

Status of Mishmi Community in the Historically Sensitive Region of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Numerous research studies have examined the socio-cultural, and religious aspects of the Idu Mishmi community; however, their traditional political structures in the context of politico-historical roles remain significantly underexplored. This paper presents a comprehensive political profile of the Idu Mishmi people residing in villages in the Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley regions, located near the India-China international border. Unlike the predominant reliance on colonial records in studies of remote borderland communities, the research undertaken adopts a bottom-up approach, focusing on the perspectives of the community members themselves. Understanding the political history and traditional governance systems of the Idu Mishmi from their vantage points is integral to this inquiry. The study involved interviews with experts from the Idu Mishmi community and household surveys conducted across the selected villages. Data collection was facilitated through the use of questionnaires along with direct observations during the fieldwork. The study highlights the often-overlooked political dimensions of the Idu Mishmi community, delving into their historical roots and the evolution of their political practices. Grounded in fieldwork-based data, this paper explores the traditional polity of the Idu Mishmis and examines their significant political roles in the past, contributing to a deeper understanding of the political profile and heritage of their community.

Keywords: Idu Mishmi, Dibang Valley, Ethnography, Arunachal Pradesh

Introduction

The Mishmi tribes are categorized into three sub-tribes: Idu Mishmi, Digaru Mishmi, and Miju Mishmi. However, field studies showed that there are no significant differences among them, aside from their ancestral locations and some practices. The Idu Mishmis primarily inhabit the Dibang Valley District, where they coexist with other minor tribes, totalling a population of 8,004 (Census of India, 2011). Digaru and Miju Mishmi are spread in the Lohit district as well. They speak a dialect that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group. However, more specific research on the origin of their dialect and language is still underway at the Centre for Mother Languages at the Research Institute of World and Ancient Traditions and Cultures and Heritage, Roing, Lower Dibang Valley. These research projects are being conducted diligently, with the active involvement of community members throughout the process to ensure the research remains grounded and contextually sensitive. This paper explores the lived experiences and the challenges faced by people in Borderland areas. It's crucial to examine the political history of those living near an international border. Often, a heavily statist perspective overlooks the locally nuanced context of these tribal regions and their inhabitants. Most of the existing literature on this community is mostly shaped by colonial records, which were created with the economic and political agendas of the colonial officers stationed in these areas at that time. Consequently, there is very limited literature available on this community. The primary goal behind the present exploration was to move beyond this statist framework and foster a more people-centred, bottom-up understanding of the tribal communities in the border areas. It was observed that much of their history is only partially recorded, and translation efforts are still ongoing. It aims to challenge and question the limited colonial depictions of space, borderlands, and state controls. Employing a *'history from*

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below' approach, the focus is on indigenous mobilities, local perceptions of space, and power struggles along the Sino-India border in Arunachal Pradesh. The term '*borderlands*' is defined and approached as contested areas, highlighting the contradictions inherent in these spaces. The present paper emphasizes the states' attempts to '*maintain law and order*' along the unfortified colonial border and how these were significantly undermined and tested by border landers, including chiefs, farmers, traders, and healers during the colonial time.

Research Framework

The case study method was utilized as a research approach to explore an individual, a group of people, or a specific phenomenon. To carry out the study, techniques such as observation, interviews, and the analysis of secondary data, including documents and records, were employed. This fieldwork was carried out in the villages located within the Roing and Anini towns of Dibang Valley and Lower Dibang Valley regions of Arunachal Pradesh. The villages visited in Roing were Eduli, Emuli, Abali, and Intaya, while Anini, New Achuli, Atali, Atoto, and Karu villages were considered. These villages are inhabited by members of the Mishmi community. The sample for this study comprised individuals from these villages. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with experts who had previously published works on the Idu Mishmi. These experts included professors, assistant professors, a documentation head, and village leaders. The case study method is recognized as a significant approach for collecting qualitative data to facilitate an in-depth, intensive, and comprehensive scientific study of a social unit, which may include an individual, a family, a community, a group, or even an entire society. The main data sources included life histories, personal documents, letters, records, biographies, and information obtained through interviews and observations. Context sensitivity is a simple idea – considering the surroundings while planning or decision-making. Successful context-sensitive processes facilitate citizen participation throughout the process and allow greater design flexibility in the final product¹. The processes integrate community objectives and values relating to compatibility, livability and walkability, sense of place, environmental impacts, justice, and historic preservation while respecting traditional objectives for street design of safety, efficiency, capacity, and maintenance. Greater consideration is given to the requirements of an inclusive approach and less focus is placed on expanding capacity. These objectives are met through early and continuous collaboration with stakeholders, with frequent working sessions and communication efforts throughout the

design and construction processes. Consequently, traditional political practices are detailed in this paper to provide insights that can be modified to the current political situations in these regions.

Capacity-building activities within the community aim to strengthen the ability of individuals and institutions to effectively connect policy with research, evidence, information, and knowledge through skills enhancement in gathering and analysing data, translating research findings into actionable insights, and fostering collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders. By bridging the gap between evidence and policy, these activities ensure that decision-making processes are informed by robust, contextually relevant knowledge, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Similarly, history and tradition can confer legitimacy on existing practices, where their mere continuation is often taken as evidence of their validity. In this context, the social acceptability of questioning entrenched power structures becomes a critical factor in driving change—or in maintaining the status quo.

Role as Socio-Political Mediators

The various types of disputes arising in the Mishmi Tribe are firstly resolved by their traditionally evolved dispute resolution mechanism. These communities had their traditional system of resolving disputes between two parties whether it was regarding marriages, or clash between clans or with other tribes or outsiders. Land-related disputes are among the most important disputes. The ancestral land of the Mishmi tribe is distributed across three districts, Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, and Lohit District.

Role of Abbala: For resolving marriage-related disputes, Abbala helps in conveying the message from one party to another party. He has the power to impose fines on the defaulters. He is well-versed in their customary laws. Other than this, if any inter-clan dispute arises then, Abbala has the power to convene a meeting at the village level to listen to both parties. Because of their inherited rights and responsibilities, the final decision-making power lies with Abbala. Hence, they cannot be partial to any party involved in the dispute. Their role calls for an impartial and fair judgement to maintain social harmony within the tribe².

Role of Abbachiya: Abbachiya plays a dominant role in resolving disputes related to land and theft. When the mediator takes up any specific case, he does not stay in his own house but at the residence of the party involved in the disputes. After the case is resolved, the mediator has to

perform some rituals after coming back into his residence³. The selection of community mediators depends on three core qualities: their sound judgment, comprehensive knowledge, and unbiased thinking. These mediators serve as crucial arbitrators in resolving conflicts between villages and different communities. Even in contemporary times, their role remains significant. Local administrative bodies require their approval before registering any case. Based on the deep understanding of local customs and concerns, these mediators prioritize resolving disputes within the community framework before handing over such matters to external authorities. The significance of the traditional mediation practices extends beyond mere conflict resolution. They exemplify the community's sophisticated internal governance mechanisms, mainly in their ability to balance opposing interests while maintaining open channels of communication across diverse community groups. This historical practice of mediation and conflict resolution provides valuable insights to how the community historically positioned itself as an intermediary between various empires and political powers, making it a compelling subject for further academic study and analysis.

Political History of the Idu Mishmis as Mediators

Before the British took possession of the province of Assam, all the Mishmi groups were obedient to the orders of the then Assam Government and paid tribute to its representatives at Sadiya. They also gave allegiances to the Khamptis and Singhpos till as late as 1835. The Singpho Dafa Gam received assistance from the Mishmi in establishing stockade⁴. The Mishmi hills despite their formidable character, attracted many explorers even in the earlier days. A British officer, Captain Bedford, went up the Dibang Valley in 1826 to visit the villages between Bomjur and Mebo⁵. At that time, these villages were in a confrontation with their neighbours, the Tاراon Mishmi and he was turned back by the Idu Mishmi in a friendly manner. They alleged that because Bedford was friendly with the Taraons, he must be an enemy of Idus.

The policy of the British about the hill people when they took charge of Assam, was like a loose political control having as its object minimum interferences compatible with unprovoked acts of oppression by other tribes, checking the violation of British territory, and while leaving the people as much as possible to themselves, to abstain from any line of action which would tend to instil in their minds an overdue sense of independence. In 1939, some Idus joined the Khamptis in their attack on Sadiya. In the year after the defeat of the Khamptis, their chief, Tao Goahin fled to the Mishmi village of Etalian, north of the Junction of the Ithun and Dibang rivers⁶. In

1951, a separate Administrative Centre for the Dibang Valley was established at Nizam Ghat. However, due to the flood and earthquake, the headquarters had to be shifted to Roing in April 1952 (Baruah, 1960). Following this, an outpost was opened at Kronli. With this, the modern western administrative system was introduced in the Areas of the Dibang Valley. An administrative change was brought about in 1956, by which the Dibang Valley was recognized as a separate Subdivision and its charge was entrusted to an additional political officer with headquarters in Roing⁷.

Arbitrary System of Miju and Digaru Mishmi

The negotiation system among Miju Mishmi and *Kabaya* in Digaru Mishmi is called *Pharai katai*⁸. The prerequisite to be the arbitrator is that one should have good knowledge of the rules and regulations of the tribes, must have good orating skills, must be above 25 years of age, and must be a patient listener. The village councils do not operate in the Mishmi community, so everything depends on *pharai katai*. If there is any dispute between two members of the village then he acts as a judge to give verdict to the problems of land-related disputes and clashes between the villagers. If there is any inter-community clash then he and *pharai katai* of another community come together and solve the clash between two communities. Suppose, there is a clash between two members of the village, and the accused realises his misdeeds, in such a case, *pharai katai* is sent from the accused side to negotiate compensation for his misdeed on a victim. He tries to convince the victim and offers a certain kind of cash as a compensation or fine from the accused side.

If there is a dispute between the two members of the village, then *pharai katai* demands a mass gathering of villagers. The *pharai katai* decides what has to be paid to the victim as compensation in front of villagers. This compensation may be in the form of cash or kind. When any case is resolved, there is a feast, known as *Tanam* is organized to end the misunderstanding between the two parties⁹. In some cases, when the *pharai katai* is unable to trace the guilty, then the *pharai katai* seeks the help of a shaman. The shaman is a religious person in the village. This system of traditional polity is replaced by the democratic political system, making the role of *pharai katai* minimal and negligent. So far as disputes related to land, theft, etc. are concerned, *pharai katai* acts as a mediator between the opposite parties. *Pharai katai* tries to negotiate the penalty or fine imposed on the accused by the victim. Even the *Anchal Samity* members and village headmen are not fully authorized to solve the dispute. They are entitled to give decisions or suggestions but are not empowered to resolve the dispute. Each village has

six to seven *pharai katai* who have good skills, knowledge and expertise in negotiation and regulation of societal norms.

Systems and Nature of Punishment

Pharai katai is entitled to give different types of punishments to the defaulters¹⁰. The fine is the most common form of punishment that prevails in the village, in which victims have to pay cash or kind, such as mithun, cow, pig or ornaments, etc. as per their tradition. In case of murder, both parties have to make a camp on both sides of the village, in a common land, locally known as *maha kyap*. The decision is usually taken on the spot with the help of *pharai katai*.

Kandang Tongru: This type of punishment is practised when an accused is kept in *Kandang Tongru*, a type of house. As a punishment, the accused is kept in this particular house for till the dispute is solved and food is provided to him during the detention period. *Kandang Tongru* is linked with a murder case. Presently, due to the contact with administrative systems, the *Kandang Tongru* is not practised in the Mishmi Community.

Brang Tatapai: If any outsider comes and steals or harms the Mishmi society, then the person is punished by tying up ropes and detained for some days.

Mangra: In case, a person lends money from another person and does not pay it back during the stipulated period, this type of punishment prevails among the Mishmi community.

Tilam Tefyap: Sometimes *pharai katai* is unable to trace the defaulter, and then he seeks help from a shaman. In such a case, the shaman performs some rituals to trace the whereabouts of the accused. Both parties have to face different types of trials which are physically challenging.

Payment to *pharai katai*: Earlier *pharai katai* was paid by donating cow, pig, mithun, etc. But nowadays cash payment is made. In the Mishmi community, the *pharai katai* are considered highly dominant and are known to operate the traditional political system. Despite the presence of an administrative system, most people prefer to resolve their disputes by going to the *pharai katai*.

Selection of *Pharai Katai*

A set of criteria are adopted for selecting a *pharai katai*¹¹. Any person who is unrelated to either party and is known for his expertise in handling or settling disputes is

generally accepted by both the parties for arbitration. He can be from any sub-clan of the Mishmi Community. It is expected that *pharai katai* must be well-versed in traditional knowledge. He must have the greatest wisdom, patience and influence. He should be married, but the women can't be the members of *pharai katai*. The tenure of the *pharai katai* lasts till his death. He is a permanent member unless found guilty or unfaithful. Experienced village elders help mediators with the disposal of disputes and arriving at proper decisions. In this case, they are not elected but selected.

Arbitration Structure and Meetings

The arbitration meetings usually take place at the residence of Goan Bura, Anchal Samiti members or in the Mishmi community halls. The meeting may last for one hour to three days in arriving at a proper settlement of the dispute. Since arbitration is a form of governance, it has a well-defined structure in the traditional polity of the Mishmi community. In every village, there are five *pharai katai* members. A representative from every clan is found among these members. The selection of *pharai katai* is not hereditary. Therefore, the son of a *pharai katai* cannot automatically become a *pharai katai* unless proven his or her credentials.

The authority is derived from the chief of the village who is a leading member of the village. There are domains of jurisdiction for all disputes, but when there is any matter of unusual difficulty or when the parties cannot come to an agreement, then they are free to go to any *pharai katai* who is usually regarded as having the greatest wisdom or influence in the village. Fine and penalties are generally decided keeping in view the degree of crime, seeking the arbitration of the case for compensation. The degree may range from what is called in their local dialect as *laimitam jopila samla* (small dispute) to *laidum samla* (big dispute). While solving a problem all the potential leader gathers together with *pharai katai* present in the community hall making the right decision¹².

History of Polity

The British rulers in India realized quite early that the territories under tribal possession had their specific problems that required a special administrative approach. Enforcement of laws unsuited to the primitive conditions and contrary to the spirit of their customs and religion' spread disillusionment among the tribal population leading to sporadic uprisings. Many times, frictions arose as a consequence of great competition among the people bordering the hills for the forest produce that the Mishmi tribes carried down, mainly rubber, Mishmi teetha, musk

deer, etc. Therefore, the Inner Line regulation of 1873 laid down contours in Lakhimpur towards the Daflas, Miris, Abors, Mishmis, Khamtis, and Singphos¹³. Other significant administrative measures were initiated to gather knowledge about and cultivate better relations with the hill tribes of India's northeast frontiers. In 1881-82, the post of a political officer was created with headquarters at Sadiya. Mr. Needham was appointed as the first assistant political officer succeeded by Mr. Williamson¹⁴.

The year 1912-13, marked progress in the history of frontier administration of the province. Attention was mainly directed to the North-East frontier and several important measures were introduced under the control of the political officer working directly under the chief commissioner. The survey operations and road construction were undertaken on an extensive scale. The year 1914 saw further consolidation of the administration in the frontier territories. The Government of India (Foreign and Political Departments) by a notification extended the jurisdiction of the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880 to the hills inhabited by Abhors, Miris, Mishmi, Sighpos, Nagas, Khamptis, Bhutiyas, Aks and Daflas'. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, special provisions for the administration of tribal areas were made whereby they were reconstituted as Excluded Areas or Partially Excluded Areas¹⁵. The administration of these areas was conferred to the Governor of Assam, acting at his discretion. After Independence in 1948, the Sadiya frontier was further divided into two divisions, the Abhor Hills and the Mishmi Hills. Eventually, out of the North-East Frontier Agency, Arunachal Pradesh with the status of Union territory was born in 1972 and later in the year 1987 got statehood under the State of Arunachal Pradesh Act of 1986.

Trade Relations of Mishmi

It is generally said that the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh lived in isolation from the rest of the world and they had little interaction among the various tribes. Yet, from the early days, various tribes had established trade relations amongst themselves and the outside world. The trade was a compulsion for them since they had to depend on the outside world to supply some of the primary requirements of life such as salt, metal, clothes, etc. Early tribal hill people practised trade within the society and the outside world. Dr Elwin has rightly pointed out that "some of the tribes are very keen traders". The Sherdokens and Akas have, for generations, traded with the foothills and plains¹⁶.

The Mishmi used to bring deer musk, *mishmi teetha* (a medicine), hides, textiles, and baskets to barter with

the traders in the plains in exchange for daily necessities. The tribes of Adi, Nyishi and Mishmi were particularly responsible for the early commercial contacts for the trade carried out through their areas. The Mishmi hills became the intermediate space to undertake trade between the plains of Assam and Hokung and lama valley. The Mishmi tribes regularly went to Rima, a regular trade market in Tibet. They used to export cane to Tibet, which the Tibetan traders required for making baskets.

The Mishmi also traded their goods with the Singphos Khamptis and Adi tribes. They supplied textiles, and fabrics of various kinds to other tribes. The Mishmi traders mostly used to operate as middle traders, wherein the commodities were brought from Tibet to barter in Assam through Mishmi traders. Indigenous products like chillies, vegetables, amber and forest products, such as dyes, madder, peaches, opium, hides of wild animals, and mushrooms were exchanged in barter with Tibetan rock salt, wool, brass and iron items, and silver ornaments. Valuable items from Assam including Assam tri cloth, muga, and silk were bartered with Tibet white shells, beads, silver coins, wool, yak tails, and domestic bovine.

Role of Mishmi Traders

The Mishmi tribes were the main traders with the neighbours and other tribes. There is no doubt that from very early times Mishmi were noted for their trade excellence, and various valuable forest products and trade items were traded to other nearby provinces. During field visits, researchers interviewed elderly members of the Mishmi community to learn more about their historical trade relations. Rima served as the primary trade centre where merchants from both Assam and Tibet would gather. However, after the British colonized Assam, Sadiya emerged as the new trade hub, where Mishmi traders conducted business with Assamese merchants, with trade routes extending to Jorhat and Lakhimpur. The trade relations between Mishmi Hills and Assam were not new. It was mentioned in 1675 at a stone pillar on the Deopani River in Sadiya in the Ahom language. Hence, the trade relations between the Mishmi hills and the Plains in Assam were very strong from very early times. *Mishmi teetha*, an expensive trade item, was popular among the ruling class in Assam. It was traded extensively by the Mishmi tribes. This gave a lot of significance to the Mishmi traders in this region¹⁷. Trade has always been a facilitator for developing political partnerships. Thus, Mishmi's contact with these neighbouring kingdoms was through trade links, which later developed into close political relations.

Mishmi Trade with Ahoms

It is very difficult to trace the year and date to exactly mention when the trade was initiated. But the Ahom scripts, like Ahom Buranjis and Sadiya Stone pillar, provide concrete evidence about the relations of the Mishmi and Ahoms¹⁸.

In the Ahoms Buranjis, it is mentioned that during the time of Ahom rule, the Mishmi were such excellent traders that Ahoms introduced the policy of non-interventions and barter trade which strengthened the relations of Mishmi and Ahoms. The trading facilities offered by the Ahom rulers pleased the Mishmis. It was an important factor that the Mishmi refrained from raiding operations in Ahoms territory which resulted in a conciliatory approach and non-interference in the Mishmi administration. The Ahoms cultivated a peaceful relationship with the Mishmi. The Mishmi were powerful traders and as far as possible they tried to avoid any conflicts with Ahoms that could hamper their trade relations¹⁹.

A stone pillar on the bank of Deopani River (now in Dibang Valley) about seven miles north of Sadiya, has an inscription engraved in the Ahom language at the orders of '*Dihingia Bargohain*', by which the Mishmi were confirmed of their possession of the hills near the Dibang river on the payment of tributes, including four baskets of *Mishmi Teetha*, and other local herbs. Unlike other hill tribes, the Mishmi didn't have the right to '*posa*' because they were monopolizing the central market of the northeastern hills' tribes at Sadiya. The trading facilities offered by the Ahom government must have been greatly appreciated by the Mishmi who avoided causing any offence to it, lest it would result in the closing off of all trades with the plains. The Mishmis served as the middlemen between many trading parties. There was regular traffic between the people of the plains and the Mishmi hills. The hillmen had to depend by and large on the neighbours for their requirements of foodstuff and other necessities. Every winter, the Mishmi used to come down to the plains to trade musk, silk, and indigenous medicinal herbs in exchange for the goods from the plains.

Mishmi Trade with Tibet

Except few oral narratives, there is no literature or documentation records regarding trade relations between Mishmi and Tibetan lamas. The Mishmi had very sound and cordial trade relations with Tibetans. Many Mishmi traditional ornaments, silver jewellery and utensils were imported from Tibet. Adding to this, the sword that Kaman Mishmi called Syambari Brick possessed by the

higher-status Mishmi was imported from Tibet. Another Mishmi trade article from the Tibetans (Lamas) was about domestic animals, which were used for marriage ceremonies, ritual sacrifices and meat for the Mishmi society. These domestic animals were used during the traditional ceremonial festivals.

The Digaru and Idu Mishmi had extensive trade relations with the plains, but the Kamani Mishmi had trade relations with Tibet²⁰. The Mishmi used to regulate their trade relations with all the neighbouring countries, even the Idu and Digaru Mishmi used to trade with Tibetan lamas but very small in numbers. Kaman or Miju Mishmi used to trade on both sides, with the Tibetan lamas and with the plains. Overall, the Mishmi tribes used to act as the middlemen between Tibet and Ahoms.

Mishmi Trade with Myanmar

Regarding early trade with the Burmese, it is stated that the Mishmi from the upper region were mostly in contact with the Burmese. During the field investigation, it was found that only three or four valleys were most commonly used as trade routes to Myanmar. Kalung Valley was the most important trade zone from the very early days. Due to the total absence of the accounts of the early trade and commercial activities of the valley, it is not proven whether trade existed or not. But various items of significance existed which were exchanged from Burma through the hills to the Mishmi region. '*Gong*' was one of the items that was valued in the Mishmi, because it produced very soothing music. The main trade centres in Burma that the Mishmi traders visited for trading purposes were Moon-Awa, Maje, Pongling, Kumbrong Chatti, Chatta, and Fhalin. All these were the Burmese villages and towns where the trade barter was done. The exchange of goods in these towns and villages was well-known to Mishmi who used to trade these particular places.

The clans of Mishmi who inhabited the extreme northern part like the Walong areas used to go on trade trips to Tibet (Tallung glad) very constantly for barter. Similarly, the Mishmi clans of the extreme southern part like the Tezu area used to visit adjoining places in Assam for the exchange of goods from the hills. The Mishmi used to trade with the Burmese from Kallung²¹, where it used to take three to four days only to reach. From the Burmese side, iron tools, gong, opium, etc. were the main barter items with Mishmi.

Mishmi's Trade Relations with the British

After the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the Burmese rule came to an end and in its place the British occupation

established their authority in the Ahom. The British made the inner line and outer line regulations. The nature of trade relations completely changed and the British made the hill tribes follow seclusion due to rapid conflicts of Mishmi with the British objects. In 1911-12, Captain Noel Williamson completed the survey of this region. In 1914, The Mishmi hills were included in the central and eastern sections of the frontier. This was followed by loose political control in this region²². The British required people for cane cutting in dense forests to make place for their offices and Mishmi were experts in cane cutting and clearing dense forests. They were also skilled in extracting rubber from the rubber trees. Normal trade relations started between the British and Mishmi and instead of barter, a silver coin was introduced. The British started sending the Mishmi *teetha* medicine to Japan and earned a lot by trading the same.

The Mishmi not only depended on trade but also started engaging in work under British Authorities to earn British currencies. Eventually, the British exercised their power and stopped the trade of *teetha*, musk deer and other items that Mishmi used to sell. The exports and imports of the Mishmi hill regions were banned. The regulations further laid down that any other jungle products found in the possession of any person without a permit were confiscated by the government. The Mac Mohan line in 1914 completely stopped the trade activities of Mishmi with Tibet and trade was confined because of strong check posts established by the British Authorities. Trade continued as usual with the plains but the trade with Tibet was completely stopped.

Recent Concerns of Idu Mishmis

The Mishmi community has protested against the administration's illegal land encroachments for the establishment of a tiger reserve on their forest land. Their primary concern is that the creation of this reserve will result in the government seizing a significant portion of their land, leaving them landless in their territory.

The Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society (IMCLS), the leading organization representing the Mishmi community, has expressed concerns about being neither consulted nor informed about various initiatives related to road and infrastructure development in their villages. They assert that since they are dedicated to advocating the rights of the Mishmi people, they must be involved in discussions regarding matters that affect their community.

The erosion of the Mishmi dialect and language, largely due to insufficient documentation of their traditional cultural practices and customs, is another concern. There is a lack of funding for this documentation,

which is crucial for upholding their ancestral legacy and identity. Additionally, development projects are bringing outsiders into their villages, leading to the launching of new religions and cultures. This external influence is significantly impacting age-old tribal customs and traditions, affecting their rituals and ceremonies, as outside festivals and activities encroach upon their practices.

The situation along the India-China border significantly affects the daily lives of those residing in the borderland villages. Whenever incidents occur, it becomes challenging for these communities to maintain a normal routine. There is a pressing need for more effective measures to ensure the safety and security of people living in remote forest villages. Establishing regular communication and contact with these communities is crucial. Additionally, reviving the trade of forest products would help foster connections between these villagers and those in the plains, promoting interaction and economic opportunities.

There should be an increase in civil-military extracurricular activities to foster trust and cooperation between the two groups. Due to language and cultural differences, many concerns of the tribal people often go unheard and are largely ignored by the administration. To encourage cooperation from these communities, it is essential to take more proactive initiatives that involve them in a meaningful way.

Finally, despite Tarun Mene's (2014) extensive research on tribal suicides, many such cases continue to be reported today. Individuals who feel marginalized and unsupported often resort to drug gangs or tragically, suicide. Even a decade after Prof. Tarun's study, this fieldwork reveals that many tribal people are still experiencing significant distress, highlighting the need for further research and increased support from the government.

Conclusion

The crux of the Idu Mishmi society is a confluence between traditional and modern with each one having its pivotal role in an Idu Mishmi's life. The Mishmi community has historically played the role of mediators, negotiators, and intermediaries between various influential kingdoms, including British rule. Their traditional practices and inherent negotiation skills have paved their importance in a sensitive region like Arunachal Pradesh. Among the tribes of the state, the Mishmi are unique in having historically facilitated trade and interactions between different tribal groups, spanning various levels of the region's tribal hierarchy.

The Mishmi have consistently upheld their historical role as mediators, bridging opposing parties across

tribal and political divides. Within the traditional tribal hierarchy of Arunachal Pradesh, as categorized by the state's first Lieutenant Governor, K.A.A. Raja²³, tribes such as the Adi, Wancho, and Nocte occupy the upper echelons, while the Mishmi hold a middle position, and the Monpa and Apatani are placed lowest in the hierarchy. This unique positioning highlights the Mishmi's enduring significance as a connecting force in the region.

Likewise, Gogoi, in his PhD thesis 'NEFA Local Polity, (1971)²⁴' classified the tribes and their political structures in Arunachal Pradesh into four distinct categories: Chieftaincy, where power is transferred hereditarily (e.g., Noctes and Tangsas); Republicans, characterized by collective decision-making (e.g., Monpas, Apatanis, Sherdukpen, Aka); Democratic, with structures like the Kebang among the Adis and Akas; and Arbiters, who were skilled negotiators, represented by the Mishmi community.

Given the strategic position of Arunachal Pradesh amidst the power struggles of the two nations, the role of the Mishmi as arbiters is examined in depth in this study. The Mishmi's unique intermediary role highlights their significance in mediating political, cultural, and trade dynamics in the region. This paper thoroughly examined the traditional governance of the Mishmi Tribes and how the contemporary state system intruded, transformed, and ultimately supplanted their indigenous polity. It explored how the Mishmi navigated as well as negotiated the changes imposed by external forces on their tribal society. This narrative encompasses compromises, adaptations, alliances, bargaining skills and, at times, uprisings in their efforts to preserve certain aspects of their political systems and village management practices. Even today, the Mishmi tribes are actively striving to maintain their culture, traditions, and conventional methods of addressing community issues. However, they face ongoing challenges both from the administration and the state government, making this conservancy difficult. Further research is desirable to explore the creation of more cohesive and socially embedded administrative models for these tribes.

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Notes

1. <https://development.asia/explainer/using-context-sensitive-approach-enhance-development>
2. The information is obtained from the Fieldwork Project report on the Mishmi community in 2002, by the Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University.

3. Ibid.
4. Mamang, Dai. (2009). *Arunachal Pradesh the Hidden Land*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, Ajanta Offset and Packing's Ltd.
5. Ibid.
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