

# The People-Who Lost Their Flute

Rucheta Sen Chaudhuri

---

*"We tried to catch up with the rest of the country by importing 'national' norms in governance, education, and other important sectors for the sake of mere 'uniformity' in progress. If we claim that this is the progress we have achieved, it has been done in a tremendous cost because we are no longer a self-reliant people, we have ceased to be fighters and achievers, and have become loungers on stipends, concessions and subcontracts." - TemsulaAo*

## Introduction

Hunter and gatherers are either historical or evolutionary categories. Hunter and gatherer communities of mainland India are conceptualized as a case of 'secondary primitivization' (Sinha as quoted by Baidyanath Saraswati 1991). The idea of civilization and later development policies have clouded our perspectives on people who have been categorized as food gatherers and hunters. For example such categorization does not allow examination of intercommunity hierarchical relationships (dominant marginal, caste-tribe, master and serf) of tribes at their shared cultural niche. Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) and erstwhile Primitive Tribal Group (PTG), More Other Backward Class (MOBC), Schedule Caste, (SC), and Schedule Tribes (ST), categories represent people who are suffering from socio-economic and educational constraints. There are people, within the category of PVTG who are identified as hunters and gatherers. Adhikary categorized the Indian hunters and gatherers into two types: the Primary Hunters and Symbiotic Hunters (2010: 44-47). He categorized communities like Jarawa, Onge in the first category and mainland hunter and gatherer communities into the second category. He cited the examples of Birhor, Mankiria, and Santal to substantiate his concept of 'symbiotic hunters'.

Despite dissimilar geographical settlements and ecological habitats, the symbiotic hunters and gatherers of different linguistic and social backgrounds share similar social position within their respective ecological niche. The word 'symbiotic' as used by Adhikary (ibid) focuses on 'a kind of relationship' the hunter and gatherer of mainland India have

with their neighbours in respective locations. Oxford dictionary (1970) defines symbiosis as ‘a living together, companionship... partner’ and focuses on symbiotic relationship of the plants. The word ‘symbiosis’ is also referred as ‘commensalism’, or ‘consortium’, ‘distinguished from parasitism; in which one organism preys upon the other’. This discussion highlights... mutually beneficial association without bodily attachment (ibid). Webster’s Unified Dictionary and Encyclopaedia (1970) refers that the word ‘symbiosis’ is ‘the living together of organisms, the symbionts, each helping the other, and is regarded by some biologists as the perfection of parasitism.’(6:1633). The concept symbiosis discusses relationship of living organisms more from biological perspective than social sciences. It links evolution and adaptations too. Emergence of the concept of a category as ‘hunter and gatherer’ or as contemporary primitive (hunter and gatherer as an occupational category as recognized by policy makers and neighbours) is an historical phenomena. Colonial and post- colonial writings mentions symbiotic relationship of hunter and gatherer with peasant and tribal and caste communities in India. In Maikal hills of Madhya Pradesh geographical distributions of different tribal communities and their economic interdependence shows dependence of agricultural, and pastoral communities on the hunter gatherer community- the Baiga. The Baiga are settled on upper hills and depend on forest products. They gather food and other essential items for self and also barter them with neighbours of the foothills and plains. Those other neighbours depended solely on the Baiga for traditional medicines (jaributi), honey, and a variety of leafy vegetables and tubers. While the Baiga in return collect paddy and milk products from the neighbours staying at foot hills and plains.

### **Plural Occupations of Hunters and Gatherers**

It is mentioned by Roy (1925), Bhakta (2016), and Sarkar (2014) that the members of hunter and gatherer communities worked as day/bonded labourer on the lands of their neighbouring agriculture communities. Nearly hundred year’s back ethnographic writings noted that the Birhor women regularly worked in the agricultural fields of their neighbours and in return got paddy (Roy 1925). Bhakta (2016) in his biography has given a thick description on the occupation and work schedule of day labourer parents belonging to the Lodha community. Stonner (1952), Deori (1982) maintained that the Sulung/ Puroik were labourer for their masters in the agricultural fields. The Puroiks are

horticulturists at community level. In official records the occupations of all the three communities is hunting-gathering. They are identified as landless although they are all forest dwellers. The Sulung/ Puroik consider forest land as their ancestral habitat. The meaning of the word Birhor is people of forest. The Lodha of West Bengal has similar belief like Puroik that their ancestors were original settlers of the forests which has disappeared. Among these three communities the Puroik are still living in forest habitats. A brief ethnographic study conducted by me in 2004-2005 on the Puroik and forest relations revealed that they depend completely on forest products and identify many vegetables, tubers and medicinal plants. Most importantly the staple food of the Puroik is Rangbang. This is a carbohydrate extract from the trunk of sago plants. The technology and knowledge base of extraction of carbohydrate are examples of their traditional horticulture practices, where use of iron tool is limited to Dao. Neighbours like the Nyishi solely depend on the Puroik for supply of Rangbang (a delicacy for them) and for other forest foods.

While reflecting on multiplicity of subsistence strategies of the hunter-gatherer, Adhikary also referred to 'centuries-old symbiosis of the hunter-gatherer groups in central Africa, east Africa, south and southeast Asia with their neighbouring horticulturists, peasants, and market of the larger society' (2009: 5). Another hypothetical situation may be perceived 'in which hunting and gathering has been "secondary adaptation" and / or, a case of "secondary primitivization"' (ibid)). In mainland India as well as South America the colonial rulers compelled many traditional farmers of the forest to adapt foraging as their means of livelihood (ibid). Stoner (1952:953) identified the Sulungas (at present they are calledas Puroik) as horticulturists, who were under a 'feudal arrangement' of dominant agriculturist communities. Ashraf\* (2016) opined that communities with iron implements and technological know-how overpowered those people who had non-iron technology. His deliberation was based on the archaeological findings of Arunachal Pradesh. Social relations of the Birhor, Lodha and Sulung/ Puroik with their neighbours need a thorough discussion from the perspective of 'symbiotic hunters' (Adhikary 2010:46) and 'secondary primitivization' (Sinha as quoted by Saraswati).

### **The Gathering – Horticulture and Agriculture-Labourer Continuum**

The Sulung/ Puroik subsistence practice is an eye opener. Their staple food is an example of making a natural adaptation as well as finding

an alternative to rice as staple food in the rice-culture complex. There may be other reasons too behind Puroiks' subordinate social status. The hunting practices of the Puroiks can be termed as 'symbiotic hunters'. In this connection it is essential to identify nature, level and extent of their dependence on hunting and gathering. They have symbiotic relationship with the neighbouring peasants and market-based economy which has larger intercommunity networks in the region. The concept 'symbiotic' relationship in particular, needs to be properly understood. Despite the contributions of hunter and gatherer to economy by and working as labourer they have low status in respective social milieus. The Birhors at local level are known as 'monkey eaters' (Adhikary 2010: 75-86). Dominant group within a region rank neighbours as belonging to low status on the basis of 'impure' food they consume. Dominant groups identify these features to create negative images of the neighbours to prove their superiority. I remember that a member of a dominant community told me while I was on my way to reach the habitat of one such community that the people in that habitat were in the habit of lying and were like dogs. I was shocked to hear that comment but I wanted to know as to what was the basis of such a belief. He replied that they would come any moment if food was offered to them. After I completed my field work I came to the conclusion that the hunter- gatherers were more self-reliant in comparison to the agriculturists. Bhakta (2016) recounted in his biography that the Lodha were not allowed to eat with the caste people at the common dining place or in kitchens of dominant caste. But he recollected that they did make some exceptions to this rule. Despite peasant communities assign low status to hunters and gatherers they derive advantage of their deep knowledge of land, forest, flora, and fauna. Further specifically hunters and gatherers contribute in the economic activities of the neighbouring peasant communities. The interaction follows unequal reciprocal relations between dominant peasant and weaker hunter and gatherer communities in the same ecological niche.

### **Kinship beyond Consanguinal and Affinal Relations**

The Puroik are settled in the East Kameng, Kurung-Kumy, Upper and Lower Subansiri, districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The main difference this community has with their neighbours is that they speak a different language ( Furer-Haimendorf as quoted by Stonner 1952), which is to some extent understood by the Khowa (Sarkar 2014); while the Puroik are clan based (Deori 1982) their neighbours are lineage-based societies

(Taring 2011; Chaudhuri 2001,2006). The neighbours identified the Puroik as Sulung in the past, which in pronunciation sounds like ‘Solung’ (fieldwork observation 2006-7; Sarkar 2014). They are usually referred to as forest dwellers and land-less people in their habitats. The Puroik are also referred to as ‘Rangbang’ eater, which creates a separate category compared to with others. They themselves accept the idea of landlessness (Sarkar2014).The Puroik have a complex economic relationship with the neighbouring communities. Due to complexity in the relationship the Puroik for a long time were referred to as a community which had two identities (Stonner 1952; Deori 1972). One identity always connected most of them with the name of the neighbour under whom they worked (the master as Atto). Another identity was the community identity. In 1976, Government of India rehabilitated the Puroiks by regrouping their villages. The Puroiks were settled in both heterogeneous and homogenous habitats. Usually, they were depended on the Atto so that they were able to pay bride-price for self, and also for son. Such situation compelled them to remain dependent on the Atto, who was otherwise known as master and a member of other communities. The word Atto though means grandfather, in this context it neither refers to any consanguinal or affinal relationships. Usually marriage between the Puroiks living in neighbourhood is prohibited. Such practices are also observed in the communities like the Lodha (Bhakta 2016), and Kora/Kol (fieldwork observations 1988) of West Bengal, who once upon a time worked as bonded labour or day labour and usually used Bengali kinship terminologies of the neighbouring Bengali land owners. The culture of referring and addressing persons with dominant status by kinship terminology creates confusion to outsiders about their relationship. Because those words never mean any consanguinal or affinal relationships. Another set of terminologies correspond the peasants and hunters and gatherers who have separate community status. Moreover, while the persons of weaker communities refer persons of stronger communities by kinship terminologies the reverse is not practised. The dominant members of the community refer weaker community’s members by name. Such practices indicate inequality in relationship between two neighbouring communities and also the dominant community members have to be shown some respect by referring them with kinship terms.

### **The Puroik and their Land Relations**

The habitats of Puroik in the East Kameng district and in the block Cheyeng Tajo are in forests. Porter tracks connect those villages. The

distances of those village from the block headquarters is calculated as distance of one day, two days, three days, etc. There are folktales that identify the common ancestors of the Puroik and neighbours. Those stories narrate reasons why the Puroiks are based on the forests for survival. They collect products like cane, edibles, fishes, from forest and streams for self and neighbours, too. The staple food of the Puroik is a delicacy to their neighbours, who otherwise are rice and maize eating communities. Though the scholars identify Sikkim as the corridor of the Neolithic Celt makers to India from Southeast Asia (Pradhan 2014:101), Celts and polished tools have been found in different locations of Arunachal Pradesh (see Asharaf and others). It is evident that this region of eastern Himalaya has a long ancient history and has been a rice consuming region. This region is famous for the 'Sikkim Primitive' (Pradhan Ibid: 104-5) - a maize species, and locally known as 'murali makai' which leads to the speculation that the Sikkim and its adjacent regions was secondary centre of origin of maize (Ibid). The Puroik habitat is located in the Rice- Maize zone and this region is famous for other indigenous culture traits like 'natural fibre cloths' and 'Rangbang' an alternative to staple food rice. These rice and maize culture traits connect people of the high and low altitudes across ethnic communities of Arunachal Pradesh. The Puroik work in the neighbours' cultivable field for farming of rice and maize but they still prefer to eat Rangbang as staple food and that is a horticulture product in Arunachal Pradesh. Rangbang is a staple food to the Puroik and a delicacy, also fodder and famine food to nearer and distant neighbours. The ancestors of the Puroik weaved their cloths from natural fibres available in the forest. Despite connection of food and cloth culture traits of the Puroik which are archetypal geographical adaptations, it is ironical that the Puroik are landless! Tagore in one of his writings states 'Nijabhume Parabasi' meaning people who are outsiders in their own land. This phrase is so much applicable to such people, who are uprooted from their own lands and referred to as 'landless'. Table 1 will introduce the relation of Puroiks to their lands.

Ancestors of the Puroik transplant wild Sago trees into the vicinity of their forest habitats. Every family inherits such Sago plant gardens from ancestors and parents. These trees are cut after ten years for collection of Rangbang. Owners of such plots go to collect Rangbang after ten years. Though the Puroiks remain busy in cultivating their masters' land, they depend on the wild sago tree for their staple food. Rangbang plots of one family are located at some distance and therefore they have to migrate to

those places for collection of Rangbang that is why they have been referred to as nomads. Their temporary migration needs to be understood in terms of their culture. Their cultural geography too is well defined. Table 1, refers that the Puroiks horticultural lands are well demarcated as well as owned by individual families. This table further indicates that villagers have Plantation Plots at different places, near and far. This is an account of the village Sanchu in which 4 families do not have plantation plots.

**Table-1: Distribution of Rangbang Plantation Areas of the Families of Sanchu and Dache Villages**

Sl. No.	Name of the Plots/ Areas	Family Holdings
1	Takpe	03
2	Tagampu	06
3	Dache	08
4	Pari	04
5	Gamro	01
6	Taguia	10
7	Dangdu	03
8	Dungduang Milkiba	01
9	Mechakazoit	02
10	Jeppa	01
11	Sanglang, Dongdo, Takreien	06
12	Dumda	01
13	Wapung	04
14	Sanchu	10
15	Takrio	02
16	Tabyo	01
17	Takriusing	01
18	Ngorising	01
19	Sipitakrin	01

*Source: Fieldwork December 2005—January 2006 with the Post-graduate Students of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University in the Sanchu and Dache Villages, East Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh.*

Table 1 indicates areas of 66 plots and holdings of the Puroik families from the village Sancho. The Puroik from other villages too may have lands in Sancho. Since 1976, the Puroik are encouraged in cultivation of vegetables like, cabbage, cauliflower, tomato, beans, as summer crops (Deori 1972). The crops they cultivate in own small jhum fields are paddy (among), cucumber (mabung), pumpkin (truk), millet (tamai), maize (chapiu), ginger (kacho), bean (tape). After the season of cultivation is over, the produce and seeds are stored in big baskets (wangpam) in granaries. Both the technologies of Rangbang extraction and jhum cultivation are women centric; men use Dao to cut the stem of Rangbang trees, the trunks are further cut into pieces (sena) and then outer sections of senais removed to collect the pith. The pith is pounded on flat stone (kebia) by a wooden baton (khiyok). Khiyok chops remove starch from fibre. The crushed product is hammered (by wooden wak) and washed in water and spread out on mats. The cleaning process is repeated several times until the fibre (beykama) is eliminated. Water is poured in the beykama by kenkioto make it soft while hammering. The starch is strained in a cane bag (reyik) several times. In this process they collect fine yellow colour starch (bay). This is semi dried in the sun. A tree can provide carbohydrate to a family of four-five members for a week. Usually family members go together to collect Rangbang. (Source: Fieldwork 2004-2005 of the Post -graduate Students of Anthropology in the Sanchu and Dache Villages). They prefer stream/riversides for the processing of bay, as it needs plenty of running water. For jhum cultivation men cut tree and plants of forest to clear small patches of land for cultivation. The process of cultivation is similar as practised by the neighbours of the region.

**Table-2: Tools use by the Puroik**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Shape</b>	<b>Function</b>
Frukhiyong-Khiyok , Fechung	A baton with bamboo tube	To remove starch from fiber
Wak	Cricket bat shaped hammer	To soften the pith
Ryag/Reyik	Bamboo container	Used to pour water on the pith substance to make it softer
Ryag/Reyik	Finelywoven elongated strainer, Cane made strainershape of a bag	To filter bay starch
Wa	Cane mat strainer	To spread beylo

*Source: Fieldwork 2004-5 (Ibid)*



Most of the tools used by these people are made up of bamboo, cane, wood and bones. There is very little use of iron. Even for the construction of their traditional house they do not use iron pegs/nails.

Above is a short description on the use of fauna and flora used by the Puroik. The habitats of these people have thick forest with a variety of tall trees, bushes, orchids, bamboo, wild fruit trees, walnuts, bay leaves, and cane trees, wild sago trees, wild banana, wild berries, mushroom, ferns and mosses, Rhododendrons. Himalayan conifers are also there in high hills (See Deori, Stonner and Furer-Haimendorf for further description on forests). Table three and four will introduce a few edible flora and fauna of their habitats.

**Table-3: A Glimpse of Knowledge on Flora**

Name in English	Name in the Puroik	Season of availability
Bamboo shoot	Marrok	October November
Bamboo flower	Lamlu	When it flowers
Banana inner	Oowa	Through out the year
Wild leafs	Rare, Hiyak, Hagi, Harwa, AkangChaklang (two leave grow directly, Langmoo plants on the rocks)	Winter
Wild leafs	Pokra, (herb), Pokloik (climber), Papu Atong (big leaf of tree)	Summer
Wild leaf	Papek (young stems and seeds are eaten)	In all seasons
Roots	Chabong (long leaf plant and fruit grows below the plant)	Through out the year
Wild tuber Creeper-tuber Climber -tuber Climber – tuber	Tapar /Joo Chua Pura Tabo Melik	May Winter Winter August
Black Nuts Small nuts Thorn nuts	Ronga Rongia Kayu	Once in 5 years Once in 5 years November

Mushroom Small mushroom		
Mushroom grow on soil	Mang	December August
Red mushroom	Mangsaksi(white color)	January December
(Grow on wood) Red mushroom (Grow on wood)	Engdang Piyomang	Dec-January
Black mushroom (Grow on wood) Black mushroom (Grow on wood) small mushroom	Mangkok (slippery) Kzaimang	December October- Nov

*Source: Bam 2005-6:79-8*

The main aim to quote Bam (ibid) is to highlight the knowledge and association of the Puroik with flora and nature around them. Bam (ibid: 86-88) enlisted fauna of the Puroiks' environment which has a lot of variety. Some of the animals are found round the year but others are seasonal. The Puroiks also know the medicinal values of some of the animals.

### **The Sulung/Puroik and Neighbours 'Relations**

The vast forestland is usually referred to as lands of the neighbouring tribes of the Puroiks. Therefore, it can be assumed that they were enjoying joint ownership over land and forests. This area is situated between two rivers –the Kameng in the east and Subansiri in the west. Customary rules at intercommunity levels show that accesses to resources is unequal, though the neighbours heavily depend upon the Puroik for collection of forest products, as well as cultivation works. During past decades Puroiks were engaged in fighting feuds for their Attos. In exchange the Puroik enjoyed right to earn bride price, protection from sudden attacks by other neighbouring villages and persons (Deori 1972, Bagang 2005). Most of the Puroik (Sulung) Villages' had names denoted by two syllables. One word was from the neighbouring language origin and another was the Puroik (Sulung) language origin. In reply to the question, 'whether they are attached to their parents Atto?' At least sixteen family members of the Sancho village said that they were attached to the same Atto since their grandparent's time. For example one person replied that the Atto of their family purchased his mother and his wife. Nine persons could recall that they started working for the Attos' family at childhood, and four persons started work at adolescence age. Bagang

(Ibid) observed that there was transition in the relationship. The son of the Puroik priest said that he didn't work for the Atto. Two Puroik men said after demise of the Atto they did not serve the people of the next generation. Three persons confirmed that they never served the Attos' house. One person confirmed that he worked at Atto's house on payment basis because his Atto did not pay his bride price. Two persons stated that they were disconnected with their Atto. Of the two, one had some quarrel with Atto and the other's Atto had become a city dweller. During our stay in that village, in only one case it was noted that a girl had to go to her husband's home because her father's Atto received bride price for her. She was of adolescent age. Bagang quoted some Puroik men, who expressed that at present they have a kind of brotherly relations with Atto (2004:45-46).

Towards the end part of the fieldwork for the present study, one morning three men from neighbouring villages visited the houses of the Sanchu. Within no time our students came back from their work and told me that informants were not responding to them. I told my students not to get worried but should note whatever was happening around them, and observe activities of all the villagers. One member of our team reported that those persons who came to Puroik houses said that they were on the way to forest in search of their Mithun (*Bos Frontalis*). But he expressed his doubt over that statement of the visitors! I asked him reasons behind the doubt? He replied that people carry minimum a backpack and rope when they go in search of Mithun. With my utter surprise, within twenty minutes we saw those persons were coming back. I requested my students to invite them for a cup of tea. Those men accepted our invitation warmly and came in for a cup of tea with us. The oldest member in the party started relating his experience of 1962 war. He was a man of loud voice with a jolly expression and was the stoutest man among three visitors. He narrated a heroic life experience of his participation in a sudden attack to the security post of Cheyeng Tajo when he was of twelve years. I noted a sense of pride on facial expressions of the team members. While the team members captivated us in the tale, which the oldest man was narrating and all were cheering, the Puroik of different age groups didn't join us. They suddenly changed their behaviours. Carrying canes, fire woods and other materials and were going to Cheyeng Tajo from which direction these men had come. These men were very polite and well behaved to us but when they were talking to passers' by volume of their voices, tones and body language indicated that they were dominant. We had a rare chance to

observe the expression of dominant class of people in real life! It was a lifetime teaching for me. The narrator (a hero) stayed in jail for a long time for the action he committed in his juvenile age against nation state India, not understanding the gravity of the problem. He narrated that the members of Indian armies of that check post retreated, leaving their arms and ammunitions behind during the Chinese attack. They came back after war was over and found no trace of arms and ammunitions at place. They suspected villagers and raided their houses to get lost arms and ammunitions back. Army was successful in their attempts but villagers disliked such actions of army.

Apang (2004-5) from his fieldwork experience said that the Puroik are weaker in comparison to their neighbours because they do not have 'gun'. Country made gun is a very common weapon found in most of the communities of Arunachal Pradesh. All this information is presented here to attempt a comparative study of the food gatherers hunters and to draw certain conclusions.

### **NEFA: Post- Colonial Intervention**

Government regrouped the Sulung habitats under the rehabilitation program in 1976. The word Puroik was accepted in the record of administration as the new name of the tribe, on 26th January in the same year. Panchayat Raj Institution was introduced at village level to empower the Puroiks. The Puroiks habitats were in inaccessible areas lying between 5000-13000 feet. Due to unstable hills, formidable rivers and terrains etc., their neighbours claimed those forestlands (Deori Ibid: 90-91), so in 1975, to ameliorate their living condition and also to give them a settled life, Government of India regrouped the Sulung villages and the Khenwa Administrative Circle was opened. This program was implemented in three places under the Chayengtajo Administrative Circle—they were Sanchu, Yakili and Laching. Deori (Ibid) revisited the place in 1981 and noted that villagers demanded a primary school in the Sanchu. He saw a motor able road was under construction, which would connect Sanchu with Chayengtajo. But our team didn't see that road; we reached Sancho village by porter track. There was no motorable road to Sancho village. We asked villagers about that road, about which they had no information.

However as a part of development programme the government encouraged the Puroiks for wet rice cultivation and terrace cultivation.

The government established a colony called Arundoi for Puroiks in the Seppa town by constructing houses, cemented roads with water facility.

### **The Birhor and the Lodha: Relationship with the Neighbouring Communities**

Roy (1925) described the economic relationship of the Birhor with the neighbouring peasant communities and specifically the role of the Birhor women as agricultural labourer some nine decades back. The Birhor are usually known as hunter and gatherers. They have been rehabilitated in government colonies. One such colony is located Maqcluxygunje of Khalary subdivision Jharkhand. People in this habitat live a life of scavenger and beggar (CICS, CUJ Fieldwork of 2014). Maqcluxygunje of Khalary was a colonial habitat. It was developed for European and Anglo-Indians. Mr. Maqcluxygunj occupied lands of seven villages to create this habitat. Colonial literature on Chottanagpur (Bradley-Birt 1903: 2-7) is a shameless testimony of perceived 'civilization'. Colonial writer took it as a privilege to describe everything from his preconceived ideas of civilized man. Descriptions on the 'emergence of cultivable lands mile after miles' out of 'impenetrable' forests full of 'undergrowth and mighty trees' and flourishing business of timber is appreciated. Establishment of Railway in this region of Chottanagpore was perceived as, 'the enormous strides the civilization made everywhere during the latter half of the nineteenth century could not fail to affect Chottanagpore...' (1903: 6-7). Obsession of civilization to impose written records (especially where it was absent) and in case of the people of Chottanagpur tribes did not have land records was enough to justify unequal delivery of justice system of the British who redefined lands and forests of the indigenous people Birhor, Munda and Asur. This hundred years old writing is clear evidence as to how Birhor in Chottanagpur were alienated from their lands and forests. The meaning of the word "Birhor" (Bir-forest; Hor- people that is "people of forest") was not enough proof for the colonial administration to understand the deep rooted association of Birhor with the land and forest. Unequal relationship of the Birhor and their neighbours becomes clear from the following quotation, 'Only about fifty years ago when the attention of British administrators was first drawn to this people, they used to be accused by their neighbours of a revolting cannibalism '(Roy 1925:1). The description on the Bihors as quoted from Dalton, Forbes and Paddington (Roy Ibid: 2-14) clearly indicates subordinate positions of the Birhor in their

neighbourhood caste communities. Roy quotes Dalton (1925: 15) to refer economic exchanges between the Birhor with other tribes. Birhor exchanged forest products for procuring Sari, rice and other essentials.

During post-colonial time a good number of the Lodha women and children were begging on holidays in the Kharagpur town (Bhakta 2016). Such kinds of transformation were initiated during colonial period. The Lodhas were converted from 'forest dwelling people' to 'hunter-gatherer' to 'criminal tribe' to 'beggar'. The land and forest relationship of these indigenous people were never an issue for so called caste based local community and outsiders. Earlier, indigenous people like the Lodha were supplier of forest products and labour to neighbouring agriculturist communities. Colonial rules disassociated the Lodhas from forests and framed forest rules which made them landless. Such situation was explained by Adhikary quoting Surajit Chandra Sinha, who said that "primitivization" situation is a historical categorization. Evolutionary perspectives should not apply here. Shifting hill cultivators and horticulturists usually practiced their activities in a large territory. Due to encroachment of their territories by others, they became more dependent on forest products. Colonial administrators identified them as 'hunter and gatherers'. Symbiotic relationships among neighbouring communities were there. Dominant neighbours could not give up their dependence on the so called forest dwellers like the Lodha and Birhor for fulfilling requirements of forest resources. They were in a symbiotic relationship. Rice-Rangbang- Bamboo-Gun Culture Complex of the Puroik and their neighbour's throws much in sight into inter community relationship. While the Puroik food cycle is 'Rangbang- Rice' and that of their neighbours' is Rice-Maize- Rangbang. For the 'Rangbang' neighbours depended on the Puroiks, who maintained the horticulture plantations in the forest ecology. Rangbang was staple food for the Puroik and Rice and Maize are staple foods for the neighbours. The neighbours considered "Rangbang" as delicacy. Apparently, these relationships of foods with different groups act as identity markers. But during natural disasters (like famine due to Bamboo flowering) the neighbours had to depend on the Puroiks. The natural disasters caused by Bamboo flowering create scarcity of rice. So, to strengthen food security during natural disaster and famine situation, neighbours of the Puroik developed a social institution of paying bride price for Puroik men. A Puroik man is under the control of Atto, who had paid bride-price for him. A Puroik man can free himself by shouldering responsibilities of payment of bride-price for self and son.

The Asur and Munda started using 'iron implements' in 'Forest Resources- and Rice Culture complex', who were neighbours to Birhor. At the same time dominant neighbours of 'Forest Resources- and Rice Culture complex' depended on the Birhor and Lodha for essential forest products for survival. Such symbiotic relationship became most exploitative due to new forest rules and new definitions of forests during British administration. Moreover, hierarchical relationship of caste system was strengthened during colonial rule weakened the Lodha (Devi, Bhakta 2016). As a result, self reliant forest dwellers Lodhas and Birhors lost their cultural ecology and to practice their knowledge. They became dependent on others on their own land.

### **Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

"We lost our flute"- Taram Soja, Panchayat Member of village Sancho, Cheyeng Tajo, a Puroik man said. He believed that origin of the Puroik can be known if they reveal the missing link between flute and their oral history. Colonial literature most of the time presented people of oral history traditions as people without history. Folklore, folktales studies aimed at reconstruction of history of such people of pre-literate societies. But that kind of approach was heavily relied on generalization and obeyed principles of evolution. Boas (1887) opposed the general notion of evolution and says, 'Civilization is not something absolute, but ... is relative, and ... our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes'. Boas and his students depended on historical approaches to understand people history, language and culture.

British administration declared the Lodha as a criminal tribe. This new categorization made the Lodhas' life hell. Dominant neighbouring communities within the same ecological niche (were cultivators) and the Lodha have differential access to land resources. British government prohibited the Lodha from utilizing forest resources. So, the Lodhas were left with no option but to beg for food at the railway town Kharagpur, and become landless labourers in the villages (Bhakta 2016). Indigenous knowledge of hunter and gatherers is an ignored area of discussion in colonial literature. Oral history, literature, folklore are inadequate to focus on the identity of the so called 'hunter gatherer' in their respective neighbourhood. The Lodha speak in the language of the neighbouring people that is Bengali. But at present in the writings of the educated Lodha

people indigenous words are coming to light, which refer to land, village names etc. Linguists connect language and place names to understand local history of human settlement in obscurity. Therefore, words and meanings of the Birhor, Lodha and Puroik languages may provide important clues in reconstruction of their social history and relations.

Mr. Taram Soja the young Anchal Samiti Member of Sanchu repeatedly told me that the Puroik had culture of Flute playing, which they lost. I didn't ask any Puroik elder at that time. Recently, while I was writing this paper, that comment of Mr. Taram Soja created a curiosity in me, so I searched in Internet but was not able to gather any information on the relationship between 'Flute and the Puroik', or importance of flute in 'hunting and gathering community'. Taram Soja intends to express by his speech that link of the Puroik with their flute will be able to say much about the history of the people. Last but not least the present author had a field experience while she met potters of Madhya Pradesh in Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, IGRMS, Bhopal, March-April 2015, in the Potters Workshop. The potters made a few terracotta toys. They explained that the local tribal communities purchase those small bird toys before their festival. Those toys serve two functions. One is that they gift them to children. Second, the hunters use those toys as flute while hunting birds. The potter blew those toys, which create chirping sounds of different birds. They are of different shapes and hollow in sides. This was a new experience because it was observed that flute is a common musical instrument of the peasant and pastoral communities in India. Anyway, Taram Soja's question requires much deeper enquiries to reach an understanding between flute and Puroik relationship.

The symbiotic relationships of two and more communities create a scope to study of unequal social positions, in which one or more community(s) subordinates the other. That means the dominant community control the weaker community socially, economically and politically. That dominant community defines all terms of relationship, which is practiced, referred and define everything. Further, colonial administration created new scope for local dominant communities to exploit weaker marginal communities in the same ecological niche.

Symbiotic relationship of peasant and so called hunter and gatherer communities apparently got emphasised owing to new policies of colonial administration relating to land, forest and water resources. For example,



self dependent tribe like Birhor and Lodha became dependent on others for survival. The artefacts of the Puroik used to extract staple food from wild sago are mostly made of bamboo, wood and cane. The staple food is collected from horticultural plantations situated in forests. Their dependence on forest for their food is huge. However, like any other forest dweller they do not over use the resources. They are careful to leave enough for the regeneration of those resources which are not only vital for them but also others particularly when disaster or drought hits the region. Indigenous knowledge of the hunter and gatherers is being increasingly discovered particularly relating to medicine. However, the sad part of the story is that they themselves live distressed situation though they have been variously classified as backward and more backward communities. Their situation got worse during the colonial period though they also suffered at the hands of neighbouring dominant communities. They exploited their labour, knowledge and made them to extract forest resources for them. They were also tied up in bondages based on some social practices which were extremely unfavourable to them.

## References

- Adhikary, Asim. 2009 *The Tribal Situation of India: Structure, Change & Continuity*. New Delhi: Abhijit Publications.
- Apang, Gemin. 2004 "The Solung: A Note on Customs and Institutions" Post Graduation Fieldwork Report of Anthropology (unpublished). Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University.
- Bagang, Khoda. 2004 "The Solung: A Note on Customs and Institutions" Post Graduation Field work Report of Anthropology (unpublished). Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, 2004-5
- Bam, Sonia. 2004 "The Solung: A Note on Customs and Institutions" Post Graduation Fieldwork Report of Anthropology, (unpublished), Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University.
- Bhakta, Prahlad 2016 *A Biography of Lodha Savar, Amar Bhuban* (in

Bengali), Jhargram, West Bengal. INCAA,

- Boas, Franz 2018 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cultural\\_relativism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cultural_relativism) date of access, 04/05/2018.
- Bradley-Birt 1903 Chottanagpore A Little Known Province of the Empire <http://archive.org>
- Deori, R.K. 1982 The Sulung, Research Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar
- NDTV Correspondent 2009 "Lost Tribe of Jharkhand" Your Daily Newsletter, December 21, 23.111St
- Pradhan, Shital 2014 "Ancient Roots of Modern Sikkim" in Monisha Ahmed (ed.), Marg No.4, Vol-65, pp100-105
- Roy, S.C. 1925. The Birhor: A Little Known Tribe of Chottanagpur <http://archive.org>
- Sarkar, Jayanta 2015 Adibasi Baichitra Anusandhan Avijan. Arunachal (in Bengali), Kolkata, Offbit publication
- Saraswati, Baidyanath 1991 Tribal Thought and Culture. New Delhi: Concept Publication
- Stoner, C.R. 1952 "The Sulung: Tribe of the Assam Himalayas", Anthropos Vol. 47. Pp. 947-61.