

## LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY INTERFACE IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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### Abstract

In contemporary academics, the topic of identity has emerged as an interesting area of engagement. Identity however, takes different expressions, such as linguistic, ethnic, political, religious, and so on. Are these constructs of identity different forms of expression or they correspond one another in some ways? The present paper is an attempt to address the query. In view of this it explores the interfacing between language and ethnicity with tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as case study. The paper presents language and ethnic profiles of the state and examines interface between the two. It concludes that linguistic identity constructed on the basis of linguistic principles and ethnicity evolved in historical process may not have one to one correspondence.

**Keywords:** North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), The Frontier Tracts, Creole, Linguistic affiliation, Ethnicity, Identity, Phylum, Contact linguistics

### Introduction

From last decade of the concluding century, concern over language endangerment has triggered academic interest to document endangered languages with a view to preserve world linguistic diversity. In this academic engagement, languages/dialects of small speech communities, particularly tribes and ethnos, have become the focus of attention. Along with preservation drive, the issue of identity assertion by ethnic communities has become a crucial topic of interest not only in academics but also outside it. Apparently, language preservation and ethnic assertion point to their one-to-one correspondence. But the question arises: Does language preservation go hand in hand with ethnic assertion of a speech community? In simple terms are language and ethnicity of a community synonymous?

In view of this, the present paper is designed to explore connection between language and ethnic perception of communities and thereby to examine whether one-to-one correspondence exists between the two or not. The study is based on both secondary and primary data. The latter is collected mainly from Arunachal Pradesh over a period of more than 30 years of author's research engagement from 1986. However, reference to tribes of other parts of India has been taken into consideration with the aim of substantiating to Arunachal context. Such an attempt underlies theorisation of the connection between language and ethnicity by examining its generalisability. Arunachal Pradesh is selected for the purpose of study because of author's familiarity with the state and its people on one hand and state's ethnic diversity on the other.

It is to be made clear that the present investigation is not an incursion into the boundary of the linguistic studies. It is an engagement in tribal studies aimed to examine the connections between language and ethnic perceptions using observations and comments of the linguists.

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Obviously, the paper is an innovative approach in the field of inter-disciplinary engagement in tribal studies.

The paper is organised in four parts. First part introduces to Arunachal Pradesh and district wise distribution of its ethnic communities. The second part presents language and linguistic affiliation of Arunachal tribes. The third part makes a scrutiny of linguistic affiliation and ethnic perception. The fourth part concludes the discussion.

### **Part-I: Arunachal Pradesh and its Ethnic Profile**

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the North-eastern states of India located between 26.28<sup>0</sup> N to 29.30<sup>0</sup> N latitude and 91.20<sup>0</sup> E to 97.30<sup>0</sup> E longitude with a geographical area of 83,740 sq. km. It is the largest state among the North-eastern states, but with a low density of population of 17 persons per sq.km (GoI,2011) and shares its border with Bhutan in the west, China occupied Tibet in the north at McMahon line, Myanmar in the east and Assam and Nagaland states to the south.

The present State of Arunachal Pradesh has evolved over a period of more than 100 years in response to various Acts and Regulations of colonial administration and thereafter. The first regulation in this regard dates back to 1875 when the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 was drawn up. However, the territory assumed administrative significance only in 1914. In this year, the frontier line (the McMohan Line) between the then Tibet and the present Arunachal Pradesh was defined with the birth of a territorial entity in the name of North-East Frontier Tracts (NEFT). The territory was carved out from the then Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam comprising the Western Section, the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, and the Central and Eastern sections, and was placed under the Assam Government. In 1919 the Western Section was renamed as Balipara Frontier Tract, and the Central and Eastern sections as Sadiya Frontier Tract. The tracts included the areas either inhabited or frequented by the tribes such as Abors (now Adis), Miris, Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas, Khamptis, Bhutias, Akas and Daflas (now Nyishis) as mentioned in the 1880 Act (see Luthra 1971:53-55 and Behera and Misra, 2013:12-14).

After Independence, however, the Notification of Presidential Order, 1950 listed 12 tribes namely, Abor, Aka, Dafla, Apatani, Galong, Monpa, Khampti, Singpho, Khowa, Sherdukpen, Mishmi and any Naga tribe. In another Notification in 1989, based on the proposal of the State Government, 25 tribes were enlisted. Later Abor was replaced by the name Adi, Dafla by Nyishi and Galong by Galo<sup>2</sup>.

In 1937 the Frontier Tracts, namely Balipara Frontier Tract, Sadiya Frontier Tract and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, came to be known as 'Excluded Areas' of the Province of Assam under the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936. In 1943, the post of an Advisor to the Governor of Assam was created, and the Tirap Frontier Tract was formed by combining some portions of areas from Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts. In 1946, Balipara Frontier Tract was bifurcated into Sela Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area.

In 1948, the Sadiya Frontier Tract was divided into Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills districts with their headquarters at Pasighat and Sadiya respectively. In 1951, the entire Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, and the plains of the Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Mishmi Hills District and Abor Hills District were transferred to the administrative jurisdiction

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<sup>2</sup>See Government of India 2019,2008 and 2012.

of the Assam Government. In the same year, the Tuensang Division was created, merging the Naga Tribal Area and placed under the jurisdiction of NEFT.

In 1954, NEFT was brought under a single administrative unit and re-designated as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Frontier Tracts were renamed as Frontier Divisions. In the same year, Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into Kameng and Subansiri Divisions; Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills districts were changed to Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions; Sela Sub-Agency to Kameng Frontier Division and Subansiri Area into Subansiri Frontier Division. In 1957, the Tuensang Frontier Division was excluded from the NEFA and included in Naga Hills. In 1965, the divisions of the NEFA were designated as districts, and Political Officers as Deputy Commissioners. On 20 January 1972, NEFA was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh and became a Union Territory. In 1974 the capital of Arunachal Pradesh was shifted from Shillong to the present Itanagar. And on 20 February 1987, Arunachal Pradesh became the 24<sup>th</sup> state of the Union of India<sup>3</sup>.

**Table No.1: Communities and their Previous Place of Migration**

Place from where migrated	Tribe/Ethnic community <sup>4</sup>
Myanmar	Idu, Miju&Digaru Mishmi, Meyor, Nocte, Tangsa, Lisu, Singpho, Tutsa, Khampti (including groups like Phakial, Khamiyong, etc.), Wancho
Tibet	Nyishi, Puroik (Sulung), Bangru, Adi, Galo (Minyong, Padam, Pasi, Shimong and others), Memba, Khamba, Apatani, Hills Miri, Samua/Miri, Monpa, Tagin, Nah, Miji, Khowa, Aka
Bhutan	Sherdukpen and Brokpa <sup>5</sup> group of Monpas
Assam	Deori, Adivasis and a few Assamese communities
Bangladesh	Chakma

Source: Author with reference to various monographs, district gazetteers and field study

At present i.e. at the beginning of 2021, Arunachal Pradesh has 25 districts with 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes. Tribes like Mikir enumerated in 1961 census (Dutta Choudhury, 1978:61) have not been listed as Arunachal tribes. Arunachal Pradesh is predominantly a tribal state with 68.8 per cent of its population belonging to ST category (GoI, 2011). The non-ST category consists of a few Arunachalee ethnos and migrant population from outside the state. The tribes and ethnos live in the present territory for a long time and we will focus our discussion mainly on ST communities. The ethnic diversity could be attributed to migration of groups from different countries and regions. This is presented in table No-1.

In Arunachal Pradesh census figures on number of tribes vary from field situation<sup>6</sup>. In 2001 Census, a total of 100 STs have been enumerated with a total of 25 as major tribes.

<sup>3</sup>For administration, territorial growth and corresponding regulations see Kri (2010:1-3).

<sup>4</sup>Many distinct groups have been included in ST category and so they have not been considered separately except a few who still claim an independent identity like Tutsa, Sartang, Puroik, etc.

<sup>5</sup>Brokpas are also considered Monpas. Earlier writings therefore locate them to Tibet. But field study and the fact that Brokpa people live in adjacent hills in Bhutan along international border point to their migration from Bhutan.

<sup>6</sup>Census 1991 enlists 111 tribes, the 111<sup>th</sup> entry being 'any Naga tribe' (see Abraham, 2007:182). Referring to 1981 census, Abraham (ibid.181) finds that the names Abor and Dafla, though discarded

According to census, 2011<sup>7</sup> all tribes of the State are included in the list of Scheduled Tribes in India which records 104 communities. The statement ‘all tribes in the State’ is confusing as it does not distinguish between STs and ethnos, tribes and sub-tribes, and between generic tribe and ethnic tribe.

Census records sub-tribes and clans as tribes. Often there is no difference between a generic tribe and an ethnic tribe. The Adi or Nyishi is a generic tribe, but Padam or Minyong in Adi group, Puroik or Hills Miri in Nyishi group are ethnic communities. Tribes as STs and ethnic communities are also not properly distinguished. Puroik, for example is a distinct ethnic community, but as ST it is clubbed with Nyishi identity. In recent years political dynamics make it difficult to designate a group as tribe following academic tradition. Anomalies make it difficult to present exact number of tribes in the state. However, distinctly visible district-wise groups, both STs and ethnos, from the western most district Tawang to the eastern most (south-eastern to be specific) district Longding is presented in table No. 2.

**Table No.2: Districts and Distribution of Tribes/Ethnos of Arunachal Pradesh**

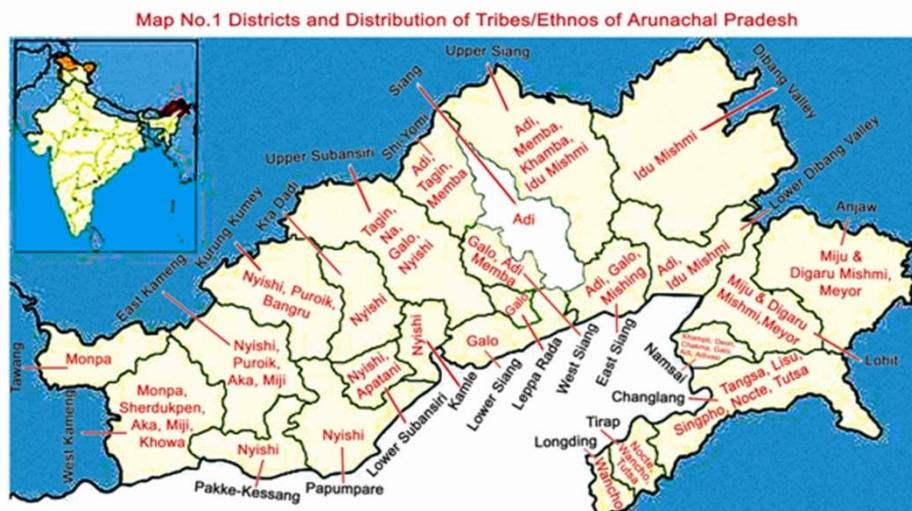
<b>District</b>	<b>Tribes/Ethnos</b>
Tawang	Monpa (Tsangla) and Brokpa
West Kameng	Monpa (Dirang Monpa, Kalaktang Monpa, Brokpa, Chug/Chugpa, Lish/Lishpa and Boot Monpa now known as Sartang), Sherdukpen (Rupa and Shergaon divisions), Aka (Koro and Hrusso), Miji (Sajalong), Khowa (Bugun), Tibetan Community
East Kameng	Nyishi, Puroik (Sulung), Aka (Koro & Hrusso), Miji (Sajalong)
Pakke-Kessang	Nyishi
Papumpare	Nyishi and others
Lower Subansiri	Nyishi, Apatani
KurungKumey	Nyishi, Bangru) and Puroik (Sulung)
Kra-Dadi	Nyishi and Puroik
Kamle	Nyishi, Hills Miri (now Nyishi)
Upper Subansiri	Tagin, Nah, Galo, Nyishi (including former Hills Miri)
Lower Siang	Galo
Leppa Rada	Galo
West Siang	Galo, Memba and Adi (Bori, Bokar, Pailibo, Minyong, etc.)
Shi-Yomi	Adi ( <i>Pailibo, Ramo &amp; Bokar</i> ), Tagin and Memba
Siang	Adi (Minyong and other Adi groups)
East Siang	Adi, (Minyong, Padam, Pasi and others) and Mishing
Upper Siang	Adi (Minyong, Padam, Karko, Millang, Ashing, Tangam, etc.), Memba, Khamba and Idu Mishmi
Dibang Valley	Idu Mishmi

by the people, appear in the list of tribes. Moreover, names like Gallong, MilangMinyong, Padam and Pasi are listed twice, as tribe and as sub-tribe (for example Minyong, Adi Minyong, Pasi and Adi Pasi for same group of people). The same anomalies are noticed in case of Mishmi, Monpa, Tangsa and other few tribes.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/arunachal+pradesh.html>

Lower Dibang Valley	Adi ( <i>Padam, Millang, Komkar, Miyong&amp;Pasi</i> ), Idu Mishmi, Galo, & Mishing
Anjaw	Miju&Digaru Mishmi, Meyor/Zakhring
Lohit <sup>8</sup>	Miju&Digaru Mishmi, Khampti, Singpho, Nepali (Sunpura, Tezu, Lohitpur and Digaru areas) and Tibetan (at Lama camp in Tezu township) Communities
Namsai <sup>9</sup>	Khampti, Deori, Chakma, Singpho, Galo, Adi Samua/Miri, Adivasis, Nepali and few Assamese communities
Changlang	Tangsa(Mossang, Jugli, Longchang, Muklom, Ronrang, etc.), Lisu (Yobin), Singpho, Nocte and Tutsa
Tirap	Nocte, Wancho and Tutsa
Longding	Wancho
Changlang	TangsaTutsa, Singpho, Nokte, & Lisu

**Source:** From arunachalpradesh.gov.in. Compiled and edited by the author from Gazetteers of various districts, and author's field experience over a period more than 35 years.



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The district wise distribution of main ethnic communities has also been presented in map no.1. In the map, major communities have been placed within district space while districts have been indicated outside the map. However, in table no. 2 a few known sub-groups of some tribes have been listed. Map 1 also shows location of Arunachal Pradesh in the map of India. Distribution of a single tribe in more districts suggests migration of people from original place of settlement in Arunachal Pradesh. Presence of Padam in Lower Dibang Valley, for example,

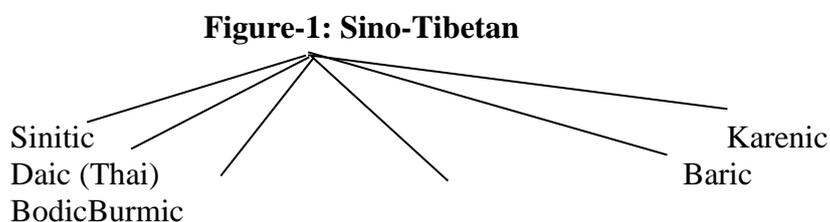
<sup>88</sup> Settlements of Tibetan communities are found in the territory primarily inhabited by tribes from Myanmar, and the settlements are of later phenomenon.

<sup>9</sup> Some sections of a few tribes like the Galo migrated to Lohit and Namsai after independence. Some of them like Samua and Miri, migrated much before via Assam. Therefore, settlements of Miri are also found in adjacent territories of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.



Moreover, survey of languages like Aka, Dafla and Abor does not represent sub-groups within. Obviously, the survey as far as Arunachal languages are concerned was incomplete in many respects. However, its seminal contribution to understand and study ethno-linguistic diversity of the present state could not be undermined in any way, though ‘Konow’s geographical grouping is repeated in one form or another in successive overviews of the phylum without any compelling re-examination of the evidence’ (Blench and Post:2011:1).

Nevertheless, studies subsequent to the Linguistic Survey of India have contributed to our understanding of diverse ethno-linguistics affiliations of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. David Bradley (1997:1) credits classifications of Tibeto-Burman languages by Shafer (1947) and Benedict (1972). Shafer’s classification has four main parts: Bodic, Baric, Burmic and Karenic. Earlier also Shafer (1955:99) had proposed Sinitic (Chinese), Daic, Bodic, Burmic, Baric and Karenic divisions of Sino-Tibetan divisions by abandoning the tradition of the Sino-Daic division in contrast to the Tibeto-Burmic division<sup>10</sup>.



In Shafer’s classificatory scheme, Northwest section of Daic division mentions Khamti language; Bodish section of Bodish division mentions Tsangla branch (without mentioning name of any language); Eastern branch of East Himalayish section of Bodish division mentions Digarish unit consisting of Taying (Digaru) and Midu languages, Hrusish unit consisting of Hruso (Aka), both dialect A and dialect B; Misignish section consisting of Mising (Miri), Abor, Yano<sup>11</sup>, Nyising (Dafla), Tagen (present Tagin) languages. Further, Lolo branch of Burmish section of Burmic division mentions Lisu language; Northern Naga branch in Barish section of Baric lists Mongsen and Tengsa (Tangsa) languages. Nagish section in Baric division lists Mosang and Namsangia languages<sup>12</sup> (Shafer,1955:100-107).

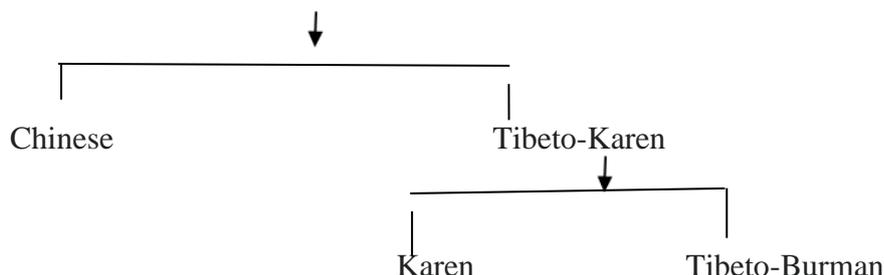
<sup>10</sup> In Sino-Tibetan family of Shafer, Sinitic (Chinese) is a distinct division and so is also Daic (Thai). However, Shafer (1955) is skeptical about its genetic relationship to Sino-Tibetan family (ibid.:97-98). Obviously, his Bodic, Baric and Burmic divisions fall under Tibeto-Burman divisions; the classifications noted by Bradley (1997:1) though abandoned by Shafer from his schema.

<sup>11</sup> Yano was a variety of Nyishi language (Mark Post 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Mosang is a Tangsa clan and Namsangia refers to the Nocte people of Namsang village.

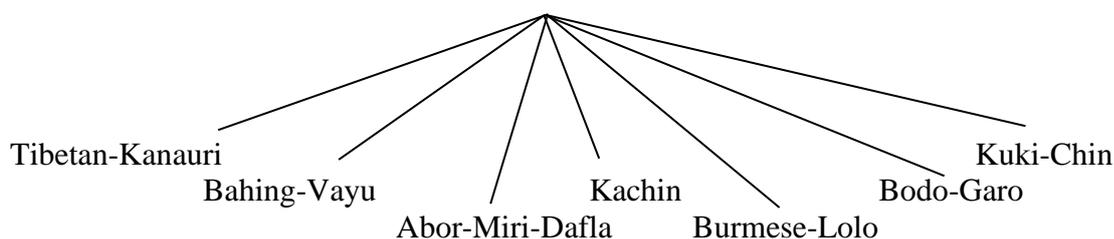
Benedict's (1972) classification of Sino-Tibetan lists Tibeto-Burman under Tibeto-Karen.

**Figure- 2: Sino-Tibetan**



However, he reanalysed the classification in 1976, and listed Karen under Tibeto-Burman. Accordingly, he presented eight sub-groups plus another category. However, he reclassified his nine sub-categories into three groups (Bradley 1997:1). Karen whose group affiliation was doubtful was placed in an intermediate position (see Benedict 1972:2-4). Excluding Karne, Benedict identified seven sub-groups of Tibeto-Burman division. These are: Tibetan-Kanauri, Bahing-Vayu, Abor-Miri-Dafla, Kachin, Burmese-Lolo, Bodo-Garo, and Kuki-Chin. This is shown in figure-3.

**Figure-3: Tibeto-Burman**



In these divisions such languages as Tshangla in Tibetan-Kanauri sub-division; languages in Abor-Miri-Dafla sub-division including perhaps Aka, Digaru and Miju; and Singpho in Kachin sub-division have been noted which belong to Arunachal speech communities. The division has not stated about Khamti and other Thai group languages along with Tangsa, Nocte and Wancho which are spoken in Arunachal Pradesh. Perhaps the last three languages belonged to Kuki-Naga division.

Bradley (1997) however, summarizes Tibeto-Burman languages into four divisions following Shafer and Benedict's classifications. This is shown in figure 4. Bradley summarises the languages of Arunachal Pradesh in map-6 entitled 'Tibeto-Burman Languages of Arunachal Pradesh, North Assam, North Nagaland and Meghalaya' in his edited volume titled Papers in Southeast Asian Linguistics No.14: Tibeto Burman Languages of the Himalyas (Bradley, 1997:69). The map shows Bodic, Burmese-Lolo, Central and Sal group of languages. In Bodic group Eastern and Tsgangala sub-groups have relevance for Arunachal Pradesh. The former includes Dzalakha, Eastern Monpa and Sherdukpen languages. The latter included the language by the same name i.e., Tshangla. Burmese-Lolo group includes Lisu language while Central group includes (1) West Arunachal languages such as Sulung, Bugun, Hruso, Dhammai and Bangru; (2) Adi- Mising- Nyishi group of languages such as Nyishi, Apatani, Hills Miri, Adi

and Msing; (3) Digarish and Idu Taraon languages; and (4) Keman (now spelt Kaman). The Sal group includes Deori under Bodo-subgroup; Wancho, Nocte and Tangsa under Northern Naga group and Jinghpaw (Kachin) under Jinghpaw group.

**Figure-4 Tibeto- Burman**

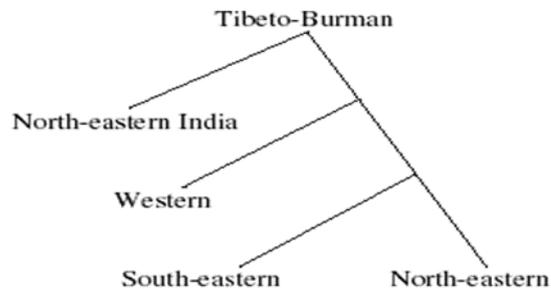


Figure 4. The Tibeto-Burman linguistic family (Bradley 1997:2)

In above paragraphs, we have discussed language classifications of present Arunachal Pradesh with reference to George Abraham Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India, and works of Robert Shafer, Paul K. Benedict and David Bradley. These works are mile stones in the study of Tibeto-Burman languages and their classification. One common pattern that is noticed in these works is the objective of classifying languages to understand their underlying relationship within the family of Sino-Tibetan family of languages in general and Tibeto-Burman sub-family in particular, and a change in nomenclature and grouping of languages. However, in a recent work, Blench and Post (2015) have proposed a list of languages and their possible grouping pertaining to present ethno-linguistic scenario of Arunachal Pradesh. The work of reference differs from other work in that it is focused on Arunachal Pradesh. According to their scheme, languages and their possible affiliation are presented as under: They suggested **five phyla** (A) Sino-Tibetan, Siangic, Kamengic, Mishmic and Isolate phyla in their paper of 2011. But in Sino **Tibetan Phylum** included Jingpho, East Bodish, Tani and Tangsa Naga branches languages under each branch were reported as follows:

**Jingpho:** Turung

**East Bodish:** Memba, Meyor (Zakhring), Monpa of Tawang (including Senge, Jang, etc. Zemithang, Dirang, Murshing and Kalktang. Monpa of Dirang, Murshing and Kalktang is also presented as Sharchop and Tshangla

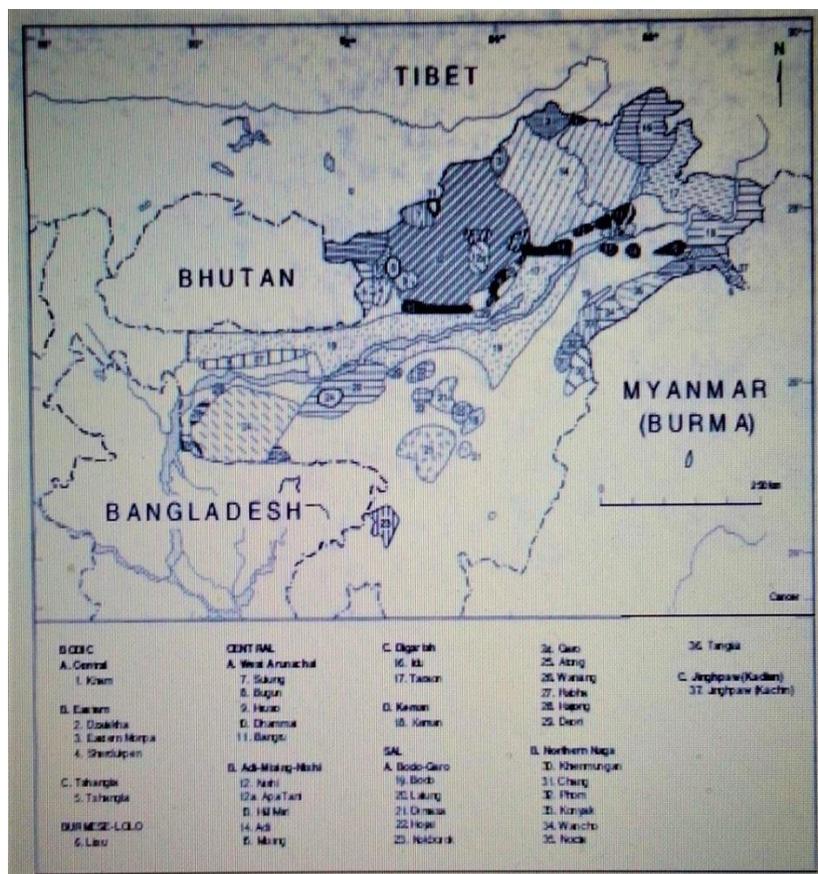
**Tani:** Numerous languages such as Adi, Apatani, Nyishi, Tagin, Galo, etc.

**Tangsa Naga:** Numerous such as Lunchang, Jugli, Moklum, Wancho, Nocte

**Siangic phylum** had one branch namely Milang-Koro. In this compound branch Milang and Koro languages were reported. Koro is presented in another name such as Aka Koro. Milang has three variants, namely Mala, Holon and Dalbing.

**Kamengic and Mishmic phyla** however did not have any branch. They included languages. Bugun (Khowa), Mey of Shergaon and Rupa (Sherdupen), Sartang (Boot Monpa), Lish and Chug were reported under Kamengic phylum. Mishmic phylum included Idu (Idu Mishmi) and Digaru (Taraon) languages

**Map No.3 Tibeto- Burman languages of Arunachal Pradesh, NorthAssam, North Nagaland and Meghalaya**



Four languages, namely Miji (Sajalong, Dhimmai, Bangru, northern dialect), Puroik (Sulung), Miju and Hruso were listed under Isolate Phyla. However, Hruso (Aka) was grouped under Hrusish branch. Further discussion will show that Hruso has been a linguistic dilemma. But the same paper which is available for the year 2015 classified Arunachalee languages under five phyla. Four phyla, namely (A) Sino-Tibetan, (B) Siangic, (C) Mishmic and (E) Isolate remained same except (D) Kamengic of 2011 paper which was replaced by (D) Mijiic.

(A) **Sino Tibetan Phylum** includes seven branches. The three new branches include languages which were under East Bodish branch in 2011 work. As East Bodish branch is numbered 2, the new branches are numbered 2a, 2b and 2c to show their earlier links. The branches are (1) Jingpho, (2) East Bodish, (2a) Tibetic, (2b) Tshangla, (2c) Unclassified, (3) Taniand (4) Tangsa Naga branches. Language(s) under each branch have been reported as follows:

- (1) **Jingpho:** Turung (*as in 2011 work*)
- (2) **East Bodish:** Memba, Monpa of Tawang and Zemithang. East Bodish branch of 2011 work is divided into East Bodish, Tibetic and Tshangla branches.
- (2a) **Tibetic:** Memba and Brokeh (earlier in East Bodish branch of Sino-Tibetan phylum) is reported under Tibetan branch.

- (2b) **Tshangla**: Monpa of Dirang, Murshing and Kalktang, reported under East Bodish branch, is placed under Tshangla branch in 2015 work.
- (2c) **Unclassified**: Meyor (Zakhring). Earlier it was included in East Bodish branch.
- (3) **Tani**: Numerous languages such as Adi, Apatani, Nyishi, Tagin, Galo, etc. (*as in 2011 work*)
- (4) **Tangsa Naga**: Numerous such as Lunchang, Jugli, Moklum, Wancho, Nocte (*as in 2011 work*)
- (B) **Siangic** (*as in 2011 work*)
- (C) **Mishmic**: (*as in 2011 work*). However, Taraon's spelling is suggested as Tawra.
- (D) **Mijiic**: This phylum includes Miji and Bangru language. Of course, Bangru was listed under Miji language and Isolate phylum in 2011 work without any specification.
- (E) **Isolate**: Bugun (Khowa), Mey of Shergaon and Rupa (Sherdupen), Sartang (Boot Monpa), Lish and Chug were reported under Kamengic phylum in 2011 work but have been placed under Isolate phylum in 2015 work. These languages have not been assigned any branch. Lish and Chung languages have been also reported in their respective alternative names such as Khispi and Dhumbi.

Puroik (Sulung), Miju (new spelling Kman) and Hruso (Aka) languages have been listed under Isolate Phyla as in 2011 work but with the same branch name as of the language. Earlier they did not have any branch name except the Hruso which was reported under Hrusish branch.

### Part III: Linguistic and ethnicity interface

From above discussions two crucial points may be inferred. A comparison of map-1 and map-2 shows one to one correspondence between languages and respective ethnic communities. We can take the example of Meyor. In 1906-07 a large number of immigrants came from across the Indo-Tibet border. These immigrants settled in Walong area, now in Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh and came to be known as Meyors and Zakhrings (Dutta Choudhury 1978:55). Census 1971 records 98 Meyors and 23 Zakhrings (*ibid.*:61) and obviously two ethnic groups have been reported. During a field study in 2000 December and 2001 January, the present author was reported by Mr. H.N.Dubey, the Circle Officer of Walong that the Zakhrings were of higher social status than the Meyors. Further, he also informed that all the Zakhrings adopted Meyor identity as the latter was recognised as Arunachal tribe and got ST status after 1987 through the initiation of Mr. KhaprisoKrong, the then Education Minister of GegongApang government. In this case language, i.e. Meyor and the ethnicity go together. In several other cases also, for example Singpho, Tagin, Bugun, Apatani, as can be noted from the maps of reference, language and ethnic identity go together.

Second, studies by the linguistics present a mixed picture with regard to language and ethnic connection, for linguists are apparently interested in language grouping for organisational purposes. Evidently, geographical, lexical, grammatical and other such criteria and/or combination of any two or more of these criteria were adopted for classification (e.g. see Konow, 1909: 568-569). Obviously, grouping of languages for a genetic unity has not been primary objective of linguistic study, though not altogether ignored (see Shafer 1955:99). Blench and Post (2015:1), are therefore of the opinion that genetic unity of Sino-Tibetan languages 'has rarely been subject to attempted proof'. Empirical data show that geographical

and lexical similarities considered in grouping have limitations to determine genetic affiliations (Campbell,1991; also see Blench and Post,2015:1-2). Contact linguistics also informs hybridisation of languages to such an extent that disentangling their genetic affiliation can remain dispute over long periods' (Blench and Post,2015:1)

Limitations associated with genetic affiliation of languages may not coincide with the language and ethnic perceptions of those communities which are based on common ancestry. Moreover, one to one correspondence as is evident from a comparison between map -1 and map-2 does not confirm to the empirical validation in all the cases. Obviously, language and linguistic affiliation and ethnic identity cannot be one and same in all the cases.

This can be argued with reference to language varieties informed by the Centre for Endangered Languages, Rajiv Gandhi University and tribes and sub-tribes reported in the Census. Though 34 varieties of languages are reported (Lomdak, 2017:1), and possibility of several others indicated, still the language varieties as can be observed in the field will not be equal to more than 100, the figure being number of tribes and sub-tribes as reported in the census. Moreover, a tribe is not coterminous with the ethnic group. This will be clear from our discussion of the Aka and a few other tribes. In CFEL (ibid.:4) the Tangam and Milang languages are grouped with the Adi ethnicity; the Olo, Khapa and Tang (linguistically close to Wancho) with the Nocte ethnicity; and the Nah with the Tagin ethnicity. Obviously, language and the ethnic perception show divergence.

From the study of the linguists, it is seen that genetic affiliation may not correspond to ethnic perception. The nomenclature Aka by which the ethnic community asserts its identity is an exonym (see Chowdhury 1992:55). However, the community is not linguistically homogenous or ancestrally of same origin. The ethnicity is composed of two distinct linguistic groups, namely Hruso and Koro and the ancestry of each group is different; Hruso trace their origin from DzuwBuslou and Koro from Saslong (Nimachow:2011:4). Shafer (1947) argues that Hruso (a division of the Aka tribe) has been ethnically grouped with its Koro division of East Kameng while linguistically with the Miji group. Astonishingly, the Koro shows genetic affiliation with Milang, a sub-tribe of the Adi (Blench and Post, 2015:10)

Form the classification of Bodt and Lieberherr (2015:69-70) it is understood that Hruso (Aka) and Miji-Bangru form one group which they suggest by the name of Hrusish 9see also Anderson, 2014). Miji-Bangru language group has three divisions, namely Western Miji of West Kameng (who call themselves Dhammai or Sajolang; the autonym is *Dmay*), EasternMiji of East Kameng (who call themselves Namrai) and Northern Miji (known as Bangru). It is evident that the Miji-Bangru group has three distinct ethnic identities on the basis of language variation. While Dhammai and Namrai together institute the broader Sajolang group, the Bangru stands visibly different. In fact, it is a part of the greater Nyishi ethnicity though linguistically it falls in Miji-Bangru group under Hrusish phylum as suggested by Bodt and Lieberherr (2015) and van Driem (2014). However, Blench and Post (2015) suggest Mijiic phylum for Miji and Bangru languages/dialects and consider Hruso as an Isolate. Anderson, on the other hand preferred Southeast Kamengic in place of Hrusish. Obviously, Hruso has been a problematic in the process of classification. Similarly, Mishmi ethnicity is constructed with three speech communities- Idu, Digaru or Taraon and Miju or Kaman. While Idu and Digaru belong to Mishimic phylum, the Miju is an Isolate (Blench and Post 2015:13). Culturally, however, Digaru and Miju have similarities and Idu stands at a distant. There emerges a divergence between linguistic affiliation and ethnic perception of communities.

## Part IV: Conclusion

Fusion and fission processes play a greater role in the evolution of both ethnicity and languages/dialects. In the process, ethnicity and language/dialect may correspond to each other or may be different in response to historical forces. At present ethnic identity is constructed for socio-political gain<sup>13</sup> (see Saikia and Gogoi, 2018) in which language may not play crucial role.

As we have argued, fusion and fission have impacted language and ethnic variations. Fission process is very much evident in dialectical variations and ethnicity construct among Kuki-Chin (Haokip, 2019) and Tani group of tribes<sup>14</sup> in the process of migration and loss of contact with different groups. In contrast, Milang community though has its own language, is fused with Adi identity and has become a branch of Adi languages (see Post and Modi, 2011).

Obviously, separation of groups was not the only trend in the course of migration; there has been contact and interaction between/among tribal groups. Contact linguistics points to cases where the genetic unity of languages does not show ethnic similarities. Khasi and Munda tribes belong to two different genetic groups- Khasi to Mongoloid and Munda to Proto Austroloid; but their languages belong to Asutro-Asiatic branch (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1985:68). Koro and Milang have linguistic similarities, but in the process of history they are ethnically linked to two unrelated groups- Koro to the Aka and Milang to the Adi. Concepts of pidgin, creole, typological homogeneity, etc. are used by linguists to represent emerging interactive space across two or more languages. In this context Bradley's (1997) observation is useful. He admits that 'classification of some languages is uncertain' due to extensive contact' (Bradley 1997:21).

We can cite the example of present Milang language which shows genetic unity with the Koro, but 'the Milang lexicon exhibits word-formation structures that are similar to those found in most Tani languages' (Post and Modi, 2011:222). No doubt, the present Milang is called Adi Milang, though it underlies non-Tani substrata. It is a case of fusion. A group divided into separate ethnic subgroups provide the case of fission. These sub-groups also in response to socio-political dynamics reorganise into larger groups. For example, integration and assertion of the greater Kuki-Chin identity underlies the contemporary socio-political scenario in Manipur because of mutual intelligibility among these dialects (see Vaiphei, 1995:3; fn-1).

The intelligibility is evident from the fact that the Ralte dialect has evolved as a creole language comprising Hmar, Thadou, Lusei, etc. (Haokip, 2019:138, fn 14). Surprisingly, Ralte is severely endangered as it is spoken by the elders while the younger people shift to Lusie. Similarly, about fifty per cent of the speakers of Hmar language have shifted to other Kuki-Chin dialects like Lusei, Thadou, etc. Another critically endangered language, namely Aimol, has three dialectical sub-divisions, namely *Sutpong*, *Khurai* and *Langrong*. (see Haokip, 2019:138-139). So Haokip concludes that naming a dialect to one particular tribe or clan or village has internal contradictions (ibid.). Sherdukpen, the name of the tribe derived from their

<sup>13</sup> The Zakhring adopted Meyor identity because the latter has been accorded Scheduled Tribe status. The Khamiyangs living in Namsai district have adopted Khampti (Khamti) identity for the same reason. The Hills Miri, the Puroik and the Bangru tribe are Nyishis though the last two have different languages.

<sup>14</sup> Adi, Apatani, Galo, Nyishi and Tagin believe in common descent from Tani. In other words, the descendants of Tani have organized into the above distinct ethnic groups and with their respective languages have formed a linguistic phylum, namely Tani (see Blench and Post, 2015). Of course, a few sub-groups within ethnic groups show linguistic affiliation with different branches/phyla as has been discussed in part III. Also see footnote 11 above.

settlements at Rupa and Shergaon<sup>15</sup> has Mey as its language to which we assign Sherdukpen name. Sherdukpen or Mey cannot be assigned to either Rupa or Shergaon people as standard language as their dialects show wide variations. The nature of intra-tribe variation, as is evident in two original Sherdukpen villages, is similar to variations between Sherdukpen and other ethnic groups like Sartang, Chug and Lish. In fact, Shergaon, Rupa, Sartang, Chug and Lish 'form a single close dialect complex' (Blench and Post 2015:5), but surprisingly, 'the Lish deny any connection with the Mey of Rupa and Shergaon' (ibid.:4).<sup>16</sup>

The crucial point that emerges is that one to one correspondence between dialect/language and ethnic group is problematic. The Puroiks, who speak a different language outside Tani phylum belong to Nyishi ethnicity as we have discussed. Obviously, the issue of language preservation for ethnic assertion does not have generalisability. Identity at the level of consciousness and beyond language and culture has been empirically established by Anvita Abbi (1997). She cites an example of Oraons living in and around the villages of Mesra, Garihotwar and Angara. Oraons in these areas not only have changed their clan but also speak a Munda dialect called Kera Munda. Culturally and linguistically, it is difficult to distinguish these Oraons with local Mundas (Abbi,1997:403-404). Nevertheless, Oraons are Oraons, and they do not claim Munda identity despite sharing identical cultural and linguistic traditions. Haugean (1989) also gives a parallel of Norwegian immigrants to America who have lost their language and culture but not the Norwegian identity. The American Negro community, it can be noted, is conscious of its ethnic and territorial African identity despite its switch over to American culture and language.

It is worth mentioning that language has not been taken seriously by ethnic communities for the purpose of identity assertion. Had that been so, several languages would not have died or endangered. Moreover, communities would have raised voice before 1991 to preserve identity through preservation of language had they sensed language endangerment. Arguably, they did not link language decline with identity loss. American Negro or Norwegian immigrants would have maintained their language and culture side by side their new ones. It is only in 1991, following Michael E. Krauss' address, entitled *The World's Languages in danger*, at the Linguistic Society of America, global attention was drawn to the problem of language endangerment. Subsequently, works on other scholars on the problem and UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in danger*, first edition published in 1996, also inspired a systematic global effort with regard to preservation of world's linguistic diversity. Though the topic of 'language and identity' is a crucial area of engagement since 1990s, preservation of world's linguistic diversity is at the core of the concern. Language and identity connection perhaps emerged as a strategy towards preservation of language diversity, and wherever possible to use it to preserve community identity. Obviously, it is not a generalised prescription to preserve ethnic identity by preserving language as empirical findings show ethnic perception without preservation of language.

In recent years, construct of ethnicity depends more on socio-political dynamics and people's perception of belonging; while the language communication depends on all spheres of people's interaction and the purpose at various levels. Arguably, both factors hardly

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<sup>15</sup>Sherdukpen or Shertukpen = Sher (people of Shergaon) +Thukpen (people of Thongthuik, i.e. Rupa which is an exonym). Thongthuik (autonym) means village of the Thongs, people of higher social status (see Sharma 2013:1).

<sup>16</sup>Sherdukpens resemble people of But (Boot/Bud), Rahung, Khudum (Khutam) and Khoina (Khowan) villages in physical features, marriage customs and so on. (Chowdhury,1992:48-49). People of these villages, whose modern name is enclosed in parenthesis, now assert Sartang identity. In earlier writings they were also recorded as ThembangiaBhutias after an ancient village called Thembang. (Authoir's field data).

coincide. In linguistic principles of classification, historical process of ethnicity construct has not been considered a variable.

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