



Unwritten Journeys: Migrants and Cultural Coexistence from Colonial Outpost to Smart City in Pasighat

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Abstract. This article examines the migration patterns in Pasighat, the oldest city in Arunachal Pradesh. It provides a brief history of migration in the region, addresses the current situation, and highlights the challenges faced by those settling in this border state. The primary sources of migration to Pasighat include Bihar, Nepal, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, and Punjab. Initially, people moved to this area during the British colonial period, and after India gained independence, many chose to remain. Migrants in Pasighat encounter several challenges, including difficulties due to the remote location, access to necessities, and strict government policies that prevent immigrants from buying land and obtaining business licenses. Additional issues include limited transportation options, inadequate medical facilities, and a significant cultural gap. Despite these challenges, many migrants opt to stay in Pasighat. This situation contributes to a sense of uncertainty about the future, yet the substantial population still residing there presents a topic for further research. The nature and dynamics of migration in Arunachal Pradesh are unique, often involving movements from more developed areas to remote locations. Although a significant earthquake occurred in 1953, a trend of reverse migration has not been prominent. However, in recent times, some instances of reverse migration from Pasighat to other parts of India and abroad have been observed but the inflow of migration cannot stop.

Index Terms- Migration, scarcity, movement, decades

I. Introduction

Indian Diversity cannot be fully understood without acknowledging its rich history of migration. Every part of India has a unique migration story, demonstrating how diverse communities accept to each other while preserving their distinct identities in terms of culture, religion, and social practices. This coexistence of all diverse cultures is an excellent example of a civilized mindset. Here, the "civilized mindset" refers to the ability to respect and embrace diverse social behaviours, cultures, and practices of each other and live together.

Arunachal Pradesh is largest state in seven sisters of northeastern state of India. it is the 24th state of Indian Republic. lying between 26,28' and 29.31' north latitudes and 90.31'nd 97.30' east longitudes.it covers 2.5 percent of geographical area. Arunachal got an identity of its own for the first time in 1914, when some tribal area separated from



Arunachal Pradesh was known as the North east frontier Agency till 1972. It was formed as a full-fledged state “Arunachal Pradesh” on 20 February 1987. It is bounded by Bhutan in west, Tibet and China in north -east, Myanmar to east and Nagaland and Assam in south. International boarder is about 1628km which 1030 kms is with Tibet 441km with Myanmar and 157km with Bhutan. Arunachal Pradesh eastern stretch of the Himalayas and all the three sections of Himalayas are present here covering an area 83.743sqkms. The sparsely inhabited Arunachal Pradesh is a predominantly tribal inhabitant state.



II. Research Methodology

The study is based on migration in one of the oldest towns of Arunachal Pradesh. . This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to examine the sociological dynamics in Pasighat, focusing on migration, coexistence, and cultural pluralism Both primary and secondary data were analysed collected to address the stated objective. The Primary data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the Adi tribal community and migrant groups, capturing their lived experiences and social interactions. Non Participant observations will identify community behaviors and integration mechanisms. Secondary data from government reports, census data, and academic literature will provide context on migration’s long-term impacts. The analysis will draw on sociological theories and maintain ethical considerations, including informed consent and cultural sensitivity throughout the research process.

Nowadays the scenario is changing the participation of local people in business is increasing. As total population 2011 is 25656 in which almost half of the



population are migrants. There are several local tribes in Pasighat that represent the local population, with the Aadi community making up nearly 37 percent of the total population, according to the 2011 census. Other tribes, such as the Galo, also have a significant presence in the area. The Aadi community is one of the oldest tribes in India, predominantly found in Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Tibet that are under Chinese control. They consist of approximately 18 sub-tribes, including the Ashing, Bori, Bokar, Karko, Komkar, Minyong, Millang, Pasi, Padam, Panggi, Pailibo, Ramo, Shimong, and Tang. These tribes inhabit temperate and subtropical regions across several districts in Arunachal Pradesh, including Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, West Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit, Shi Yomi, and Namsai.

Pasighat

Pasighat is an oldest town in Arunachal Pradesh it is known for Aadi tribals homeland, rich History, herbals medicines, and cold breezes. Pasighat holds a prominent place in India. It has also selected city as one of India's smart cities, reflecting its importance and potentiality for modern development and requirement.

It is located at the eastern foothills of the Himalayas, at 155 meters above sea level. The first historical mention of Arunachal Pradesh and its inhabitants occurs in the Ahom Buranjis which records the arrival of the Ahom's in Assam in the 13th century and their subsequent history there. (Peter van ham). The old name of Pasighat was paklek meaning Garden of Banana but the new name "Pasighat" originates from the local "Pasis" tribe. Besides One of the versions of the local people is that the town named was given by captain Noel Williamson.

The location of Pasighat city has been significant strategic, geographical, and commercial significances since British era since till now. In additionally commercially Pasighat is important because it is the only market of nearby remote hilly villages and directly connected with major city of Assam Dibrugarh and which is almost 150 km far from here.

Background of Migration in Pasighat

Migration history of Pasighat spans over 100 years start from British era. The era of British relations with the Adis began with Captain Bedford's visit to Pasighat on November 22, 1825, for a geological survey aimed at exploring potential trade routes and territorial expansion with Tibet.

They aimed to achieve control in the tea trade and facilitate the trade of Tibetan wool, gold, musk, and cattle. To secure a safe route, the Abhor Hill became necessary. The British government referred to the region as NEFA. The visit of the British official William Williamson led to his being killed in the unadministered village of Komsing in March. Consequently British and Aadi tribal war started, the British mounted one of the largest punitive campaigns ever, deploying 3,000 troops and 4,000 porters. They established their colonial rule in this Aadi tribal area after fighting the Anglo-Abor War, which lasted from the 1850s to 1911. The local tribes, known as the Abors, participated in four key conflicts: Bitbor Mimak (1858), Bongal Mimak (1859), Nijom Mimak (1894), and Poju Mimak (1911).



This wish of William's was ultimately achieved after his death. Following the victory in the Abhor War, a military base was established in Pasighat in the winter of 1911 to conduct military expeditions into the tribal areas. It was the first time that the local tribals encountered migration; before that, they were completely isolated from the outside world. In the following years, small shops were set up by Marwaris, Biharis, Uttar Pradesh residents, and Nepalis brought in by the British them from the town of Sadiya to meet the needs of the administrators. Some of the Nepali population in Pasighat came as porter. alongside the British from the 1930s until 1950. As a result, Pasighat was significantly influenced by trade from various parts of India (Onyok 2011)

Most of these who comes since the British rule migrants had brought by Britishers but after their who could come here most of them were poor and came here for searching bread and butter. Tarkeshwar prasad a senior hardware shopkeeper shares his life experience that he came here with only 500 Rs from Chapda in Bihar, and he is leading businessman in Pasighat. Same experiences shares by other migrants who also came here empty hand but now become leading businessmen.

Here in Horticulture college, defence colleges and some central and state department offices in which they came here from different part of India. These are permanent job, so they have to stay here almost 30 years. So their presence also contributed in existing society. After smart city a large number of migrants came here for temporary basis that also contributed in society.

The nontribal people have come in after 1911 and recent times, but the research related to the migrants in Pasighat in various phases over a decade is limited. As of the first census conduct in 1961 North east Frontier agency in which entire state is



rural. The first written record on migration can be say because they divided the population between tribal and non-tribal. In which tribal people formed 88.76 % of total population and rest are but in the 1991 census report the migrant's percentage decline almost 63.66 percent.



As a result, the latest census indicates that the total population of Pasighat is approximately 24,656, with more than half of the residents being migrants. Let's examine the migrants from each stat in the following way:

III. Current Situation

Upon arriving in Pasighat, one can notice a significant variation in culture, social behavior, and religions. The Adi tribals hold a predominant position in the town. While most tribal communities share similar ethnic backgrounds, each tribe exhibits distinctive characteristics in language and customs. They often form cultural groups based on their rituals and beliefs. Additionally, migrants from Marwaris, Biharis, Bengalis, residents of Uttar Pradesh, and Nepalis bring their own diverse cultures, religions, and culinary traditions. As a result, the small population of Pasighat reflects a rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity, representing the true essence of Indian cultural variety.

They gradually established Pasighat as a commercial and administrative purpose. Pasighat, grew as a centre for business, school and college medicals for nearby area because Market facilities was available here which was doing by mostly migrant people that attracted people from different tribes and caste groups of nearby area. No massive fights can be experience faced by Migrants unfortunately the nearest state Assam has massive protest ULFA against migrants.

Unfortunately, in 1954, because of earthquake the old township of Pasighat was totally washed away by the river Siang flood. Older generations of Pasighat met in Local library informed that, who attended schools and colleges during the 1950s, natural calamities like earthquakes and floods changed the town's topography and pushed it further towards the hills on the eastern.



Interestingly Throughout both good and adverse situations, the phenomenon of migration persisted. This indicates that migrants had a strong emotional connection to the land, as the opportunities in their native states were limited. As a result, they preferred to stay in Pasighat rather than return to their homelands.

IV. Discussion

Apparently after becoming the smart city the inflow of investment and development growing rapidly. Now people are far connected with the outside world than they were in the past decades . and to change societal patterns, the economy plays a crucial role, gradually transforming the entire system of society, where social behavior is paramount. leading to numerous material changes, increased investments, and a significant influx of people from outside the area. However, Pasighat has already experienced a longstanding presence of migrants, many of whom have lived here since the British era.

Northeast of India is unique culturally they are connected with Indian culture but by face and somehow the food habits and face Generally, the people of Northeast India prefer to live in their native regions rather than settling in other parts of the country, aside from metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Guwahati, and Bangalore. In contrast, people from Bihar are known for their willingness to migrate and can be found in various locations across India. Currently, The distance between Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh exceeds 1,300 kilometers, and there is no direct train connecting Patna to Pasighat. Migration from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh has occurred, but many people were likely not willing to come here initially; however, once they arrived, they chose to stay. On the other hand, there is very little evidence of people from the Northeast settling in Bihar.

This migration began during the British era, a time when relocation was not an easy task. Pasighat has been designated as a smart city increased. In Pasighat, migrants are commonly seen working in various roles such as shopkeepers, labourers in construction, engineers, professors, office assistants, and staff employees in government and non-government organizations. They also participate as street vendors in weekly and monthly fairs throughout Pasighat . In today's era of globalization, migration is a widespread phenomenon. A significant percentage of the population in Pasighat consists of migrants. Additionally, bank employees, army employees and the smart city project and various tourist attractions have led to an influx of temporary migrants.

The migrants had different cultures, languages, and social behaviors, making it challenging for them to settle in Pasighat. Additionally, the local climate posed significant challenges. The local population also harboured some apprehension towards the newcomers, as they were unfamiliar with the migrants' cultures, languages, and social behaviors. In this environment when everyone is new for other one but they live together in scarcity. Scarcity in Pasighat refers to the limited availability of medical facilities. Electricity is rare, and not all vegetarian food options are available. The transportation system is expensive and difficult to navigate.



Nevertheless, everyone is enjoying their life. It signifies that even in times of scarcity, people find happiness and make the most out of life.

Religion and Practices

The local tribes are following Dono polo religion and migrants are Hindu, Muslims, Sikh Ahom tribes they are Hindu but god is different) is We can easily bifurcate the local people and migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh Assam and Bengal but difficult to differentiate between Nepali and local. People come from various religions. Migrants from Bihar, UP, Bengal, and Assam are both Hindus and Muslims. People from Nepal are mostly Hindus and Buddhists. Marwari migrants are mostly Marwari Hindu community.

Additionally, about half a kilometre away, there is a mosque constructed by Muslim migrants, as well as two more mosques established by other Muslim settlers. Furthermore, Buddhist migrants from Nepal have also built a Buddhist temple in the area. Thus, Pasighat is religiously diverse and prosperous in this regard.

The majority of locals are Christian and Hindu, while migrants include Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs. Pasighat is a place where many major religions coexist that represents diverse Indian identity. There are more than four temples built by Hindu migrants, including three next to each other: one dedicated to Lord Shiva, one to Maa Kali, and another to an Assamese deity. Adjacent to these temples is a gurudwara.



In Bihar and Bengal, loudspeakers are commonly used during festivals, particularly during Durga Puja and Kali Puja. People create elaborate Puja pandals adorned with beautiful, colorful cloth. Various food stalls are set up in these pandals, and there is dancing and celebration. After the puja, the deity is immersed in water during a ceremony called visarjan. Hindu migrants, as well as local Hindus, enjoy the festival as a reflection of their native culture. Interestingly, members of the Buddhist community also participate in Durga Puja, celebrating it as Hindus. They engage in the festivities for all ten days of the puja. While many local Hindu tribes do not actively celebrate the puja themselves, they do not complain about the loudspeakers, even though the noise can be quite loud, especially at night.

In the other hand in Jharkhand there is a place Deoghar where a Hindi college Hindi Vidyapith situated where people from north east which has boarding hostel for them since decades but there is no any northeast student one who settle their and rarely participate the local festival and celebrate their festival on street and road . Perhaps they do not settle down permanently or celebrate their festivals openly,



which raises questions about cultural integration, mobility, and long-term plans, or they do not prefer to mix up the people frequently

The Sikh population is abysmal low almost 50 Sikh migrants here and they are mostly engage in business. now some companies established here and there are some Sikh family also live here on temporary basis. One gurudwara is here which is regulated by Delhi ----- . The Sikh community's perseverance in celebrating festivals like Gurburab, despite being a small minority,. The Sikh population is abysmally low; almost 50 sikh migrants are here, and they are primarily engaged in business. Some companies have been established here, and some Sikh families also live here temporarily. One gurudwara is here, and Delhi regulates it -----.

The Muslim migrant population is also present in the area, primarily from Bihar and Bengal. One mosque, along with the local Maulvi, is particularly popular among Bihari and Nepali Hindus as well as Muslims for its religious practices, including jhad-fook and Nazar dharna (faith healing). Most of the Muslims are engaged in business as shopkeepers, with their shops located directly opposite Hindu temples. Hindu and Muslim shops stand side by side, forming a shared commercial space, even though their residential areas are in separate locations

Pasighat's unique cultural mosaic highlights the coexistence of diverse groups, each preserving their traditions while adapting to the local socio-economic dynamics.

The Dangaria Baba puja is a good example of the connection between the local community and migrant populations. Dangaria Baba is a revered deity in Pasighat, (Bhole baba) attracting devotees from diverse religious backgrounds, including Christians, Buddhists, local indigenous traditions, and followers of Donyi-Polo. People visit the Dangaria Baba temple to express their devotion, as Dangaria is seen as a nature god with supernatural abilities that transcend religious differences. Migrants play a significant role in this puja, preparing the traditional prasad, usually Khichdi, which is distributed among all the worshippers. The priest officiating at the temple is also a migrant. Many of the hawkers, predominantly from Bihar, come from the bordering regions of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Together, both the local residents and migrants collaborate to organize the puja, highlighting their mutual respect and cooperation.

V. Economy and Business

The Inner Line Regulation, imposed by the British in 1873, came into effect on November 1 of 1873. Under this regulation, no British subject was allowed to enter certain areas without a formal pass from the relevant authority. Even after independence, this rule remains in force no one can buy property or obtain a trade license except for locally listed tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh. Most migrants, do not possess their own trade licenses and instead conduct business using local tribal trade licenses. They pay a certain amount as rent to those whose licenses they use. However, a few migrants, especially Marwari, Uttarpradesh and Bihari individuals, do have their own licenses, which were issued during British rule and in the Indira



Gandhi era. Some of them own land and shops granted under the British or Indira Gandhi tenure. These individuals also receive tax exemptions and benefits similar to those of the local population.

The shops where the migrants are owner the local tribe can be work under them although there is few shops but there are . The migrant tailors have set up shops specializing in Arunachali traditional attire, which is highly popular among the locals. These tailors craft traditional garments, such as the Galo skirt, catering to the cultural preferences of the community.

Local vegetable shops are located in various areas near residential zones and separate markets. The voter list shows a total population of not more than one lakh, with the local population estimated at around fifty thousand. However, many vegetable and fruit sellers are from the Bihari community, including both Hindus and Muslims. They sell their products in the market alongside companions who are Nepali or local tribal individuals. There has been no significant history of conflict between these groups. A similar scenario is observed in government departments, where migrants comfortably work alongside local staff. A few decades ago, a majority of teachers and professors were from North India, but the situation has changed significantly, and now there is a substantial percentage of local staff in colleges.

It is unique to observe the construction of new buildings, driven largely by migrant labour, predominantly from Bihar. They used to brought here in through contractors, who are often local tribals. This dynamic reflects a mutual understanding between the local and temporary migrants from outside. These workers likely choose to come here due to favorable labour wages, adequate facilities, and a conducive work environment. This collaboration highlights an interesting socio-economic relationship among local and migrants rely on each other to meet the growing demands of development in the region. They meet first time to each other but they rely to each other.

VI. Marriage, Culture and Language

Monogamy is the prevalent form of marriage among the Aadi and Galo communities. The status of women in these societies is stronger compared to that in northern India. Women have a significant role in making family decisions and are generally empowered. There are some migrants from Bihar, Bengal, Assam, and Nepal who marry locals from the tribal communities. The local tribal society does not create significant objections to these unions, and they actively celebrate the marriages and participate in the ceremonies. Although the religions of the migrants may differ from those of the local tribes, both groups celebrate each other's festivals and engage in family events together. Migrants who marry local tribals typically do not face the same issues as they might in their home states.

In Arunachal Pradesh, there are approximately 30 to 50 languages spoken, primarily due to the diverse tribal communities, each having its own language. The most widely spoken languages are Hindi and English, with English serving as the official language. In Pasighat, Hindi is the common language of communication.



Almost everyone can understand and speak Hindi, which facilitates communication among the locals. Migrants from various states also use Hindi to interact; for example, Assamese migrants communicate with Bengali migrants in Hindi. Similarly, Biharis and Rajasthanis speak Hindi with everyone around them. So the main language which connected with migrants with the local public is Hindi. So the worker class migrants can easily survive their decades.

VII. Education and Government Department

The literacy rate in Pasighat is 79.6%. There are numerous private and government schools in the area such as central university Rajiv Gandhi University, the first agricultural university, as well as an Ayurvedic university and a private university called Apex Professional University is established, setting up of new administration government and private offices is increasing. Most of the teachers and professors, and clerks are migrants. Many of these migrants have established various tuition centres for school, college, IIT, medical entrance exams, and UGC NET preparation. Gradually, the participation of the local public in the education sector is increasing. The migrants operate educational institutions and private universities freely, making their role in education crucial.

Environment and Health

The average pollution index is under 50 so the pollution level is low as compared to rest of India. The main river in Pasighat is The Siang is the biggest river in India, which flows all the way from Tibet's Mansarovar Lake. The Siang is the name of the great, great grandfather of the Adis, and it carries the patrilineal culture of the Adi society. The word SI refers to water and Ang refers to heart in Adi language. The Adis, the Siang River represents vibrant energy and strength, controlled solely by the almighty god Donyi-Polo. Siang is deeply rooted with their cultural identity and has inspired a rich heritage of folktales, folksongs, and lullabies in the communities along the Siang Valley. Because of highly respect and regards to the river Siang is comparatively clean and people avoid to throw the garbage in the river. So entire river is clean.

The migrants come from their home state where the water is extremely polluted specially Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Rajasthan. Here they also respect the river Siang. They celebrate the chath puja on the bank of River Siang without any fear. The local public generally does not disturb them.

Food and Medical facility

The medical facilities in Arunachal Pradesh are unsatisfactory. However, the region's extensive and dense forests contribute to a rich variety of herbal medicine. A notable figure in Ayurvedic medicine, who has received the Rashtrapati Award, is well-known in this field. The local tribal groups incorporate many herbal medicinal foods into their diets. Their eating habits involve consuming herbal medicinal foods regularly. In contrast, migrants generally do not significantly alter their eating habits. They typically eat rice twice a day and include other foods similar to those from their home states.



Local tribal cuisine often favours meat from various animals, seasoned with little to no spices, whereas migrants selectively consume certain meats such as mutton, chicken, and fish. Additionally, they are less likely to include herbal vegetables and grasses in their diets. For specialized medical treatment, residents often have to travel to Dibrugarh in Assam, which is 150 km away. This difference in food consumption highlights a cultural divide that has persisted for decades without change.

Reverse Migration

During interviews, I learned that some migrants are selling their properties to local people due to threats they have received. Many have returned to their home states out of fear and dissatisfaction with the local administration. Reverse migration is often observed in the Rajasthani business community and among Nepalis. Individuals owned prime location properties and operated successful businesses. While most migrants do not relocate back to their former states, they still experience apprehension while conducting business here.

It is evident that the new generation of previously migrated individuals is moving to other parts of the country and even to other countries. Most of these individuals are educated and they do not want to continue to live here.

VIII. Conclusion

Pasighat gives the fresh insight how society carry their heritage culture in remote place. It is a diverse country, and people who move just 100 kilometres from their place of origin are often treated as migrants due to differences in culture, language, social practices, and sometimes even appearance. Pasighat serves as an example of this phenomenon. In various regions of India, some states, such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, have distinct characteristics that set them apart. Generally, we see that people are attracted to areas where facilities like metro systems, cosmopolitan environments, and better surroundings are available. However, Pasighat is different. In this place, securing even basic necessities is challenging due to factors such as climate, weather, location, and local food habits. Despite these hardships, migrants have lived there happily for decades. They find it difficult to buy flats in this globalized era, acquire land, or start their own businesses with trade licenses. In brief, the migrants understand that they may not have a promising future plan, yet they choose to live there. This situation proves that many people do not demand much from their fate; they can endure scarcity if they find life to be easier and less stressful.

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