

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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The book not only studies Arunachal Pradesh's cultural heritage but also its strategic location, environment, populace, trade and commerce and border sensitivity, and is supported by vivid photographs, writes *Surendar Kaul*

This book was released in a jam packed hall at India International Centre, New Delhi, by Dr Jatinder Singh, MOS, in Union Cabinet, PMO. Albeit, the writer is professionally a doctor, who often travels to Arunachal Pradesh, the remotest part of the country and other places, out of her inquisitiveness and yearning to study cultural and architectural sites in the country, yet she has produced the book as an intellectual fallow for interested people to undertake further deep research about cultural heritage, sociological and environmental aspects of earlier called NEFA, rechristened as Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh had remained neglected most of the time, even after Independence, but the Chinese aggression and their intrusion of 1962 in upper parts of NEFA brought in limelight its strategic significance and urgency of connectivity to the forefront in the Indian Government. The aborigines of this region must had lived the lives of confinement and limited contentment due to inaccessibility, lack of communication, economic underdevelopment, road connectivity network among various tribes settlements in stray clusters. Physical location of the region falls in outer Himalaya; Patkai range is vivisected by number of rivers and streams, emanating from higher Himalayas which in turn are tributaries of the mighty Brahmaputra. Climatically, Arunachal Pradesh receives highest rainfall, which makes the region susceptible to large scale occurrences of landslides, resulting in damaging of permanent road links and housing colonies along the foothills of mountain ridges covered with alpine shrubs and coniferous tree line.

For compiling this masterpiece, the author has travelled at length to each and every corner of the State to have the first-hand ground information about the ancient temples, shrines, ruins which were destroyed and annihilated under various cultural invasion, conquests and devastated by natural upheavals in Northeast in past centuries. Most of these crumbled age old temple structures were further eroded and denudated under vagaries of nature from time to time in past centuries. In spite of cultural influx and economic depravity of the region, the influence of Hinduism might have diminished with the passage of time, but the essence of its philosophy must not have vanished, that is why the local people still revere Hindu gods and goddess and maintain their Hindu ways of praying.

Yet the author has made strenuous efforts to recast the religious significance of places, highlights of main archaeological findings with the help of local folktales, beliefs, traditions and customs and existing literature available in comprehensive manner. The book has various chapters and each subject matter has been well elucidated with understandable references and related Hindu oblations, and sacerdotal rites. Description about several obliterated sculptures of images of Hindu goddess and gods, carved pillars, floral designs on plinth slabs, full lotus carved on circular stone slab in Malinithan temple premises are also mentioned in minute details. It also mentions various performances of worshipping that was prevalent in 'mainland' India among the Hindus and had been practiced by the people in Arunachal Pradesh also from ages.

It has identified temples precincts and ruins where worshipping the Shiva Linga and Durga as Malini still exist and on auspicious occasions, devotees from the nearby States throng these sanctified places to pay their obeisance too. The accounts are supported by vivid photographs, say, of stone images of Laxmi, Lord Indira. Also, Nandi, Kartikaya, Lord Surya and Lord

Ganesha, the three headed Lord Brahma, Goddess Saraswati, Lord Krishna and Radha, Varah with boar head and body of human, figure of Vidhadhar and well chiseled out images of the favourite animals of the deities on stone pillars that have been found almost around in the State in these ruins of temples complexes are well documented. It is empirically evident that these consecrated places might have had magnificent Hindu temples and places of worship in some period of time. And the ruins and stone images do corroborate that the then inhabitants of this undulated mountainous verdant region must had been professing Saktism, Vaishnavism and Shaivism, all the major sects of Hinduism in Arunachal Pradesh as had been the Hindu religious doctrines in rest of Indian sub continent. The writer has given sufficient chronically documentary support, of the epics, *Mahabharata and Ramayana*, to relate and justify the religious history of the region with that of Hinduism and its format of worship, pattern of rituals, customs and beliefs and its philosophy, an article of faith. Since, the Vedas are the common source of Hinduism in all its all varied stages, therefore the author has rightly spelled out the proof of religious commonness of Hinduism between Arunachal Pradesh and Indian heart land. Moreover, the research work done by the author in this book does certify that people of Arunachal Pradesh were not isolated from Indian society.

The book is hard bound, better printed on art paper, spread over on 135 pages, having paper cover jacket, embossed with a beautiful picture of a Shiva Linga, Parvati idols girdled in coloured swath of holy cloth, a trident pitched by side, a symbolic weapon of Lord Shiva. Its cost is Rs995 and is easily available at leading bookshops. Blown up, high resolution photographs of defaced, worn out images of gods and goddesses carved out on stones lying scattered in dilapidated temple complexes, ruins of Itanagar (the capital) fort and map showing the diagrams of flowing rivers of the region and its topographic contours have been juxtaposed with fineness on glossy pages to make convenient for the reader to grasp the subject matter. The book makes an interesting read not only from the view of cultural heritage but also from diverse aspects of its strategic location, environment, its class of populace, border trade and commerce and border sensitivity due to ingress and egress people.