

Report on field trip to India 2014 under the DAAD New Passage to India programme

Host institution in India: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati.

Period of the trip: 24.1.2014 to 18.4.2014

Places visited: I flew in via Delhi and also returned to attend a workshop there. I stayed in Guwahati, and visited the Tezpur and Dibrugarh Universities in Assam, besides many field locations in the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district of Upper Assam as well as in the Longding, Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

Brief description: During my almost three-month long stay in India, of which two were supported by the programme, I organised and participated in a workshop in Delhi, organised a panel and spoke at a conference in Dibrugarh, attended and spoke at a conference in Tezpur, and presented my work at a colloquium at my host institution, IIT Guwahati. I also visited my field and worked with my Tangsa informants. When in Guwahati I spent time discussing my work with the faculty and using the facilities at my host institution, and interacting with academics from other institutions. I also worked intensively on the historical records available at the State Archives in Guwahati.

Conferences attended/ organised and presentations made:

1. *Diversities and Connections: Reconsidering Ethnic Boundaries in Northeast India*. 6-7 Feb. 2014, at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. **Co-organised** the seminar, along with Dr. Philippe Ramirez (CNRS Paris) and Prof. Tanka Subba (Vice Chancellor, Sikkim University) and was also a **panel discussant**.
2. *Understanding contemporary religious reform movements among ethnic communities in India*. **Panel co-organiser**, along with Prof. Sarit Kr. Chaudhuri (RGU, Itanagar), at the Indian Anthropological Congress, 2014, at Dibrugarh University, 21-23 February, 2014. **Presented** a paper titled, '*Rangfraism – the new religion of the Tangsa in Northeast India : best of all worlds*'.
3. *Philosophy of Culture* International Seminar at the Department of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University, March 31 and April 1, 2014, **presented** a paper titled, '*The link between institutionalising traditional belief systems and reinventing cultural identity -- a case study of the Tangsa in north-east India*'.
4. **Invited 90-minute colloquium talk** at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, on the 20th March 2014 titled "*Tangsa for a day: can small ethnic groups survive in Assam?*"
5. **Interacted** with the Bachelor and Master degree students of Anthropology at Cotton University, Guwahati.

Detailed description of the trip: My activities during my stay in India on this trip can be roughly separated into three different locations: the first in Guwahati, the second attending conferences and seminars elsewhere, and the third in the field.

In Guwahati I spent a lot of time at my host institution, discussing my work with some of the faculty members at the Humanities and Social Sciences Department there. I was given access to their facilities and made use of their excellent library and journals; my time at IIT Guwahati proved to be very useful and productive in terms of expanding the bibliography on recent work published from the region. I also worked in the State Archives and Record Room of the Government of Assam, located in Dispur. The colonial records of most parts of north-east India are kept there and it was possible for me to do a thorough search of all material (including maps) relevant to the Tangsa (called Rangpang by the British) during my stay. I also discussed my work with academics – mostly anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists -- working in other institutions in the city notably Gauhati University, Cotton University, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati and the Omeo Kumar Das Institute.

Next, attending (and speaking at) the various workshops and conferences first at Delhi, and later at Dibrugarh and Tezpur, as already listed, helped me to re-establish old contacts and to make some new ones. My panel co-organiser at the Dibrugarh conference, Prof. Sarit K. Chaudhuri (RGU, Itanagar), and I also worked out detailed plans for a possible publication based on the papers which were presented at our panel.

Finally, my time in the field took me to visit three different sets of people. Just after attending the conference in Dibrugarh I went with another senior anthropologist Dr. Philippe Ramirez (Paris) on an exploratory trip to make first contact with the Moran and Motak communities living in the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam. These communities claim to be the earliest inhabitants of that area and still practise many of their unique cultural traditions. However, in recent years, lack of opportunities have forced many younger members of the community to take up arms and join violent insurgent movements. It was a very instructive and productive first meeting and we made plans to do further work with these communities in the future.

I then spent some time with my Tangsa informants in Assam as well as in Changlang, mostly confirming and clarifying material already collected, tying up loose ends and renewing contacts. It has long been claimed that the Tangsa people with whom I have been working the last years and who live mostly in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh are connected to the Naga people living in Nagaland via the Tutsa, the Nocte and the Wancho people who live in the area in between which now comprise the Longding and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore towards the end of my time in the field, I decided to go to those districts to get an impression about the people there. That was a very strenuous and complicated trip as these regions are not well connected, and it was also not possible to make contact beforehand. However, the time spent there has vitally enriched my knowledge of that region and enabled me to gather a lot of rich ethnographic data, which I hope to be able to use in my doctoral dissertation.