

Chapter 4

Reporting the Border: Media narratives and stories

- Media Narratives about the Border: A Study in Contrast
- Stories about life on the other side of the border: myths and realities

4.1 Media Narratives about the Border: A Study in Contrast

North East India, surrounded by valleys and interspersed with mountain ranges known for nature's bounty in general, has always been the "other" for 'mainland' India. Unlike the history of other parts of the country, there was been traditionally, little mention of North East India in the academic curriculum. People from other parts of the country have very limited knowledge about North East India. This matter was taken up in the Lok Sabha in the year 2014, and in a written reply to the question asked, the then Union Human Resource Development Minister, Smriti Irani informed that the University Grant Commission (UGC) advised the Universities to incorporate various studies not only in secondary level but also in the university curriculum.

The condition has not changed much. A series of reports being aired on the perceived sense of alienation of the people, violence in the region, interstate conflicts, politics, and insurgency by the national media in covering the North East only goes to show that the region makes headlines for all the wrong reasons. While the media is projecting the region as an oddity in the social mosaic of the country, the populace are no less in alienating the people from North East India. The fact that we have Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Bezbaruah Committee constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs shows that measure had to be taken by the Centre to ensure that such practise of alienation in the form of racial discrimination does not take a toll. In this, the North East Indian has emerged with a distinct identity. For people from other parts of the country the North Easterner constitutes a single identity, glossing over the immense heterogeneity of the region.

RC Reddy (2014) writing for Tehelka said,

The Centre's efforts towards national integration and democratic consolidation did not help much in reducing the hostilities between the people of the Northeast and those from the rest of India. This is mainly due to the perception of people from the Northeast about the people from the mainland and the latter's intentions/sincerity on the development of the Northeast on one hand, and the perception of people from the rest of India about the people of the Northeast regarding their attitude and loyalty. (Tehelka, 2014)

This is not something new to this part of the world, the region is itself divided into states. Tensions along the inter-state border develop from time to time which sometimes take a violent turn. The state governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are often at loggerheads regarding the interstate boundary claims. In the media reports the states appear to be in strong disagreement over territorial claims. There is also rise of sub-nationalism in the region where each state has their share of explanation in validating their territorial claims. History of North East India is loaded with assertion of identities in laying claim over the lands. The media reports confirm this very idea of sub-nationalism and regionalism being the steering wheel of the present day inter-state conflicts. There are few days when interstate boundary, inter district conflicts go unreported. The print, electronic and new media of the region have prominent space for interstate conflicts, probably guided by the understanding that the sub-nationalism feeling cannot be undermined in reporting the borders.

In the words of Ajai K Rai,

The media have a special relationship with conflict situations, external or internal, which have been an inalienable part of the history of a country as well as the world. The reasons for such a relationship are two-fold: first; the world over, conflict is acknowledged as being of major news value and, as such, constitutes a major area of operation for the media; second, it is a matter of utmost public importance and interest because of its security implications. (Rai, 2000, 585)

It is indeed, important to look at the roles media play in conflict situations and how it evoke strong sentiments about interstate boundary conflicts. The media plays a major role in fanning passions on both side of the border. The political administrative construct is an aspect of the sub-nationalist aspirations manifested in communities and their identities. It is not at all okay for an 'insider' to have an 'outsider' stepping in for fencing their land where the supposed insiders claim to be living for ages. Reporting boundary disputes and the activities that happen in the activity site is a "diabolical" read. It is not the story per se but the way the story progresses in the news supported by other reactions. The news reports covered by both the state media of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on border conflicts are never complete. If at all, the insight of the other side is to be taken, it is mostly from the administration, not the commoners. Report from

Arunachal will carry the views of the people belonging to a community from Arunachal and it is same in the case of the media from Assam. The jingoistic rise in the ‘we’ feeling has a historical context that dates back to the post-colonial days. The British did not just leave the region and for that matter the country but in their leaving they left the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide. The imprints of the binary oppositions are in the community, state, and at the national level.

This very divisive role of the borders makes its way in reporting the borders, undermining the understanding about it as sets of practices and discourses. The divisive understanding of borders limits to just being a marker of administrative control and to be the work of the state. For obvious reasons, interstate border conflicts make it to the front-page news, as ‘breaking news’ in broadcast media and ‘trending’ in new media. The in-group feeling is so strong that the activities of a member outside that group are not tolerated and this intolerance is of “news value”. The reports on border by media houses representing both the states have an imaginary ‘in group’ factor in its reporting.

Media texts are layered with multiple meanings but the readers take it immediately with the experiences they have had and the stories they have been exposed to. Texts acquire meaning when it is interpreted by the readers and there is a relation between readers and texts where personal and shared contexts is present in the reading and interpretation. The media narratives use language that moulds the readers in a specific manner. Although media professionals claim to be unbiased in all sorts of reporting and claim that all they do is just report the situation as it is, the society has always raised eyebrows about the way media functions and how they play with the texts. Text being a language form paired with its discourse interpretation (Hanks, 1989) are read and understood by the readers leaving certain effects on them. The effects theory of the media texts developed in the 1920s suggests the ways in which media texts influence the consumers. This characteristic of media text can alter the objectivity of border stories to being subjective, as consumers are influenced by text yet manage to draw their own interpretation.

Reports on borders may not necessarily reflect an objective reality because stories are mediated texts. Even in the case of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the report on border dispute comes to the limelight and to the public domain only when it is published or broadcasted. It is pertinent to look at the media reports to understand how borders are conceived by the people in the present day. Media has the power to influence sentiments

of sub-nationalism. The media reports on Assam- Arunachal boundary dispute ride through the ideas of territoriality and political authority. However, the narratives of the people from the borders are of view that the boundary has become rigid after the British took administrative control of the region. This narrative is a shared one in the sense that people from both sides of the states agree that there was movement between the hills and the plains for exchange of goods which was more or less put to halt after the British annexed the North East Frontier (undivided Assam). Scholars like Chaube (2012) and Phukon (1996) were very clear about this in their writings on *Hill politics in North East India* and *Politics of Regionalism in Northeast India* respectively. The duo opines that the present day of separatism and divided states fuelled by ethnic identity is the work of the British administrators. The authoritarian rules laid down after British annexed the Frontiers left its impact in the boundaries of the ‘hills’ and ‘plains’ which diminished the movement both physically and emotionally. The present day is not much different from the colonial days. Most of the written records about the relation between Assam and Arunachal are in the writings of the British officials who worked in the frontiers. It is debatable if the content was objectively written. If we look at the writings of Verrier Elwin (1959), much has been said about the cordial relation shared by the people of the hills with the plains. Elwin (1999) who was successful in collecting the stories and beliefs of the hill tribes expresses that there was always a love/hate relationship between the hills and the plains. Very little of these aspects are taken up in the media reporting. The reports inform about the current incidents but very little to do with the tracing of history. It is thus obvious that generations after generations are fed with the information of the current times, not of the past. However, in a few articles and editorials of newspapers, the historical aspect has been covered.

The separatist approach in dealing with the hills and plains by the British left less scope for people of the plains to go up to the hills vice versa. In present day, the markets and festival in the boundary or the “disputed” areas are seen as a place of some lost fulfilment of enjoying the meeting space which otherwise would not have been possible during the British rule. Weekly markets along the interstate borders and annual fair of religious importance like the Malini Mela appears to fit well in the timeline of the people living along the borders. However, there have also been reports of administration from either side protesting against such public spheres supposedly known to be in the “disputed” area.

This section analyses the media reports on boundary disputes between Assam and Arunachal from January 2010 to May 2017. The previous chapter corroborated the claims and counter claims made in the Local Commission Report. The commission was constituted in the year 2006 by the centre to look into the issue of inter-state boundary demarcation. The idea was to look at how over the years popular talks on boundary issues been generated and how people react to it. Stories of conflicts that are being analysed here have been detailed with historical inputs in the previous chapter.

Going one step at a time, the Assam based newspaper mostly writes, “Assam-Arunachal” boundary dispute. Whereas, Arunachal based newspaper reverses it as “Arunachal-Assam”. This signifies the “us” and “them” concept, with people expecting their state to be preferred in matters of “power”.

Newspapers often use term such as ‘resurface’, ‘boundary row’, ‘claims’, ‘counter claims’, ‘encroachment’, ‘erupts’, ‘decades-old boundary dispute’, ‘status quo’, ‘blames’, ‘allege’ and so on while reporting the Arunachal- Assam border, creating a mental map of border as divider, as being the case of only conflict. Now these media texts that are present in the news reporting create a discourse that lead people to identify with the state that they belong to in the wave of subnationalism.

Figure 1. National newspapers

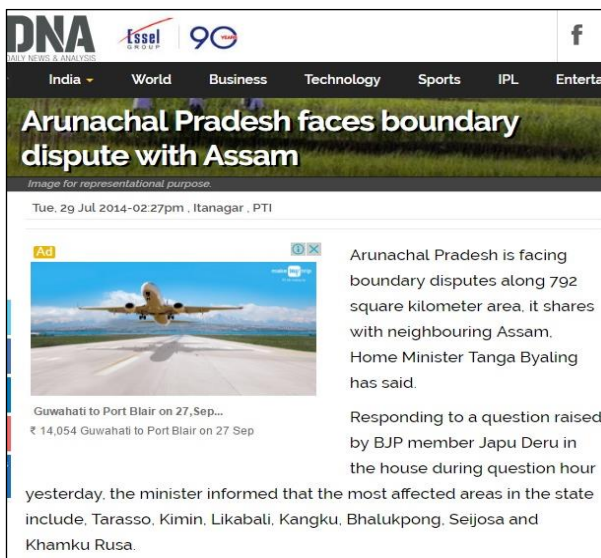


Figure 1 shows national newspapers giving space to the interstate conflicts in the North East region. It is pertinent to mention that the national media sometimes depends on news drafted from the region (activity site) and at times they do what they think is best with the little knowledge they have about the issue, a call here and there and that's just it. The national papers deal with the headline and it is structured to grab attention. In national newspapers, much emphasis is given to headline making and sensationalizing. "10 dead in clashes along border" the headline from The Telegraph as usual would portray the region as hostile. North East India fails to hog the attention of the national media and if it does, it is to do with reporting on violence in the region. In June 21, 2015, The Morung Express, a newspaper from Nagaland had carried out an online poll questioning "Is the Indian national media reporting on North East issues further alienating the people of the North East region?" The response to that was no surprise. 84% had clicked the Yes button, 04% No and 10% other. Some of the comments in the poll read;

"Yes they report without verifying facts on the ground. To us the Indian media seems like a mouthpiece of the Indian state even our local media seems to be following this trend where issues that affect the rich and powerful are conveniently ignored for fear of reprisal" (The Morung Express).

"Yes. National media seems to be at the helm of manufacturing 'epistemic violence' wherein the 'other' is further 'othered.' Media should rather create platforms to generate a dialogue that will for instance enhance the peace process" (The Morung Express).

"No. The Indian media is partly to blame, but let us face the fact. It's people from the northeast region who are also to blame. The people that speak on television from the northeast are making a fool of themselves and presents this region as being very raw" (The Morung Express).

This takes us to what Phukon (1996, 3) had deliberated in highlighting the 'us' and 'them' divide stating that a strong sub-regional urge among a section of the people of the hills was witnessed during the post-colonial days. In media, borders are seen more as conflicts for economic purpose as it often speaks about land being claimed.

Behali-Tarasso incident

Figure 2. The Times of India



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Times of India. The main headline is "Assam-Arunachal land dispute leaves 10 dead". The article text reads: "GUWAHATI: Armed groups from Arunachal Pradesh raided a village in Assam's Sonitpur district and killed at least 10 people and injured eight others on Wednesday, the police said, adding that the attack took place at Chauldhuwa village at Behali Reserve Forest close to the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. The area has been a".

The story in *figure 2* of 30th Jun 2014, tells that Arunachalees were alleged of raiding the village in the interstate boundary area at Behali Reserved Forest leaving ten dead. The report carried in the Times of India did not use words such as “alleged” or “reportedly” while reporting the issue. It reported that ten people were killed and eight others were injured in the raid conducted by armed groups from Arunachal.

Figure 3. Assam based newspaper, The Assam Tribune



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Assam Tribune. The main headline is "10 killed, 8 hurt at Behali Reserve Forest". The article text reads: "GUWAHATI, Jan 29 – Ten persons were killed and eight others received bullet injuries when encroachers from Arunachal Pradesh opened fire with hand-made weapons in Behali Reserve Forest in Sonitpur district today. However, as the incident took place in an interior place, the exact details are awaited. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has directed the Chief Secretary, ADGP (Law-and-Order) and Sonitpur SP to closely monitor the situation in Behali, official sources said. The Behali Reserve Forest was witnessing trouble for some time as frequent clashes took place in the area between encroachers from Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and though major eviction drives were".

The Assam Tribune covered the news in the same manner. Reporting the issue, it said, “Ten person were killed...when encroachers from Arunachal Pradesh open fired...” deepens the prevailing anguish making the situation volatile. Knowing that the sentiments at cases like this are high, this kind of reporting fortifies the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ divide. Border issues appear to draw the attention of the state media. Borders seem to evoke so much passion and emotion tends to run high even in the media. A media person from Assam working in Arunachal Pradesh in a personal interview notes,

Border issues are always a sensitive case for media whether it is national or international. It involves two different parts and both the part has its own stories. All kinds of border issues attract the attention of media. Media is often guided by some local people and locals always have a story to tell. As it involves two parties, there are different versions of the story. In addition to that it is a bitter truth that apart from the local versions of the masses, the govt version differs in facts and figure of the locals.¹

It is widely accepted that issues in borders do come under the “news value” category. The supposedly volatile character among many other characteristics of border seems to be of much importance. Borders are not an exclusive entity rather an inclusive one accommodating attentions of the state party, the fourth pillar and the people themselves.

Figure 4. The Arunachal Times



Figure 3 shows the news report carried in The Arunachal Times of the reaction from certain section of the media fraternity from both the states.

The news report reads,

Arunachal Press Club (APC) and Journalists' Forum Assam (JFA) have appealed to the media to exercise restraint while covering the border conflicts between the two neighbouring States in northeast India...

The media fraternity of Arunachal under the banner of APC, came out with a statement that the said conflict zone under the Taraso circle of Arunachal is 'quite a sensitive and geo-political subject', and hence the mainstream media should not go for conclusion immediately from which side the violence was initiated. (The Arunachal Times)

The reaction from the media fraternity which came in the wake of the incident being covered in "aggressive" manner points out that this section of the society feels responsible towards the society. However, the same news report is not untouched by the flavour of 'insider', 'outsider', and 'claim', 'counter claims', feelings or beliefs. The text from the Arunachal side which states "...the said conflict zone under the Taraso circle of Arunachal..." from figure 3 indicates that in the Assam based newspaper, the disputed area is considered to be part of Behali under Sonitpur district of Assam and in the Arunachal based newspaper the disputed area is considered to be part of Taraso under Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh. The identity of the incident area is in itself a confusing tell-tale. As such the whole idea of ethnic identity like that of Arunachalee and Assamese seems to be based on the 'us-them' divide. This shows that the question of identity is also the question of where one belongs to and the question of spatial and temporal location of belongingness. Media from both the states tend to accuse each other of giving a one sided story and being biased towards their own.

A media person from Arunachal Pradesh in a personal interview shares,

Remaining objective is a challenge even for the media. Biasness definitely seeps in especially when we are dealing with issues which are perceived against 'our own'. This might at times lead to portrayal of a one-sided story as opposed to a

balanced one. And also Yellow Journalism has become a vice for the present day media. Sensitive issues like border disputes have been sensationalised in the past to detrimental effect. The competition for TRPs/readership has changed the rules of the game.²

In the similar vein, a senior journalist from Assam in a personal interview says,

It is common and natural for either side of the state media to be biased towards the issue and project the 'other' as the villain. We have to accept the fact that both the states tend to sensationalise the news on borders. Most of the media persons have not studied the Gopinath Bordoloi report and lack adequate knowledge about the issue. The trusts between the states have also reduced and media reports are one of the reasons for this breach in trust.³

Figure 5. The Arunachal Times

www.arunachaltimes.in/archives/jan14%2031.html

Paasi | Un | New Tab Search | International Journal | ScholarOne Manuscript

No Arunachalee involved in Tarasso incident, clarifies Rebia

Staff Reporter
ITANAGAR, Jan 30: Doimukh MLA Nabam Rebia has condemned the unfortunate incident at Tarasso area of Papum Pare district that left more than 10 people killed and many injured yesterday. Addressing mediapersons during a press conference at Arunachal Press Club here today Rebia, while expressing his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, said, "Violence is violence and it is condemnable in all sense."
"If anyone found guilty, law should take its own course," he said informing that the concern DC and SP have been deputed to know the ground reality of the incident.
He suggested for constitution of a neutral party to investigate into the cause of the incident.
"Neither from Arunachal government nor from Assam, a neutral party should be constituted to investigate into the incident," he said.
Refuting the claim of some section of the media that Arunachalee people were involved in the incident, he clarified that no local people from Arunachal were involved.
"Miscreants could either be from this side or that side," he stated.
The MLA expressed disappointment that many Assam based electronic media houses have been presenting fabricated and one sided media reports about the incident and appealed them to get authentic details before carrying any story.
He said, "Many electronic Media have been showing fabricated and one sided story of the incident which is wrong. It may infuriate the situation. Authenticity of the details should be verified before carrying the story."

Figure 4 is the news report on the reaction of parliamentarian Nabam Rebia from Arunachal Pradesh, slamming the media for blaming Arunachal. The headline reads, “No Arunachalee involved in Tarasso incident, clarifies Rebia”. The parliamentarian in the local daily of the state refuted the claim of Assam media that people from Arunachal were involved in the incident (as shown in Figure 2 and 3). “Miscreants could either be from this side or that side,” the parliamentarian stated.

Press releases on boundary disputes that reach the media houses are mostly from student’s union and some pressure groups. The media texts tend to leave out the narratives of the borderlanders. Often the media texts are taken from the people wherein participants in the communication are either individual who stand as representatives of a community. There is a representation in the texts available in media. These representations come from pressure groups such as student’s union, administrative circle, welfare societies. Based on the texts made available to the readers, the readers interpret that as the final word.

Similarly, Burton writes,

Media texts are continually being produced and renewed. Media texts intend to engage people, to convey some kind of information, and to produce reactions in their audiences which justify their continuing production. Even when treated as part of the environment they can never be seen as passive in the way that the facade of a building or wallpaper is passive. They are active in their capacity to produce meanings in the minds of the audience.

... production of meanings happens whether or not we engage intentionally with a text.

Even when the text is attended to, there are meanings which the reader is conscious of, and yet other meanings which may be produced unconsciously. In this sense the reader of texts is not entirely in control of their engagement with the text. Equally, I am not arguing that the text maker is entirely in control of the production of meaning. The text becomes an interesting place of engagement. Things happen through the text, not all of them predictable or manageable. (Burton, 2010, 5)

In everyday usage of words there is not much difference in the terms ‘boundary’ and ‘border’. However, the media text that uses the term ‘border’ designates the official political line that divides territorial units, states and countries. In the media texts, the

term 'boundary' is used to designate the material construct such as roads, check gates and other establishments. 'Boundaries' possessing the characteristics of signifying differences in terms of culture has been barely taken into account.

The creation of 'borders' and 'boundaries' is that of territorialisation in the case of media narratives as it often speaks about the conflicts for land rights and other economic resources.

In the case of the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, there were clashes that did not surface extensively. Pushpita Das on June 12, 2008 giving an account of the border dispute in the Assam-Arunachal border writes,

In the case of the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, clashes were first reported in 1992 when the Arunachal state government alleged that people from Assam are building houses, markets and even police stations on its territory. Since then intermittent clashes have been taking place making the border tense. In 2005, for example, during an eviction drive by the Assam government, some 100 houses in East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh were allegedly set ablaze by Assam Police and forest officials. Again in 2007, tensions flared up along the Assam-Arunachal border when villagers from across the border fired at a peace meeting in Assam injuring eight people. (IDSA)

However, there have been stories on border skirmishes which were reported prior to 1992 as well. It is not out rightly possible to point out the exact year of crisis in the inter-state borders. The issue of inter-state borders is as old as Independent India and even more. Nongbri (1999, 3) says, "The extension of colonial rule significantly altered geography of the region. British annexation brought within the economic and political framework of colonialism, and its people within rigid territorial boundaries hitherto history."

Though news in the paper are understood as reality but these realities of the incidents are again interpreted based on shared narratives and experiences, and at times, on presumptions. For instance, in the Assam based newspaper it is written that Arunachal has encroached Assam land and in Arunachal based newspaper it is the other way round.

The state media is totally ignorant of the real border issues and how border inhabitants lead their lives. Local journalists neither visit the field nor are aware of the ground realities. State media have not justified their role as they are supposed to when it comes to reporting the borders.⁴

These texts are artifacts apt for interpretations and actions and artworks are the paradigms of intrinsic texts, shares Margolis in his understanding of texts (1993, 1). Margolis (ibid) also questions, how apt for interpretation must anything be in order to be apt enough? Are human themselves texts, then, seeing that they interpret themselves? This as such leads us to follow how the readers tend to interpret the world around them guided by the immediate context of their lives. In the context of Assam-Arunachal border, the conventional understanding of border is that of an endorsement of differences and conflicts as explicitly projected by both state dailies during border disputes. However, Houtum (2011, 50) proposed that there is no original model for border; rather, border is a simulation of a model and it is the meaning attached to the border that actually creates the border. In this, it is not just about news reports, but also about how these reports are perceived and how reactions are elicited. The media texts often stress the maintenance of status-quo as the government from both sides stress. The logical conclusion to the boundary disputes between the two states is something that the media fails to highlight.

Burton extending the meaning making characteristics of text writes,

The familiarity of texts in our lives can divert attention from the fact that they are made objects. This is important because one must then ask questions about who made the text and with what intentions. In whose interest is the existence of the text and its apparent meanings?

... structuralist approach – do try to explain the nature of the construction. But one always needs to go beyond the descriptive to the interpretive. (Burton, 2010, 7)

Likabali Malini Mela issue

Figure 6. The Assam Tribune



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Assam Tribune. The masthead features the newspaper's name in a large, stylized font. To the right, there is a blue button that says "Download Free" and "App" with an Android icon. Below the masthead is a search bar and a navigation menu with links for Home, Main, Weather, Backissues, Epaper, Dainik Asam, Videos, and Contact Us. The date "Guwahati, Saturday, April 07, 2012" is displayed in the top right. The main article is titled "Assam-Arunachal border row erupts at Likabali" and reports on a border dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The article text is as follows:

ITANAGAR/DHEMAJI, April 6 – A border row between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam has erupted over demolition of a structure at Likabali, a disputed area on the border between the two States.

Official sources in Itanagar claimed that Assam officials led by the additional deputy commissioner and SP of Dhemaji district allegedly raided the Malini Mela complex at Likabali in West Siang district yesterday and destroyed structures including a recently erected pandal and a storeroom constructed in 1994. Arunachal Chief Minister Nabam Tuki termed this as 'provocative'.

Tuki, in a statement said, he was trying to contact his Assam counterpart, Tarun Gogoi, who was out of station, to register strong protest.

Tuki said that 300 armed police personnel who came with an excavator demolished the pandal and took away CGI sheets and other materials without prior notice.

"It is a breach of trust that could jeopardise the bilateral relations between two sisterly States. Such condemnable and uncalled for evictions should be avoided at all costs," Arunachal Lok Sabha member Takam Sanjoy said. Assam's Dhemaji district superintendent of police Pradeep Ranjan Kore, however, said a community hall built by encroachers from East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh was dismantled recently.

Following the eviction at Nilgan Malini area, some miscreants from the neighbouring State attempted to attack villagers on the Assam side yesterday, but the police drove them away, Kore said.

The situation was now under control, he said. – PTI

Likabali has always been the bone of contention between the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Malini Mela celebration is hosted at a "disputed" area in Likabali annually to mark the festival of Ram Navami. The fair holds cultural value and the visitors are a mix of population from both the states. The fair can also be seen as a centre of cultural exchange and the temple as a centre for national integration. In this media narrative, the production of meaning and process of influence of the border stories are significant. The report in fig 5, also signify that there exist 'bilateral relations' between the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and that the trust is at stake. The report also shows that the fair which can be a tool to bring the people of both the states together is under threat due to the acts of the administration.

Figure 7. The Arunachal Times

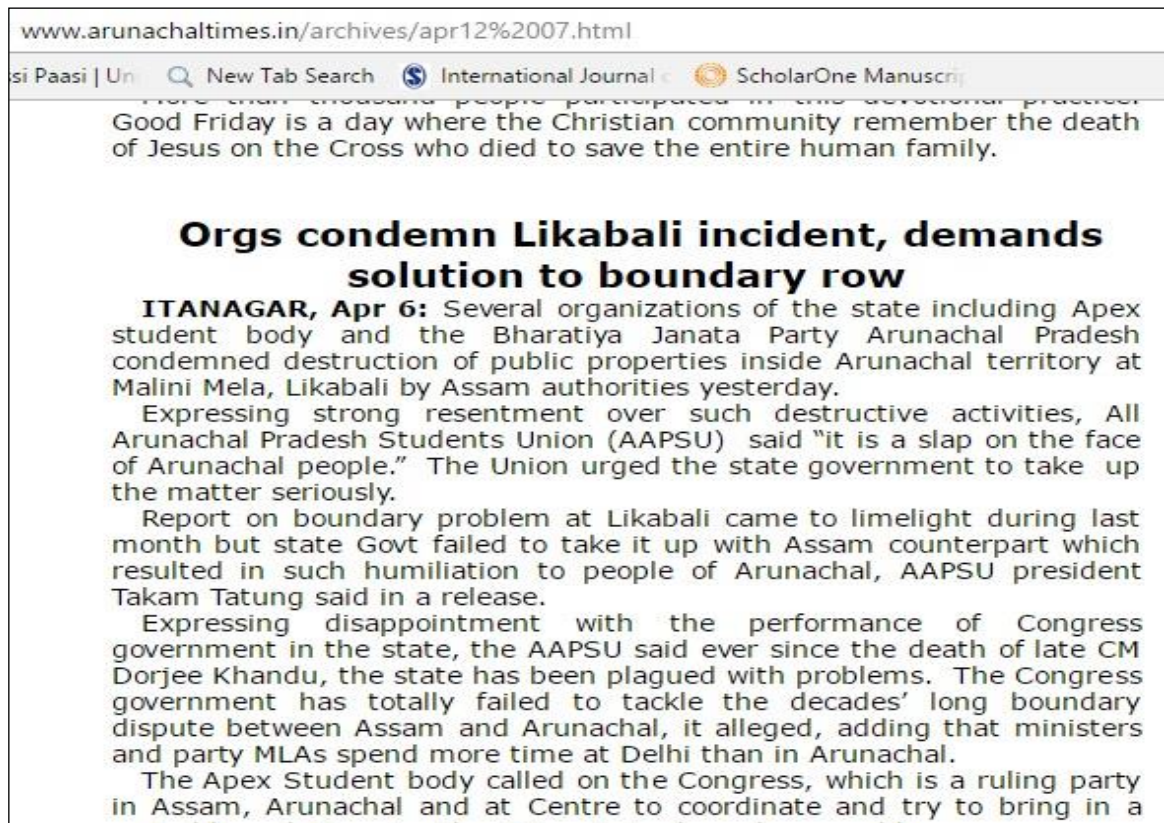


Figure 4 and 5 are the reports and reactions on Likabali boundary issue. Likabali in West Siang district in the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh is considered to be the interstate boundary between the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The report on Likabali carried in the Assam based newspaper above (Figure 4) is filed from Arunachal. PTI (Press Trust of India) is a news agency that shares news across the country on paid subscription basis. The PTI representative of Arunachal has filed the news. There are not many differences in the news taken from PTI for use in state dailies barring the name of places and prefixing Arunachal and Assam (Arunachal-Assam boundary, Assam-Arunachal boundary).

Figure 6 is a clip from an Arunachal based newspaper which carries the reaction of the state of Arunachal on the Likabali issue. The Arunachal based organisations have condemned the act. Reacting to the incident with statements like "It is a slap on the face of Arunachal Pradesh", they reflect strong sentiments of subnationalism and assert their ethnic identity. However, the report is the voice of a student based organisation on the infrastructure at the fair being dismantled by the Assam administration. The idea of

ethnicity, built-in understanding of difference and setting limits to the actions of ‘the other’ is evident from the reports on the story and the reaction that follows the story.

Figure 8. NewsBharati regional newspaper

Assam, Arunachal agree to maintain status quo at boundary

Source: Agencies | 25 Dec 2013 11:43:35

0 Like 0 Share Tweet 0 Share G+



Itanagar, December 25: Papum Pare district administration (Arunachal) and Sonitpur district administration (Assam) in a joint meeting on Tuesday agreed to maintain status-quo in letter and spirit in boundary area till the Apex Court delivers its verdict.

According to Arunachal Pradesh Times, the meeting held at the DC's Conference hall, Tezpur (Assam) following the tense situation in boundary area under Tarasso circle in Arunachal Pradesh, also agreed to initiate action against fresh encroachers on the both sides of the border.

Both sides elaborately discussed the situation at Tarasso wherein SDO Biswanath Chariali, Sonitpur DFO and SP assured to initiate appropriate action against the encroachers of Assam side.

Figure 7 is a report covered by NewsBharati a newspaper based in Nagpur, India. Border dispute stories from the region also make it way to newspapers with not much circulation figure. The news was given space in the website of NewsBharati. However, the source written as agencies has to be from either Assam or Arunachal Pradesh. The news report shows that borders and boundaries are being negotiated in the form of requests and appeal made by both the state governments in maintaining ‘status-quo’. Status-quo is the watchword for the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as directed by the Supreme Court of India. The long pending boundary dispute between the two states is also in the judicial domain. The directive of the SC in matters pertaining to the border dispute is essential to be followed knowing the gravity of the dispute in the conflict zone. This shows that borders are often created and its meanings construed upon by the very people involved in the process. Also in the picture, the officials from Arunachal are adorning the traditional muffler. This is the Assamese way of showing hospitality, a fundamental element of ethnic identity.

Figure 9. The Assam Tribune



Figure 8 shows that the Supreme Court of India has directed the states to maintain status-quo fearing violence in the disputed areas. It was the Supreme Court of India that constituted a Local Commission in 2006 to investigate the interstate border areas. Quite unfortunately, Assam is in conflict over land with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. Notifications on interstate demarcations given by the Union of India after independence did not go down well with most North Eastern states. In 2010, the former minister TA Nguillie of Nagaland had said, “In the name of the series of notifications by the Assam Government all the lands belonging to the tribals were forcibly taken away. All the notifications show that it extends the boundaries of the boundary till the tribals were completely driven out of Brahmaputra valley one after the other” (Nagalimvoice).

In September 17, 2015, the Supreme Court of India asked the states to avoid divisive fight over boundary disputes and “refrain from creating border inside the border”. The court has also asked the states to resolve the issue through mediation. This was reported in many dailies. Newman and Paasi (1998, 196) opine, “The media texts are ideological reproduction of the state. It also helps in understanding the construction of institutionalized forms of ‘we’ and the ‘other’, which are produced and perpetually reproduced in educational texts, narratives and discourses.”

Figure 10. The Indian Express



The heads of both the states are seen often making statements in the media, directing each other to maintain status quo. Whenever there is any eviction or encroachment from either side, the direction on maintaining status quo becomes an easy way out. In the figure the former Chief Minister Late Dorjee Khandu claims that the status quo was violated by the Assam police and requests the then acting Chief Minister of Assam Bhumidhar Barman to look into the matter. Media reports tend to entertain the statements the heads of the states make on the interstate conflicts giving it front page coverage.

Figure 11. (Assam based newspaper)

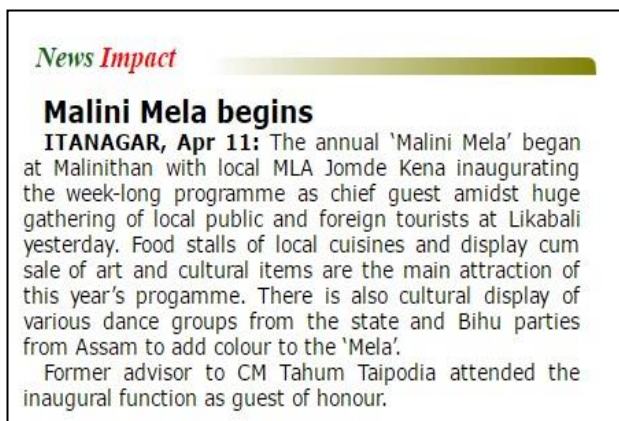


Figure 12. (Arunachal based newspaper)



The news matter carried in both the dailies show that the area of Malini Mela celebration is mentioned in different way. The Assam based newspaper mentions ‘celebrated at Likabali on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border’ while in the Arunachal based paper, Likabali is not mentioned as being situated in the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. The reporting style in a way exhibits the ‘in-group’ feeling. At times, it takes a serious turn when the ‘other’ is projected as the violent one and the one at fault.

A senior journalist from Arunachal Pradesh opines,

State media, print, online and electronic sensationalise interstate border issues beyond acceptable limits. The reports are biased, those who do not take out enough time to know the reality is bound to take sides. The problem may be of two villages having issues but it's blown out of proportion and it is made to look like as if Assam and Arunachal are going to a war or have had issues always. People to people contact remains cordial even today.⁵

With news reports containing claims and counter claims over the lands in the border areas, it can be said that media reports on border issues are often biased and sensationalised. The reports tend to project only conflicts and not the social contact that is exercised in the borders. The media also give voice to various organisations from both states demanding better infrastructures. Demand for setting up check posts, police barracks, deployment of security forces in order to check interstate border skirmishes is often reported in the media. Hard boundaries like these are opposed by both the states, but one thing that cannot be opposed is the natural resources, the direction of the river or the forests. Former chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Late Kalikho Pul (2016) once said, “Assam has always been a parent and a big brother of Arunachal Pradesh. It is for this reason that 99% of Arunachalees can speak and understand Assamese while legend like Bhupen Hazarika and his melodious songs still reverberates in the hills and valleys of the state”. (Northeast Today)

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal sharing Pul’s view termed the long-pending problem a "family issue" and that it could be settled through consultations and mutual acceptance.

In the words of Scott,

The situation of populations that have deliberately placed themselves at the state's periphery has occasionally been termed, infelicitously, secondary primitivism. Their subsistence routines, their social organization, their physical dispersal, and many elements of their culture, far from being the archaic traits of a people left behind, are purposefully crafted both to thwart incorporation into nearby states and to minimize the likelihood that state like concentrations of power will arise among them. State evasion and state prevention permeate their practices and, often, their ideology as well. (Scott, 2009, 8)

Media narratives are also important in understanding the nature of inter-state boundary dispute. Both the state media to an extent have not been able to stick to the ethical principles and standard of media.

Another senior journalist from Arunachal Pradesh on media ethics in covering border issues said in a personal interview,

We fail to see both sides of the story. The Arunachal Media and its Assam counterpart fail to realise that the border issue is about human lives and not just a stretch of land. By painting the 'other side' bad and playing the 'victim' card ourselves, Media in general gives out a distorted picture which at times can blow things out of proportion.⁶

The Assam-Arunachal relation though appear to be a sour one in the media narratives, it however, will not be all correct to say that it has always been the same. Neither can it be accepted that the relationship was always of peace and integrity. It can, however, be said that it was a love/hate relationship.

The two neighbours shared a great rapport in the olden times. But Assam with its teeming population can no longer sustain such a relationship not just with Arunachal but other states as well because of its continuous encroachment of foothill areas of other states.⁷

Media narratives tend to conjure up an image of a volatile one and very rarely seen doing human interest stories. Do they report the situation as "volatile" as it is or do they be cautious about the reactions of the crowd, the news might lead to. Burton words is suggestive in this regard, wherein he questions if we have to look at the conditions of

production that make the text, or at the nature of the audience in relation to what is made of a text (2010, 9).

A senior journalist from Assam who works in Arunachal Pradesh for Assam based news channel shares,

Political masters of Arunachal Pradesh are the new business class of Arunachal Pradesh and they own almost 80% of tea gardens and rubber gardens in state. It requires huge area and foot hills are the best suited area. Same is the case in Assam. Border disputes of today's is somewhat sponsored by a particular class in either side. But in reality, so far border peace is concern locals maintain good relationship in Assam-Arunachal border. Socio-cultural relation still exists. People of either side have marital relations as well. But, sadly media is not interested to do news on peace border relation. Where everything is on place and going fine, it hardly makes news.⁸

There is weight in the statement. Quite different from the popular media narratives, the pre-colonial narratives suggest shared history and story of bonhomie of the people on both sides of the border. It is a general understanding by the society and the state media that the news from the borders are often of conflicts and that it lacks research. The news are covered from the surface and the news provided to the society diffuse in them the imagination that borders and border areas are volatile.

4.2 Stories about life on the other side of the border: myths and realities

This section explores the commonalities and differences in conceptualisation of borders and boundaries that the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are dealing with. While the earlier segment tried to bring out how the existing set up is when it comes to borders and boundaries, this segment is an attempt to time travel back to the past to see if the concept of hills and plains were indeed thought of as being separate entities. This chapter looks at some of the myths that Verrier Elwin collected during his stay in the region and some from the fields.

Elwin (2005, 1) writes, “The history of what is now known as the North-East Frontier Agency ascends for hundreds of years into the mists of tradition and mythology. Of the vast hinterland, there are only recent accounts, but a number of ruins in the foothills

suggest some contact between the ancient rules of Assam and the tribesman living near the plains.”

Myths though may not be true explanations of the world around its people; people however give it importance believing to be of cultural value. Some of the myths in narratives of the people explain about the world the forefathers are believed to have lived in. There is clear mention of hills and plains even in the myths and some legends of the region are said to be born out of the hills and plains. The myths also talk about the creation of a world that consist both hills and plains and the effort that went into creating them.

In the beginning, the earth was covered with water. Deep down in the water there lived a snake called Pu. As the year passed, slowly the water sank down and the earth appeared. At first, everything was mud and when the snake moved over it, there was a king winding track which became a valley through which the rivers could flow. When the mud dried up, part of the earth became flat and part turned into hills.

In those days, there was only Joban, who is the greatest of all, in the sky. There were no men on earth but only spirits. In the sky was another god, Yang. He had a very pretty daughter who was married by one of the spirits on earth. In time, she bore children and there were the first men.

The first men were called Nocte and their descendants were the Ahoms. Joban gave them life and food and death. Down in the plains there was a sort of monkey with a very long tail. One of the Noctes married her and their children are the English. These first men lived in caves and made fire by rubbing bamboos together. (Elwin, 1999, 18-19)

This myth is from the Nocte tribes of Arunachal Pradesh which imagines and tell stories, making it an important social activity. The myth above mentions Ahoms, plains-dwellers, highlanders and even, the English.

Captain Lewis who was put charge of the hill tracts with full administrative and police powers based on his intimate acquaintance with hill custom and languages wrote about 278 proverbs about them in a brochure.

“Entering into a wood blaze a tree, on visiting a village make friend”, is a proverb used by the hill men. British official HFG Burbridge had also stated that the attitudes of the

hill men are generally friendly. However, they cannot be influenced by the ill advice of outsiders and they must come into contact with the ordinary workings of the law.

There are also notion of fish and gold flowing from the hills to the Brahmaputra River in the plains. The narratives suggest that fisherman and washer man of Assam would receive it from the hills whose actual owners are the Adis. “By claiming an inalienable right to all the fish and gold found in the streams which flowed from the Miri lands, the Abors exercised almost feudal powers over many sections of the Miris” (Hamilton, 1984, 31).

Popular narrative of the hill tribes (Nyishi) informs about a being named Chigo Ngirgo, which is said to be an enormous elephant living under the earth. The head of the elephant is said to lie towards Tibet and his back towards the plains of Assam. The earth according to the narratives suggests that it rests upon the elephant and every time it moves, there’s an earthquake. Elwin (1999, 87) has mentioned about similar story where the elephant is said to have six legs without ears and trunk. It appears like the imaginary world could not possibly do without including the plains. “Interpretation is very much a matter of managing, selecting and assigning meanings considered important with specific historical periods or social classes and the same story can be read very differently by successive generations” (Doty, 2004, 7). In the imaginations and stories the hills and plains are part of the content. This very use of terms ‘hills’ and ‘plains’ is also being contested in the narratives of the 21st century.

Another popular myth among the hill tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and also in Nagaland it is said that God had written words of wisdoms and prescribed ways of better living in two animal-skins. One was given to the hill tribes and the other was handed to the Assamese in the plains. The hill tribes, not knowing what to do with it, roasted the skin and ate it. In the case of the plains they saved it. Later when God asked for the skins, the hill people could not provide it. As such, they are considered to be mostly uncivilised and illiterate. The plains, on the other hand, provided it and as such got the wisdom to read and write and trade as well.

Some of the myths from the region reflect the idea of both the hills and plains being part of the creation of the world from the beginning. This basically gives insights into how people had perceived about their society and others living around them earlier.

Malinowski (1926, 118) argued that no understanding of any of the tales in primitive societies is possible without determining the ways in which they fit into other parts of the culture. References of Assamese society in the myths of the tribal people indicate that the two societies are interwoven intricately.

TE Furz Political Officer of Sadiya Frontier Tract had once contracted a poisoned hand due to the biting of a poisonous fly. In one of the narratives an informant shared that his father would tell about British officials being bitten by a fly. He says, “We call it Dam-Dum, it swells the skin and itches a lot. The officials would take the help from us. Both Assam people and we would suggest same leaves for the cure. The leaves we call it as Hanuman *patta*¹ (leaves).” The same fly is mentioned in some myths as the source of suffering. People living near the foothills know about the fly. Myths and beliefs tend to provide symbolic representations of cultural practices and its use.

Myths from the Siang Frontier Division, as written by Elwin, tells about the creation of world as hills and plains.

At first there was nothing but water. There were two brothers, Poling the elder and Tsering the younger. They lived separately in the water and neither of them knew that the other existed. Tsering had the form of a Mithun and Poling had the form of an elephant. Each thought that he was the only creature living in the world. But after many years has passed, as they moved about the lonely ancient waters, they met each other, and Poling said, “Who are you and where do you come from?” Tsering asked, ‘Who are you and where do you come from?’ Though there were only these two in all the world, they did not make friends; each accused the other of invading his territory, they quarrelled and in the fight that followed they killed each other.

From the flesh of Tsering, the earth was formed, from his bones came the trees and from his hair the grass. From Poling’s bones came the rocks and from his flesh the mountains. After the world had been formed in the manner, Sedi-Melo was born, and he set himself to put it in order. In one place he made it flat, in another he piled up hills. He made the rivers flow between them. When he had

¹ A kind of leaf use to heal wounds by stopping excess blood flow.

finished, he came to Assam and while he was resting there he caused the English to be created. (Elwin, 1999, 8)

The myth has mention of the world being created as flats and hills and the tribal creator of the world taking rest in Assam. It doesn't appear like the society was in a conflicting stage like the 21st century societies. The socio-cultural notions of the differences in terms of hills and plains are evident in social formation and development. The tribal religion is built up from an elaborate mythology. The NEFA tribes have their own philosophy of religion, even though it is expressed in poetic or metaphorical form. In the tribal puranas as we may call them we find a strong sense of history, pride in the descent of the race from a great ancestor, the record of heroic deeds and most interestingly, traces of a belief in the value of supreme self-sacrifice for the good of mankind (Elwin, 2009, 81).

These sorts of narratives establish social realities that form real life giving it varied meaning and interpretations. Doty (2004, 3) writes, "Myths are seldom fantasy construction; more frequently they are the backbones of practical ways of living realistically. Myth is way of making meaning within a particular tradition. Myths are above all (but not exclusively) narrative".

Elwin narrates,

Everything was water; water was far as the eye could see. But above the water rose the tree Ter-Ramula. As time passed a worm was born in the tree and it began to eat the wood. The dust fell into the water, year after year, until slowly the world was formed. And then at last the tree fell to the ground. The bark on the lower side of the trunk became the skin of the world: the bark of the upper side became the skin of the sky. The trunk itself turned into rock. The branches became the hills. (Elwin, 1999, 15)

Though apparently unconnected with reality, these myths show some connection with the present-day society. The people living in the hills are generally very proud about their place. However, in some myths there is explanation of incidents that shows how people are curious about venturing to the other side of the hills and the plains. Bora (1995, 1) shares, "Myths are generally religious by character. And they, because of their religious character are always considered sacred and considerable care is taken to see the myths are properly transmitted as and when required by the occasion."

Borgohain (1974, 17) in *Folktales of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh* mentions about two characters Danam and Dabir. It is said that both were brothers and they each had two sons. Sons of Danam were named Namkir and Nomnang and Bisi and Siri-Pedo were the two sons of Dabir. There was a point in time when the sons of Danam and Dabir had a quarrel. Bisi and Biri threw mountains where Namkir and Nomnang's house stood, into the river. Namkir and Nomnang went drifting down the river and reached the plain and their descendents were the Assamese people. This story originates from the Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

There is another story that talks of the hills-plains relation. Elwin records it,

Long long ago there were two powerful spirits named Draku and Supaidang. They were strong and powerful but rather lazy and spent their days in a free and happy way. One day Draku met Supaidang on the bank of a river and said, 'Look brother, let us do some real work which will remain on earth in token of our strength and power.' Supaidang agreed and after some discussion they decide to level down the hills and make the surface of the earth equal. They each went to opposite corners of the earth and crushed the hills and mountains to sand and dust. But there was a bird called Cherrai who with his wife had built a nest on the branch of a lofty tree. When we saw the spirits levelling the hills and mountains and making the whole earth one great plain he was frightened, for he thought that if they went on like this there would be no hills on earth and if the hills were destroyed there would be no trees, and if there were no tree the birds would have no shelter. So, he went to the spirits and said, 'Look, you are no doubt doing a wonderful job of breaking down the mountains and turning everything into dust, but you forget what you are missing at home. Don't you know that while you are doing all this your wives have fallen sick and your parents have died?'

When Draku and Supaidang heard this, they sat down silent in grief and did not move or speak for a long time. Then Supaidang said to his brother, 'Look, brother, by doing a little work you can get anything in the world, but it is very difficult to get a wife. Even if one's parents live to a great age they become a burden to the son, but a man can enjoy his wife's company till his death, for a woman is a very precious thing.' Draku agreed and the two brothers gave up the

idea of levelling the hills and mountains and went back home. Because they abandoned their task before it was complete, the surface of the earth remained uneven, with plain in one part and with mountains in another. (Elwin, 1999, 16)

Myths concern us for their symbolical representation with an underlying meaning. The myth above reflects about plains and hills as being the most important texture of people's creative and social imagination. The villagers from the Assam side of the border viewed some of these myths to bear resemblance to the stories they have come across. The creation of the world starting with hills and plains has mention in their lullaby as well. There are some tribes in Arunachal Pradesh that share close affinity with the Assamese society. Assamese are said to be the long lost brothers of some of the tribes in the hills. The present-day narratives that talks about the trade relationship between the hills and plains were also referred to in the myths which thus appear to be an extension of the reality.

One such story recorded by T Barua during the colonial days is:

The Noctes and the Assamese were born of the same parents, but as time went by they forgot this. In the hills, there were salt mines. One day three Noctes were collecting salt near a river and they filled a boat with it. They had no oars and when the boat was full they let it drift down the river to the plains. There the people drew it to the shore and the Noctes gave them salt which they were very glad to have. In return, they gave the Noctes red, blue and yellow cloth and they became friends. The Assamese asked the Noctes to come to the plains whenever they needed anything. But as a result of the Noctes giving salt to the people of the plains, the latter gained possession of all the salt in the world, and now the Noctes, to whom it once belonged, has to go and buy it from them. (Elwin, 1999, 209)

Vito Signorile (1973, 22) writes, "Myths can be referred to not as equivalent to fairy tales and fantasy literature; they graph fundamental psychological realities of everyday life. Myths has been understood less as providing deep psychosocial insight than as a source of cosmology, the explanation of the nature of the world and its creation."

The narratives from the field inform about houses made from ivory, much after the creation of the world, and Ahoms being fascinated by ivories. People from the hills

would give ivories to the Ahoms and in exchange would get precious old utensils known as ‘Adam Bati’ as gift. There are plenty of stories about exchange of gifts between the two societies. There are also stories that talk about natural calamities and displacement that the villagers from both the state shared. The next chapter deals with those narratives.

In the beginning there was a great flood, and all the wicked people who dwelt in the plains were drowned. This flood lasted for the eight ages of a man’s life. In the ninth age Chirun and Woisin, two Nats, dried up the flood with their hair which was very thick and long. Modoi, the eldest son of Mutum, kept one family of seven people on top of a high hill, and they were not drowned. (Elwin, 1999, 20)

Such traditional oral tales are tales that provide testimony to the great camaraderie between the two societies. In these myths, borders and boundaries were not seen as rigid demarcation between two societies. A sense of brotherhood, extending beyond political boundaries is manifested in these folklores.

The animal-skin story that talks about the wisdom of the two societies is quite popular in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. It shows how people in the hills look at people from the plains as ones with the ability to read and write. Probably that may have also been the reason for the hill tribes to accept Assamese language and scripts as there are many elderly people who till date speak fluent Assamese and are well-versed with Bhupen Hazarika’s (a cultural icon of Assam) songs thus embodying common values and ideal.

Jan’s brothers, Rei and Bai, went down towards the Assam plains in search of the other members of the family who had left their village. They reached Sissini, but when they saw in the distance the great plains with no mountains and no forest, they were afraid and turned back. On their return, they met three brothers and a sister, who had gone to the hills for trade and were now coming back to Assam...” (Elwin, 1999, 100)

Formerly Gunnu the Aka and Dhammai the Miji were brothers, Dhammai being the elder. Dhammai went towards Lhasa and Gunnu to Assam to tax the people. After a year, when they had brought home their dues, they met and Dhammai asked Gunnu what he had received. Gunnu showed him pieces of silk cloth, supari and cotton yarn. Dhammai produced sheep’s skin, salt and cow’s tails. He

said to his brother, ‘you give me some yarn and cloth and I will give you salt and sheepskin.’ In this way trade began between them and since then their descendents have intermarried. (Elwin, 1999, 105)

In one of the hill stories, it is said that a mother kept the eldest son with her and they became the Noctes while the younger son was left in the plains to be Assamese as he did not oblige the mother. The mother was believed to be God’s daughter.

Some of the stories mention about Burmese and Khamptis as being the richest for they were believed to have come down from the Himalayan Mountains by the golden ladder. In the same story, the British and Assamese are said to have come down from silver ladder as such have learnt how to make silver coins. They are assumed to have the highest number of silver coins according to the story. In the case of Adis and Nagas, they are known to have worn girdles made of cane which has given them the talent of crafting bridges and houses.

In another story from the plains, a boy had gone to meet his father who happened to be an elephant. His mother by drinking water from the same river where the elephant drank conceived the boy. On meeting his father, an elephant, the father said that he had nothing to offer him but he may take his task when he dies. When his father died he took the tusk and put it in his house. When he broke the tusk a girl came out of the tusk who he married and later from the same tusk many soldiers armed with guns and carrying gold and silver came out. He then later threw the tusk to Lohit River from which the first Assamese, Bengalis, Ankas, Daflas, Miris and Mikirs came to the world (Elwin, 1999, 134).

...At that time all the water in the world was surrounded by high hills and there was no way for it to escape. In the water where the child, whose name was Teva, was born there lived a snake and when he saw the child he wanted to eat him. Teva was frightened and swam away and since he was very light managed to get to the opposite bank and escape onto the shore. But the snake followed him and burrowed into the hill so that there was a great landslide. The water at once rushed out and flowed down into the plains, carrying the child with it.

When Yang saw his grandson’s plight he lit a torch and Teva followed its light to a village in the plains. As time went by Yang’s daughter had many children but

they too went to the plains. Gradually the water flowed down from the hills and they became dry and barren but the plains were always full of great rivers. After many years, when Teva was grown up, he told his brothers that he would like to go to the hills and see his mother. 'As I go, he said, I will whistle and you must reply'. After a long journey he found his mother and she asked why her other sons had not come to see her. He replied that they were too busy making love to their girls. She was angry with them and said that they should remain in the plains as the Assamese, but she kept the eldest son with her and his children were the first Noctes. (Elwin, 1999, 118)

It is observed that in some of the myths, the hill tribes tend to look down upon the people residing in plains. The typical curse for the hillsmen would be for them to leave the hills and live in the plains. The stories also talk about the long-lost relationship between the two states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. There is a consistent historic relation shared by the two states; in the myth.

Salts, Suparis (dry bettlenut), silk, cotton yarn that have historical relation with barter between the two states are also mentioned in some of the myths. There is a myth about an old woman who was chased to the plains by her son on the revelation that she would add nose droppings to the food to make it tasty. It is said that when she went weeping here tears turned into salt as a result plains area is known to be blessed with abundant salt.

Elwin (1970, 58) presents a story as to why Assam has plenty of cottons. In the story it is said that two sisters from the Adi tribe acted careless on the bumper harvest they had received that year. They set fire to the clothes of bark fibre, and scattered in the field that gave them bumper harvest. Miffed at their lazy attitude, a spirit that makes seeds fertile turned itself into a bird and flew over the areas of Minyongs, Pasis, Padams and at last Assam. The bird later settled in Assam and since then people of Assam are known to have good harvest and plenty of cotton. There are plenty of such stories that reflect upon the relation between the two states.

The hill tribes are fond of rice beer and in their narrative have a justification as to why the plainsmen are not fond of rice beer. It is said that there was a bird that saw Abo Tani (known to be forefather of some of the hill tribes) preparing rice beer because it did not

like the smell and the way the medicine was prepared for the beer it flew to the Assam side. It is said that from the bird came the first Brahmins which is why they do not take beer. The beer was said to be made out of women's hair and blood.

These myths as such managed to accommodate the present-day society though in an imaginative form. The articles, concepts, and idea of hills and plains are rooted in the myths. The symbolic and cultural meanings of border have been represented in the myths. In the words of Houtum (2011, 59) it can be said that at the same, "The world outside that is constructed by a border also expresses a desire, a wish, the longing to be somewhere else. It is the desire to experience and live the personal freedom despite or thanks to the fear for the unknown, the non-routine. That is the desire to turn to the other, the desire to cross the line. The unknown, the stories about the exotic and the mythical, the adventure, the wild or the culturally different, can work like the Siren song on our ears."

The representation of hills and plains not just as geographical entity but also as identities in itself is reflected in the myths. The next chapter i.e. Chapter 5 titled 'Analyzing narratives from the field' is the interpretation of the fieldwork carried out in the selected sites. It consists of narratives that look at the same subject through the parameters of the 21st century population that goes back and forth from colonial days to present day. The next chapter deals with the complexity of the symbolic terrain of borders and boundaries in the form of hills and plains. Divergent viewpoint emerges from the narratives collected from the site, expressing contrasts. The inherited meanings from the myths were not constant. Same is the case with the narratives of the present day. Myths present various ethnic groups in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh co-existing on mutual tolerance and also on peace.

Work Cited

- Bora, D.K. (1995). *Myths and tales of the Nyishings of Arunachal Pradesh*. Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Borgohain, B.K. (1974). *Folktales of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh*. Sterling publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.
- Burton, G. (2010). *Media and Society*. 2nd edition. Tata McGraw Hill Education Private Limited, New Delhi.
- Doty, W.G. (2004). *Myth*. Greenwood Press. London.
- Elwin, V. (1970). *A New Book of Tribal Fiction*. Director of Information and Public Relation, NEFA, Shillong.
- Elwin, V. (2005). The North-East Frontier Agency. In Sharma, SK. Sharma, U. editors. *The Discovery of North East India*. Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- Elwin, V. (1999). *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.
- Elwin, V. (2009). *A Philosophy for NEFA*. Isha Books, Delhi.
- Malinowski, B. (1926). *Myth in Primitive Society*. WW Norton and Company.
- Rai, A.K. (2000). Conflict Situation and the Media: A Critical Look. *Strategic Analysis*, 24:3, 585-601.
- Scott, J.C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press. New Haven & London.
- Signorile, V. (1973). Acculturation and Myth. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 46, 117-134.
- Hamilton, A. (1983). *In Abor Jungles of North-East India*. Mittal Publications, Delhi.
- Houtum, H.V. (2011). The Mask of the Border. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, 49-61.

Margolis, J. (Spring 1993), Texts. Poetics Today. Duke University Press, first edition, volume 14, 193-211.

Newman, D. and Paasi A. (1998). Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: boundary narratives in political geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, first edition, volume 22, 186-207.

Reddy, R.C. (2014, November 1). Why are people from Northeast feeling alienated?.

Retrieved from <http://www.tehelka.com/2014/10/why-are-people-from-ne-feeling-alienated/>

Retrieved on 07 April 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr0712/oth05>

Retrieved on 08 May 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=aug1414/oth052>

Retrieved on 10 May 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=jan0110/main>

Retrieved on 11 May 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=jan1810/main>

Retrieved on 12 May 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=jan1810/main>

Retrieved on 13 May 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr1414/state06>

Retrieved on 09 June 9 2017 from

<http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jun1311/city05>

Retrieved on 16 June 2017 from <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/likabali-declared-temporary-headquarter-of-isd/>

Retrieved on 09 June 2017 from <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/dfp-clarifies-on-eviction-drive-reiterates-claim/>

Retrieved on 13 May 2017 from <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/arunachal-and-its-boundaries/>

Retrieved on 14 May 2017 from <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/kena-assures-to-develop-malinithan-area-seeks-cooperation-with-assam/>

Retrieved on 12 May 2017 from <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/dc-calls-for-upholding-peace-within-assam-and-arunachal-boundary/>

Retrieved on 2 May 2017 from <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/arunachal-pradesh-the-long-journey-from-secluded-entity-to-full-fledged-state/>

Das, P. (2008, June 12). Interstate Border Disputes in the North East. Retrieved from http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/InterstateBorderDisputesintheNortheast_PDas_120608

End Notes

¹ Mukul Pathak, Guwahati. Personal communication, July 12, 2017.

² Kenter Joya Riba, Itanagar. Personal communication, May 11, 2017.

³ Digjyoti Lahkar, Guwahati. Personal communication, August 18, 2017

⁴ Pradeep Kumar Behera, Itanagar. Personal communication, July 25, 2017.

⁵ Tongam Rina, Itanagar. Personal communication, June 17, 2017.

⁶ Kenter Joya Riba, Itanagar. Personal communication, May 11, 2017.

⁷ Kenter Joya Riba, Itanagar. Personal communication, May 11, 2017.

⁸ Mukul Pathak, Guwahati. Personal communication, July 12, 2017.