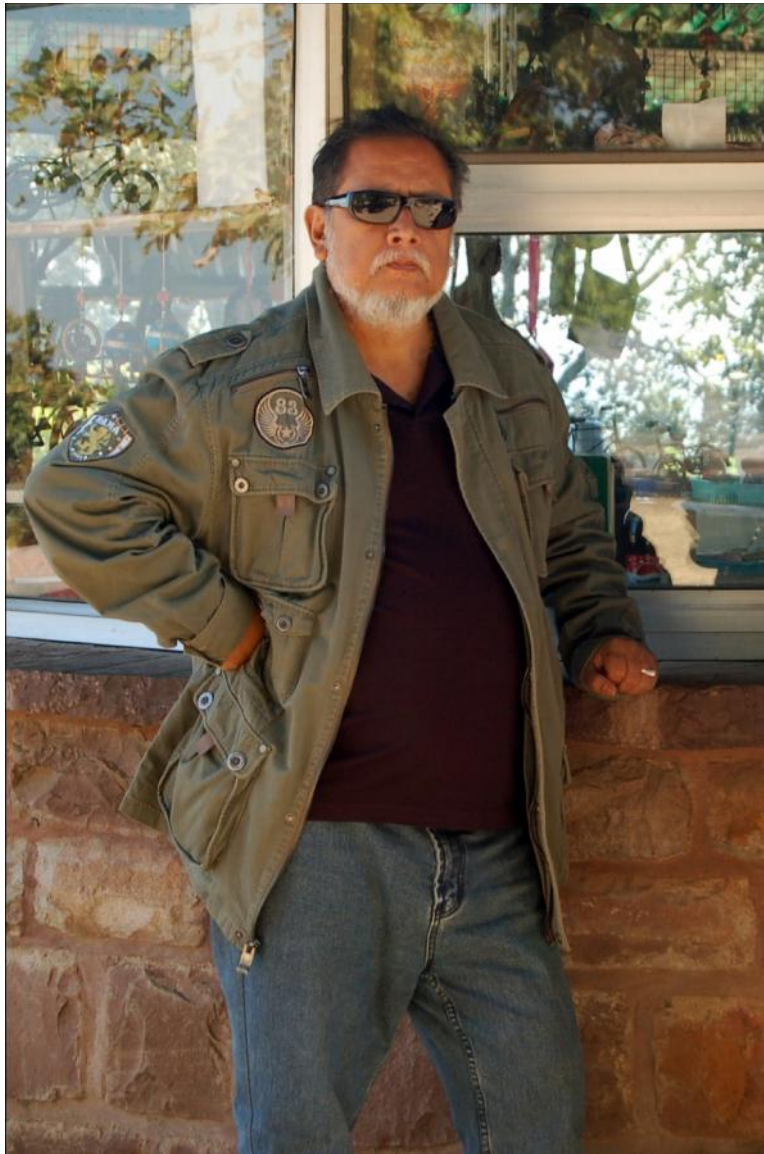
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The National School of Drama had been a premier institute of cultural improvisation in the country for long. It is one of the institutions prioritizing the portrayal of tribal culture and its rich tradition. Established in 1959, National School of Drama or (NSD) as it is popularly called, is the epitome of cultural training, practice and cultivation in the country. It is mainly a theatre training and propagating institutes in the country, which was formed under the patronage of *Sangeet Natak Academy*. It took some times, as long as 1975, to become an independent body under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, and was finally taken under the aegis of Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Besides its regular cultural activities, the school organizes festivals frequently in and around the country to celebrate the vibrancy of the various art forms, and its expressions. The festival showcases the dying art forms as well as provides strategies for their revival and resuscitation. Till date it had organized multiple festivals like the *Bharat Rang Mahotsav*, *Bal Sangam*, *Jashnebachpan*, *Sunday Club Festival*, *Poorvottar Natya Samaroh*, *Delhi International Arts Festival* and the *Adivasi Adi bimb*. All these festivals largely furnish the rich tribal expressions of our civilization and bring out its vibrancy and dynamism. Of all these festivals, the Adivasi Adi Bimb requires special mention for its animation and jauntiness. The festival had been kick started by none other than Ratan

Thiyam, the mentor of modern tribal cult .



pic.9 .

**Pic. 9**(The magnetic Ratan Thiyam)

Ratan Thiyam, as the name comes to our mind, what comes first to our thought are his rich skills of dramatics marinated with ethereal magic and a strong sense of activism. It is not a boot tromping activism, often echoed through guns and ammunition, but it expresses itself silently through one of the most ancient and classic forms of mediums of communication, viz. theatres and staged renditions. Ratan Thiyam is often identified

with the movement circumnavigating around theatres of roots, that came to define much of the modern Indian stage.

He was born on January 20, 1948 at Nabadwip, a place in the Nadia District district of West Bengal and reared in Haobam Dewan lane, Imphal. He was born in a family of artists and therefore, grew up to tow their line of creativity and zest. His father, Shri Thiyam Tarunkumar was one of the most revered mentors or 'gurus' of the classical Manipuri dance, while his mother, Bilasini Devi, was a renowned danseuse. Ratan Thiyam is a multifaceted and versatile artist not only from the view point of theatre, but also from the field of creative art and science. He works as a designer, music composer, choreographer, lightning expert, costume designer, architect and also a playwright, painter and poet<sup>29</sup>.

The notorious boy that he was, few could assume that he would grow up to be such a prodigy. As he steeped the threshold of adolescence, he went on to show his rich talent and potentialities in art and culture. By the age of 23, he has joined the Cultural Forum in 1960s which initiated much of his embarking on the literary voyage. By this time, he had started publishing his poems and lyrics and possibly, in a journal named, *Ritu*, he had published his first series of poems and short stories. He was pregnant with vibrant ideas and soon dreamed on to become a professional writer. He tasted his brush with authorship with his first novel, *Unnsads Nungsiba*. He thereafter made notable literary contributions like, *Chakravyuha* (The Wheel of War) (1984), *Uttar Priyadarshi* (The Final Beatitude, by Hindi playwright Agyeya) (1996), *Urubhangam* and *Blind Age*. His compositions are yanked from the bottom of his heart, and somewhere down the line, there is a strong sense of melancholy and loneliness, often echoed in his poems and proses, but nevertheless, his renditions are beamed by a strong alacrity and briskness, which lights up the show. It is this joviality and animation which not only takes his performing art back to its roots but he also uses this medium to draw a silent revolt.

Thiyam is often associated with the legacy of ushering a silent movement especially, in the rural heartland, using the traditional myths, mythologies and narratives as the rightful

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<sup>29</sup>A major part of his biography has been taken from the Ph.D Thesis on Thiyam, stored at the Shodhganga digital repository. The URL, has been provided below:

[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/24067/10/10\\_chapter%204.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/24067/10/10_chapter%204.pdf)

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strategies of silent encounter. He spoke of the poor denizens and addressing their issues became readily possible for the faculties he diligently developed. He speaks in myriad languages like Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, and English including Manipuri with incredible eloquence and readiness. His linguistic skills must have played a crucial role in bringing him closer to the wretched and the unkempt. He spoke of the marginal communities and used dramas as a useful instrument to express the grievances and groans of the underclass, whose mainstream possibilities had been overlooked and forcibly pushed to the dark alleys of the society. He started his own creative production unit in the name of, *Chorus Repertory Theatre Company* at Imphal in 1976, which is often termed as a watershed development in the historical trajectory of new theatre movements in post-independent India. Thiyam not just revolutionized grass root theatre movements, he at the same time promoted people at the pedestal. He can be considered as a savior or a messiah of the marginal people, trying hard to secure their standing in the 'main stream' of Indian civilization. Thiyam always felt that these *adivasis*, or the tribes as we call are the original inhabitants of the country and therefore the original stakeholders of the civilization, but who paradoxically been shunned away from the forefront of the national horizons. They themselves constitute the mainstream of the society, unlike the other so called 'main stream' communities who claim to have been the descendant of the glorified Aryan race, thus having gleefully defeated the Dasyus or the aborigines of the native land. The *adivasis* have therefore been subjected to the systematic cleansing from the society to make room for the otherwise modernised civilizations. The modern classy communities take pity upon the aborigines who are looked down with condescension and stigma, as having favoured the latter with their civilizing missions, akin to the metaphor of the white man's burden. Thiyam could be appropriately called the messiah of such *adivasis* for he took subliminal forms and strategies to empower them and give back their lost status that was due for long and reminding the external society the extent of their gratitude to the tribal forms of living. Thiyam chose the softer forms of empowerment, thus relying on the mediated performances by the *adivasis* to speak for themselves. This is a subtle form of communication thus lending elocution and articulation to the tribal forms of arts especially those, on the brim of exhaustion and decay. The *adivasi adimimb* is one such festival with strong resolution for fighting a battle for the tribes, who had

been fast losing their ground from the modern world decked up with imported paraphernalia, as against the austerity and simplicity of the tribal forms of living and expressions. The festival is attained by the big-wigs of the culture industry, and has strived hard to achieve for itself an international reputation (**pic. 2**).



Pic.2 Ratan Thiyam and Mamta Shankar , the famous danseuse and actress , along with Professor Jayanta Senupta, Director, Indian Museum as well as Secretary and Curator, inaugurated the Adivasi Adi bimb at Shantiniketan on 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2016.

### **Adibasi Adibimb: the genesis**

The festival which is now known as Adivasi Adibimb, was for the first time organized in Dwaronda, a remote tribal village in Birbhum, West Bengal to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. The festival was originally named *Enek Sereng Parab*, a three day celebration of Santhali dance, drama and music, organized far back on

8<sup>th</sup> January, 2011 by the Sangeet Natak Academy, the first Indian National Academy of the performing arts created by a resolution of the (then) Ministry of Education, Government of India, dated 31 May 1952 notified in the Gazette of India of June 1952. The Akademi was the first autonomous body for promotion of culture in the post-independent India that became operational from the year 1953, with the appointment of its first Chairman, Dr P.V. Rajamannar, along with the constitution of its all-India council of representatives, the General Council. The first ever President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, inaugurated the Academy on 28 January 1953 in a special function held in the Parliament House<sup>30</sup>.

Thus the Academy initiated a tribal festival 'Enek Sereng' largely to commemorate the growth of Santhali culture in the country. The festival was celebrated in the natural set up to keep intact the spontaneity of the tribal groups as well as to keep up with the tribal dignity. Most of the tribal festivals are usually celebrated in big cities and tribal performers are projected as pawns and guinea pigs to appease and satisfy the urban audience in a manner such that the tribal prodigies had no dignity or esteem. The Academy started a new strategy altogether, which can be taken as a noble initiative by the Academy to reverse the process, thus instead of the top-bottom approach, the process was turned on its head, to make it 'bottom-top'. Thus instead of supplying the tribes from outside, the local groups were selected for the programme. Various tribal groups across the length and the breadth of the country amass for the said event. They come as troupes largely selected for the national festival, from different parts of the nation, even its remotest parts, after a routine process of audition and selection by the local co-ordinators and the regular staffs of the hosting body (picture.3).

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<sup>30</sup>Taken from <http://www.sangeetnatak.gov.in/sna/introduction.php>.



Usha Misra, the local co-ordinator from Chaibasa, shared the stage during the inaugural ceremony along with Thiyam and West Singhbhum DC Shantanu Kumar Agrahari, at Zilla School grounds in Chaibasa. (pic.3)

Thus the festival spoke of the unique approach taken by the organizers to give the utmost esteem and dignity to these ethnic groups that were long due to them. The festival when organized in the natural setting, gives such event an autonomy to rebuff the communities that had disparaged it for ages, and to establish its footage on a solid crust. Explaining the festival in her own words, Sharmila Basu Thakur said,

The entire programme was presented on a spacious courtyard surrounded by mud huts. Mud walls decorated with *alpana* and lamps created an authentic ambience, highlighting the natural, simple and ritualistic lifestyle of the Santhal community. Ratan Thiyam, eminent theatre personality and artistic director of the festival, conceived the entire presentation in an aesthetic manner. Thirty-one troupes from Birbhum, Bankura, North Bengal, South Dinajpur and Purulia participated in this unique festival with great enthusiasm.

Each dance form, with its distinctive rhythm and style, was primarily performed in groups, accompanied by traditional songs. The open-air performance began with Dasai dance by Binod Tudu and his group from Ramnagar. Usually, women take part in Santhal dance and men provide the musical accompaniment. But Dasai is essentially a male dance item, performed just before the Durga Puja, when Santhali men go out to the neighbouring villages to sing and dance and collect donations of rice and alms. Dressed in white *dhotis* and colourful turbans, the well-built dancers showcased the strength of unity. With peacock feathers and instruments like *madol*, flute, *dhamsa*, *jhanj* and *kartal*, this turned out to be an elaborate and excellent performance (Basu Thakur: 2012:1)<sup>31</sup>. **Pic. 6**



Pic.6 The santhal dancers from Bihar

<sup>31</sup>The article on this event, entitled, "Different Celebration", was written by senior journalist and art-critic Sharmila Basu Thakur in the The Telegraph, published on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2011. The article may be read online,

[https://www.telegraphindia.com/1110108/jsp/opinion/story\\_13405038.jsp](https://www.telegraphindia.com/1110108/jsp/opinion/story_13405038.jsp)



Since then the festival has been standardized and drafted in to a blue print to be presented every year to engage such tribal razzmatazz and potentials to showcase their culture not through museum exhibitions but through participations from the tribal artists themselves. It was for the first time realized by the government of India, that a subtle instruments of empowerment had been designed such that instead of promoting the tribal performances as mementoes to be preserved in museums under the watchful eyes of the curator, the tribal artists were let themselves be thus assigning on them more autonomy and identity. This way of organizing tribal festivals not in metropolices but in hamlets and tribal belts was definitely a bold step initiated for the first time in the direction of tribal upliftment. This grand strategy was designed by Ratan Thiyam, the then Vice Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy. Soon after, this festival was shifted under the protective wings of the National School of Drama, once Thiyam joined as the Chairman of the School. Then on wards, there was no turning back for this festival, and it even clutched upon a new name, viz. Adivasi Adi Bimb, replacing the Santhal denotation, Enek Sereng. The adoption of the new name suggests the doors of universalization, that the festival aimed at, instead of narrow parochialization process that it carefully left behind. Thus under the umbrella of Adivasi Adi Bimb, which literally meant image or shadow, possibly the ancient or the primitive image of men, which might literally mean, the image of a primitive man, accommodated all groups of ancient civilization, across the cross-sections, constituting the group of early men or homo sapiens as we call them. The festival has stepped on the fifth year in 2016, and had been organized successfully each consecutive years with zest and aplomb. **(pic.10).**



**Pic.10. Ratan Thiyam and reputed film actor and director Aparna Sen inaugurating the Adivasi Adi bimb at Shantiniketan in 2015.**

The purpose of the paper is to study the unique cultural event being organized by the National School of Drama and its latent function of cementing the bonds of unison silently manifested by the school through the able hands of the festival's mentor, Ratan Thiyam. We shall make an attempt to briefly cover each of the festivals hosted by the school and to look at these festivals through the eye of cultural osmosis and tribal sustainability designed by the School. A brief analysis of festival will bring to the foray the agenda of the festivals and its impact on the social sections of the population, mostly the marginal sections of the population. Thiyam, perhaps, had shown us the doors of the tribal empowerment through mediated performances and fine arts and aesthetics, an area largely promoted in the post independent India. Though there had been a handful of institutions which emerged as autonomous bodies in the post independent India like the

Sangeet Natak Academy, the Kathak Kendra and the ICCR, or the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, little had been done to substantially improve the conditions of the poor tribes. Thiyam's initiatives can be taken as a pioneering approach in bridging the difference between the tribal and the non-tribal populace so as to give them a higher place on the social pedestal. We take upon each of the festivals in the section below, and dissect them carefully to study the impact of such festivals on the marginal sections of the population.

The paper takes into account the volatile circumstances that have lent a duality to the tribal minds. On one hand, they wanted to maintain the tribal autonomy and self-sufficiency so as to protect their cult and on the other hand, they do not want to cringe while letting out their tribal artifacts for sale. Thus there was a dual need of preservation alongside the contemporary needs of commercialization of the tribal culture, and it is where the festivals, especially those organized by the National School of Drama, fit in very well. Thus with the adoption of the New Industrial Policy in the 1950s, there was a sea change in the society. As the society slowly marched towards liberalization and the globalization processes, it took time for the people to adopt themselves to the new social conditions. How well did the tribal people, even from the obscured corners as far as the north east and the other lesser known tribes, gel with the new conditions, far away from the serene life they led, as for instance the Dong dancers from remote villages of Bihar? The festival surrounds around the marriage rituals of the tribal families, and what is still astounding about the dance is the balancing acts showed by the tribal women of diligently poising numerous flower pots on their heads while dancing to the tune. **pic.4**



pic.4 The Com dancers from Orissa.

But the question arises, how could such groups still maintain the authenticity of their folklores? How much did they contribute to the symbiosis of the society? Thus the different festivals presented a potpourri of the tribal life and alongside, showcased a new way of addressing the emergent problems of the new society. Perhaps, the mediated performances that the tribes were engaged in, brought together many a cues about the policies of the National School of Drama that are relevant in the present context of globalization, liberalization and cut-throat commercialization. We therefore present each of the festivals organized under the mentorship of Ratan Thiyamv, one of the internationally acclaimed theatre directors and choreographers (Mitra:2015 & 2016), and the colorful undercurrents and the ripples they produced for the larger society. (pic. 1)



(Pic.1 Ratan Thiyam with cultural activist , Dr Jayasri Mitra.)

**Tribal absorption versus tribal articulation: the strategies engineered by the Adivasi Adibimb.**

The adivasi adi bimb, is not just a festival of tribal arts and performances, it is also a festival celebrating the tribal identity instead of benevolently clubbing it with the dominant culture with a racist smug. Looking away from the canons of tribal absorption into the Hindu society, as the earlier sociologists had thought upon, the festival in the present scenario had conferred upon the tribal entities a new form of entitlement and autonomy, hardly believed by the earlier theorists. Negating the idea of tribal absorption, whereby the tribes are accommodated within the corpus of the Hindu society, or the dominant structure so as to serve the dual processes of escalating the social hierarchy in accordance with the styles proposed by the social mentors, which also pre-supposed a silent exchange between the tribal and its non-tribal counterparts that helped quell tribal agitations to retain the status quo by the handful of Hindu mentors, no longer stands ground. The post-independent social situations are different and therefore these theories are only partially, if not wholly correct. The new situations, especially the political undercurrents and the protective agenda undertaken by the democratic politics in favour of these depressed classes, have radically changed the scenario, which no longer pursue endeavors for tribal accommodations. While Adivasi Adibimb had taken altogether different take on the tribal problems, its strategies must be studied in detail to understand the nature of tribal empowerment, its sustainability and its impact on the heterogeneous tribal populace on a wider horizon. We must remember that, in the post colonial backdrop, the tribal population is no longer the homogenous and uni-linear, as was assumed by the sociologists, but is taking a heterogeneous character. This composition must be taken in consideration, for analysing the relevance of the tribal festivals in the present ambit. As Virginius Xaxa, had rightly said,

The initial discourse on tribal identity was shaped by those who advocated integration of tribals as citizens of a nation state and others who sought their assimilation into the Hindu fold. But identity definition for the tribals in the

early post-independent years has been largely a process from without. While the state made efforts to draw tribals into the national sphere, other elements, chiefly right wing groups, advocated measures that would restore to the tribals their ancient heritage. It is in more recent times, with the advent of education and the threat posed to tribal ways of living by other dominant groups and demands imposed by development, that tribal identity articulation has been a process directed from within the tribal community, spearheaded by a growing middle class. Such articulation has not merely been in the form of demands for some degree of political autonomy but has also seen initiatives to ensure the protection and development of tribal language, customs and culture (Xaxa:2005:1363).

Seen from this angle, the tribal festival in question largely looks into the issues of maintenance of the tribal identity and its culture, that is so quaint to it. A peek into the items of tribal performances and the tribal groups who had been invited to this festival will clarify the particular agenda of the festival.

### **Barat/Borot Utsav of Tiwa, Assam**

**Tiwa** is an ethnic group or a native tribe found in the states of Assam and Meghalaya in Northeastern part of India. They are taken as the Scheduled tribes within the Assam. A compelling peculiarity of the Tiwa is their division into two sub-groups, Hill Tiwa and Plains Tiwas, displaying opposing cultural features. The hill Tiwas celebrate the Barat dance, regularly at the foot hills of Tetelia during the full moon night of the chilly winter season before the towering presence of king Tetelia. The musical instrument aptly used with Assamese Bihu dance or any other dance, even the Tiwa dance which requires special mention, is the 'dhol' or drum. The *Bihu dhol* or the *Pati dhol*, are frequently used as accompaniments of the Tiwa dance. These 'Pati dholia' dancers and musicians come from different Tiwa villages to participate in the *Barat* festival. *Barat Nitya* and *Godalporia Barat Nitya* are two different folk dances which are associated with the *Barat Utsav* (festival) and these two dance performances are accompanied with the *Barat* and *Godalporia* song. *Barat* festival poses the gestures that

are similar to that of the animals; but with the passage of time, the styles of these dances have been metamorphosed<sup>32</sup>.

This dance form performed in the Adivasi Adibimb festival, had been carefully selected for this even given its rich store of the folk treasures embedded within it. The festival is thus said to revitalize the dying forms of arts or the lesser known ones thus making an attempt to showcase the no so familiar ones. The discretion of the organizers to portray not the famous and popular folk dances like Bihu, but the obscured ones like the Barat dance of the Tiwa tribes point out yet another character of the Adivasi Adi bimb festival. The festival does not show its obsession with the task of popularizing the already popular dances, but goes a step further to concentrate on not just the local folk dances but those which are less popular or recognized, actually speaks of the inclusive strategy of the National School of Drama, that tries to take all such tribal festivals within its fold that are the emaciated and the weaker ones with less exposure or recognition. The festival will also stand out for its grass-root networking for having interacted with the Tiwa dancers and making all arrangements to give them an exposure on the national stage. Tiwa dance, especially the Barat form of dance had been an old form of dance practised for generations by the Tiwas, but only a few have heard of their form. Thus the strategy of the resuscitation of the lesser known forms of dance and bringing them back to the foray, had been a characteristic feature of this festival. These particularities of the tribal groups were overlooked for a good amount of time that the ethnographic studies were conducted. This meant that the tribes were taken as homogeneous bodies in sharp contrast to the dominant trends of the societies. That the tribal forms of living, supposedly, the art forms might show variations, and must not be taken as wholistic units without pockets of regional differences, were never given due importance. That is why we find Assam had been chiefly associated with the Bihu dance, not with the Shatriya dance or the Barat dance, so integrally connected with the state. National School of drama when portrays such obscured forms on the national podium, only points out to the one-eyed or the jaundiced perspective of the earlier presenters who never recognized the multiplicity or

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<sup>32</sup> Dutta Pallavi, Tata Fellowships in folklore, A Project Administered by National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai and supported by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Allied Trusts, Mumbai.



the regional varieties that existed in a state other than the popular ones. The festival therefore made an attempt to showcase some of such dances like the Tiwa dancers from the remote north-east (pic.5).



**pic.5 the Tiwa dancers from the remote north-east**

Xaxa therefore said,

Tribes came to be conceptualised residually, in terms of the contrast with the general/universal features of Indian society than the particular features that they embodied. This is not to say that the particular features were overlooked but they were not at the centre stage of their conceptualisation. For people at the grass- roots level, however, it was not so much the common features, viz, caste and religion that mattered. Rather it was language and culture, now often referred to as ethnicity, which mattered the most and was hence the most pronounced marker of distinctiveness. Tribes in the regional context

were invariably posited against the dominant regional community, which also happened to be a distinct linguistic and cultural community. This is evident from the fact that tribals are addressed by their ethnic/ tribe names, which generally correspond with their distinct language/dialect. Yet, this aspect of the labelling of tribals has been overlooked in sociological discourse on tribes. In the attempt to differentiate on the basis of general/universal features (albeit in a limited sense), what was overlooked was the differentiation on basis on which people themselves differentiated (Xaxa:2005: 1364).

Therefore we find the general tendency to club the tribals all in a group thus disregarding their internal differentiations and placing them in dire contrast to the general features of the Indian society, was blatantly erroneous. This was done for a long time with total disrespect to the regional variations within the tribal groups. The tribal festivals of the Adivasi Adi bimb, provided clearly a platform to showcase these differentiations which were never taken to the limelight. That each tribal festivals were different from one another and that within a particular dance form, there were innumerable variations were conspicuously pointed out. For instance, within the Tiwa tribal dances, there are as many as eight to nine ones, which were different from one another, such as Bisus (Pisu), Barat/Borot Utsav, Sagra/Sogra Misawa, Wansua Misawa, Jonbeel Mela, Moinari Kanthi Misawa, Langkhon Phuja, Yangli Misawa Etc. Each of these festivals were exclusive from one another and must be given different accreditation. Thus when the National School of Drama, presented the Tiwa dance, its characteristic features were spelled out and presented before the audience. Thus an attempt was made to show the heterogeneous quality of the tribal art forms and its similarity with its dominant counterparts in this regards. That the tribes had long been labeled or denoted under a generic umbrella of their language or culture, without any regard for their intersectional differences, had been brought out in the open by the Adivasi Adi bimb festival. The regional differences were more sharply spelled out when other regional dance forms of Assam like *Karbi nritya*, *peacock dance*, *bordoishikla dance* of Bodos, *Mising Bihu*, *Deuri-Bihu*, *Lewatana* folk songs of the Hajongs and the *Dhaowa* dance of *Rabha* are performed. Such variations within the folk dances of one particular state seemed astounding, and it is more so when the state becomes associated with one particular form of folk dance despite the presence of such plethora of dance forms. **Pic.7**



pic.7 The peacock dancers from Assam.

**The ancillary dances centering around the quintessential *Bihu* dance: bringing such ancillary forms to the centre stage.**

Though Assam had been chiefly associated with the Bihu dance, there are other forms of dance, which have flourished here with vigour. Mention may be done of the Mising Bihu, practised by the Mising, an indigenous tribal community of Assam. Misings perform a ritualistic dance with the priest at the centrestage, usually on the occasions of religious ceremonies. Misings have different forms of dances among themselves such as Ali-ai-ligang dances, in which dancers move in rows and circles, then they have Porag or the post-harvest festivals in which the Nara –siga Bihu dancers merrily dance to the beats of the drums. The Misings also perform Gum-raag, a group dance for fun and joy.

The Bodos are an ethnic group of the Brahmaputra valley in the north-eastern part of India. Bugurumba is a folk dance of the Bodo tribes in Assam. It is usually performed during Bwisagu, a festival of the Bodos in the Bishuba Sankranti or mid-april. The dance is often denoted as the ‘butterfly’ dance, as it adopts likely postures. The dance prevails in boro inhabited areas of Udalguri, Kokrajhar, Baksha, Chirang, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur districts in Assam.

Deuri Bihu is generally performed by the Deori tribes in the east of undivided Assam. The Deuri or Deori tribes inhabit the upper plains of Assam. They came from Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloid origins. In the historical period of Chutia and Ahom dynasty in Assam, they were deployed as priests in temples. Like the other tribal groups of Assam, they are finicky about their rituals and festivals. The Deoris generally celebrate two types of Bihu every year, viz. Magiyo Bihu and Bohagiyo Bihu. The Deoris organize Bohagiyo Bihu in the middle of April every year. This is celebrated for over a week. The first day is earmarked by an offering in a “Than, a white unstitched fabric”. A goat is sacrificed as an integral section of this Bihu celebration for this community. After the ritual cleansing of animals, Bihu rituals are said to have been completed. This auspicious day is said to have marked the inception of the Suwasani Puja. The villagers are all offered sacred water and sweets, offered to the deity. Ducks, and turkeys are sacrificed after the ritual and a grand feast is set out for villagers<sup>33</sup>.

In the same vein, we can bring the instance of the Lewatana folk song and dance of the Hajong tribes of Assam. Hajongs, as is believed, observe the various festivities of the Hindus. The Lewatana is usually articulated by the Hajongs during the Bihu and the Diwali festival (pic. 8).

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<sup>33</sup>A large part of the information has been taken from the website, with the url, <http://www.nelive.in/assam/art-culture/deori-bihu-assam>. *Deori Bihu of Assam*, by Arnab Ghosh, Guwahati, Apr 19, 2016.



Pic.8 the Hajong drama being enacted.

These distinctions and cultural variations are truly rich and incredible, and it is a wonder that the tribes have till now retained their exclusion amidst processes of absorption and sanskritisation, that had been continuing for a very long time. The National School of Drama especially through such tribal festivals have co-opted the various dance forms, the range of its variety which we just saw, reminds us of the phrase of unity in diversity. Tribal groups are often taken as alien groups who hardly contribute to the cementing bond of the mainstream society, in fact they are taken as being imported to the mainstream society through the benevolent and lenient acts of the kind Hindu mentors. Thus the tribes had for long ceased to be a natural part of the society, for they are accommodated and stitched to the current social structure through cultural processes and acts all of which confer upon the tribes an ‘outsider’s’ status. Xaxa therefore said,

Thus tribes have invariably been seen as lying outside the larger Indian society. To put it starkly, tribes were seen as not being a part of the civilisation and therefore outside the structure of the larger Indian society. And yet they were seen not as isolates but in constant interaction with so-called civilisation at least in the case of those in the fringes of the larger Indian society. Hence tribes and tribal societies have been seen as undergoing changes due to the process of acculturation arising from their contact and interaction. The acculturation has been viewed in terms of tribes becoming a part of the larger Indian society. Thus, Kosambi (1975) refers to the growth and expansion of Indian society through fusion of elements between tribes and what constituted then, if one may say so, the larger Indian society. Bose (1941) drew attention to the process of how tribes were attracted to the larger Indian society by drawing themselves into the social organisation of its production system, which invariably provided protection and security. This was how, according to him, tribes got absorbed into the larger Indian society. He called it 'the Hindu method of tribal absorption'. Srinivas (1977) talks of the process of sanskritisation by which castes lower down the hierarchy emulate the lifestyle of the castes above it. Although sanskritisation has been mainly used to understand the process of social mobility within the caste hierarchy, it has been extended to understand the process of transformation even in the context of the tribal society. Sinha (1962), too, points to the process of sanskritisation and Hinduisation but to him these take place invariably within the framework of state formation (Xaxa:2005:1364).

## **Conclusion**

Tribal festivals like Adivasi Adi bimb are required to promote the inclusive strategy of the Indian society, in welcoming the diverse tribal groups. Instead of taking the tribes as the alien groups, efforts should be made, especially by searching the historical facts, to establish the tribes as an ubiquitous part of the essential Indian society. Festivals of this kind are necessary to uproot the wrong conceptions about the tribes, of they being on the pity of a handful Hindu social mentors. It is high time to refute the absorptional strategies of the Hindu society and give them a distinct place which is due to them for a long time. How long would they perish on the remnants of an affluent and astute dominant group, when they have they already have their own footage strong on the ground? Questions like this are asked by such tribal festivals which not only showcase the autonomous identity of the tribal groups but make them self sufficient enough to stop meandering in other's backyards. Globalization and liberalization are the buzzwords of the day, and amidst this

the efforts shown by such festivals to stitch the globe with the regions require special accreditation. In so doing the tribes are seen as the part and parcel of the social structure, thus questioning the much narrated view of tribal absorption.

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