LENS LORES
LIFE IN A MOMENT

An Inventory of Ahmad Hossain's Anthropological Photographs from Northeast India
A Project of Visual Histories of Northeast India,
with support from the Modern Endangered Archives Program, UCLA
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Lens Lores: Life in a Moment is an inventory of anthropological photographs by Ahmad Hossain

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# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad Hossain on Photography</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

Archiving Northeast India's Visual History: Preliminary Approaches and Methods

Aparna Sharma, Ankuran Dutta and Raja Das

This article offers an overview of an ethnographically-informed research project entitled Visual Histories of Northeast India that aims to archive endangered modern visual culture materials from the region. These materials, mostly documentary photographs and films developed following India’s independence offer rare and rich visual insight into the under-represented cultures and socio-political histories of northeast India’s diverse communities. The article shares the context and dialogic process that was practiced to survey and inventory the materials under consideration.

Digital Archiving in Northeast India:

Photographs and films bear documentary value for their immediacy, the ability to depict an exact likeness of events and processes in a given place, at a given time (Bazin 2005 (1967), Pinney 1997). As such, these visual media can be seen as constituents of cultural heritage that can aid in writing recent and contemporary histories. Offering depictions, a visible feel of places and peoples, visual media are especially suited to promoting understandings about communities removed from mainstream society. The northeastern states of India are such a region, sparsely known in any serious way to outsiders. While the northeastern region commands diverse ecologies, histories and cultures; an information and perception gap operates in relationship to it. (Sonwalkar 2005 & 2004, Sharma 2015, Baruah 2005) Finding, documenting and making accessible visual media from the region can contribute in advancing historically-sound understandings of the northeast’s landscapes and peoples, thus correcting long-standing under- and mis-representations.

Digital technologies offer vast scope for enhancing access to visual media. They can be used to develop archives made available online as open access resources. Online archives of visual media are especially suited to the northeastern region where a lack of institutional support and natural conditions i.e. humid climate, limit access to and pose risks of depletion and loss to historical materials. To be used as reliable documentary evidence, visual media require specialist preservation, documentation and dissemination.

Visual Histories — Ahmad Hossain’s Photographic Collection:

In this article we discuss preliminary work undertaken to survey, organise and develop a detailed inventory of one
private collection — a body of about 15,000 photographs — focussing on the social and cultural life, natural environment and livelihoods of communities across northeast India. The photographs have been developed by the highly-skilled, Ahmad Hussain, an octogenarian based in Shillong, Meghalaya. Hailing from a well-to-do family, photography has been a passion for Hussain who runs a studio in the heart of Shillong called, Karuz Studios. In a career spanning over 4 decades, Hussain's photography across northeast India has been commissioned and displayed by a number of public agencies. Today, most of his photographs are stored by him privately and they lack an institutional home. Thus, besides being inaccessible to users, they are at high risk of depletion and loss.

We are a group of visual media practitioner-researchers committed to preserving and promoting media that offers a nuanced understanding of the northeastern region, its peoples and the issues they face. To us, Ahmad Hussain’s photographic collection developed between the late-1960s and early-2000s offers rare, detailed and remarkable insight into the social and cultural life-worlds as well as the historical changes that communities of the region have undergone since India's independence, 1947. The inventory we have developed documents Hussain’s entire body of photographs with a view to facilitate potential digitisation so that these historically significant images maybe preserved and made publicly accessible.

**Preliminary Stage of Visual Media Archiving — Survey, Inventory and Summary**

Digital repositories and archives provide quality renditions of original materials that are readily accessible without physical limitations. However, the making of digital and online archives involves more than merely the digitisation of materials. It necessitates research and presentation in an organized way including vital information pertaining to the contents of visual media and the contexts in which they got produced and circulated — all communicated through metadata.

The development of a digital archive can be divided into two-stages of work. The first is a preliminary stage when materials are surveyed and researched to understand their scope, contents, conditions and suitability for. Based on preliminary work a second stage is devised during which materials fit for digitisation are selected, actual digitisation conducted and the digitised materials disseminated. Here, we outline the steps undertaken in the preliminary stage to highlight how Hussain’s photographs were studied and inventoried.

**Orientation:** The preliminary stage of work commenced with an orientation for Hussain and members of our research team. In this orientation the necessity and scope of work involved in surveying and devising an inventory were introduced to all. Here, our research team asserted that photographs, unlike films, are widely produced and used in both public and private settings. (Berger 2003, McGurie 2000) Private contexts pose particular risks to photographs such as devaluation, deterioration or loss due to negligence, limited resources, decay and accidents. Thus organized documentation and preservation are necessary for private collections.

During the orientation we established a mutually agreeable work plan so as not to disrupt Hussain’s personal and professional commitments. During the orientation Hussain and members of the research team also examined some online platforms with which a possible future archive of Hussain’s photographs may sit in conversation. These included the Digital Himalaya collection and the Alkazi Foundation’s Collection of Photography.
Following the orientation an open-ended session to inventory a small album of Hossain’s photographs was undertaken. The album from Mizoram, 1970s, included photographs of public events, natural landscapes, local bazaars, portraits of Mizo people and some of the state’s material culture such as textiles. Studying this album the team developed the first categories that an inventory would include. These were: serial number, photographer’s numbering, item name, description, category, format, copyright and permissions status; and, any special notes for e.g. the condition of the photographs. The making of archives and associated documentation are based on action/field-based research and as such the data generated including inventory categories must be ascertained in relation to the materials, rather than using pre-determined categories that may not necessarily accommodate all the information related to a particular body of materials.

Survey and Inventory: After orientation, the team conducted an in-depth survey of Hossain’s photographs from each of the northeast’s eight states. The survey included organizing the collection and data-gathering. The project team used transparent boxes for storing all photographs. A separate set of boxes was assigned for each state and all photographs were deposited in chronological order.

Data-gathering was done through in-depth conversations with Hossain in which he recollected his memories, shared the contexts in which he worked and, offered any further information from sources including diary entries, notes on contact sheets, supplementary documents and confirmations of information from acquaintances. Data of the kind that we gathered from Hossain is deeply relevant for it establishes the contexts in which his photographs were produced and what their intended focus was. Highlighting and sharing this context and focus contributes to promoting a culture of ethical and fair use whereby materials are appropriately attributed and, both the media and the rights of those who produce them do not get violated. The need for responsible and fair use of historically media has never been more urgent than in present times when content proliferate in the digital and online realms where they may not be appropriately attributed or, their contents clearly understood.

As our survey of Hossain’s photographs expanded we revised the inventory to include more specific categories that would offer a deeper understanding of the materials. Some of the new categories we included were: a) ‘keywords’ pertaining to photograph contents such as the name of a tribe or a place or a festival; b) ‘themes’ i.e. broad fields that the photograph reflects such as ‘culture’, ‘religion’, ‘socio-economic activity’ etc.; c) type of camera used; d) total number of photographs on a given topic; and, e) the date of data entry.

A key component of developing the inventory was devising a master code for all photographs. During our survey we recognised that the numbering Hossain had used while clear to him, may not be legible to a person new to his materials. We decided to develop a master-code that was alpha-numeric including the project name and a photograph number. For example — VH/219 refers to a photograph depicting rubber-tapping with VH being an abbreviation of our project’s name,
Visual Histories, followed by serial number of the photograph. Following this is another alpha-numeric code that references the state and date of a photograph. For the example cited above, the state-specific code is MN-OCC-86-61 to be read as — Manipur-Occupation-Date(1986)-Serial Number (61), with the serial number here referring to the photograph number in the concerned year.

**Summaries:** To conclude our work, after all inventories were developed they were shared with Hossain to review. Following this, short summaries were developed for each state’s inventory that we are including in a guidebook. The guidebook aims to offer an overview of the work undertaken to document Hossain’s photographic collection. The summaries included in it will introduce a lay-reader to the contents of the collection, the contexts and conditions in which Hossain worked. An interested reader may thus get a sense of the materials in Hossain’s collection that they can then pursue for further study in the online archive that we are presently devising.

In conclusion, we assert that visual media can offer new methodologies to complement research in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Therefore, their preservation and dissemination through digital and online platforms must itself be backed by in-depth research that facilitates meaningful and ethical use fit for intellectual inquiry.

**Acknowledgements:** The researchers thank Mr. Ahmad Hossain and the Arcadia Trust funded Modern Endangered Archives Program, UCLA.

**References:**


Ahmad Hossain on Photography

Photography is a very satisfying and creative art form for me. It can express the mood or spirit of a moment; it can tell whole stories behind a moment that has been captured by the camera. I have principally undertaken photography in the northeastern states of India for over four decades and my photographs depict the changes that communities and cultures in this region have undergone. Through my lens I have seen the changes that have come about in our societies.

I have no one favourite photograph that I composed. To my mind, there are stories behind every photograph I have clicked. I do however, want to talk about one photograph that I had taken in Assam. I was completing an assignment for the Handloom & Textiles department of the Government of Assam. During that time all cameras were analogue,
digital technology had not become so popular here. For that assignment I was carrying 4-5 cameras with me to the field sites.

One day I had approached a lady who was weaving and asked her if there was a dark, with no windows in her house. She took me inside a room with only a door and no windows. While I was there I noticed another lady sitting in the courtyard and boiling paddy. Behind her stood a bullock cart. It was dusk and the light was throwing subtle hues. Without wasting a moment, I composed and clicked a photograph from that very spot. That photograph was taken in 1985 and it was not possible at that time to enlarge the photo; but in 2010-2012 I could enlarge it. I feel that that photograph beautifully depicts the whole culture of Assam.

I am not an anthropologist and I don’t know much about anthropology, though my images have often been termed, anthropological. At the beginning of photographic my life in 1963, I had joined the NEFA (Northeast Frontier Agency) Census department. On my first visit there I had been accompanied by the Registrar General of India, Dr. B.K. Roy Burman, who was a very fine anthropologist. I had travelled with him to villages from Rupa near Bomdila to Ziro. I took some photographs of Sherdrukpen tribal people, their social and cultural life in Rupa village. From there we were heading to Bomdila and we had to cover that distance on foothills. There was strict vigilance as the Chinese invasion of 1962 had just happened and our journey was abruptly halted. As our journey got interrupted, Mr. Burman suggested that we visit another place, Doimara, that was walking distance from where we were.

Mr. Burman was very well read and had prepared for the field-visit very thoroughly. He took me to Doimara which was the winter camp of the Sherdrukpen people. He instructed on what all to photograph. He asked me to take photographs from different angles and there was some advice he gave that I will not forget. The advice was that when you take a picture, think it is the first and last time to be at that place, at that time. That place, of that time will not be encountered again. This thought has stayed with me and since that day I have carried this in my photographic practice. As a result I very liberal in my use of films, even today. I do not care about how much film or stock I have used when I am shooting.

I became close to Dr. B. K. Roy Burman and I learned a lot from him about how to take photographs. After our visit to Doimara, he also guided me while taking photographs of the Apatani tribal people in the Ziro village. I have always tried to practice what I learned from Mr. Burman and with time, my photographs have developed this reputation of being anthropological. When I shoot, I don’t think I am making an anthropological picture, but later anthropologists have told me that my photographs have deep anthropological value.

According to me, northeast India is a paradise for anthropologists and photographers. There is such rich cultural and social diversity in this region; so many different ways of living — that anyone who is interested to observe and study different kinds of cultures, will not be disappointed in this region.
As a photographer I think it is very important that one has a good connection to a place or a community or a place that one is documenting. One must think that the people facing the camera are like our own people. Whenever I go to any place, naturally I spend time with the people there. I try to become friendly with people. That helps me in taking photographs. It makes taking photographs meaningful.

But personal connection does not mean being biased in what one documents. A personal connection does not have to impact my lenses in a negative way. A personal connection makes the taking of photographs meaningful. For example, when I took photographs in Mizoram everything there was new to me. My Mizo friends would say that whatever I was looking at were the daily affairs of the Mizos, their everyday life. They would add that they had never thought of taking photographs of their daily affairs. However, I composed all those photographs that my Mizo friends agreed are a very beautiful and valuable record of Mizo people's life.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, in India the preservation facilities for visual media are very sparse. In the north-eastern region, the preservation of cultural materials is very poor. I realise now that I have faced a huge loss by giving up all the negatives and positives of photographs that I developed during the one-year contract work I did in NEFA. I had taken photographs of all the different tribes of NEFA by traveling extensively there in the 1960s. I have not seen those images anywhere again. Those were the most valuable photographs. I regret that.

It is through this project, Visual Histories of Northeast India that I have for the first time thought of preserving my own photographs. After this project started, many local people now visit me for archiving my photographs. On the whole, I would say that very few people think of archiving and preserving things. I feel it is very important to archive and preserve materials. Photographs such as the ones I have made in northeast India document the deep changes in the cultures and ways of living of the people of this region. These things will become history and all historical materials need to be systematically and carefully preserved. This knowledge must be archived.
Arunchal Nokte Dance
Arunachal Pradesh is a mountainous state in the northern-most part of northeast India. Its capital is Itanagar. In colonial times i.e. the early 19th century, it constituted the North Eastern Frontier Tracts (NEFT) of Assam. Between 1913-54 it was renamed as the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA); and continued to be administered as a part of the state of Assam. In 1972 it was recognized as a Union Territory and in 1987, it received statehood, becoming the 24th state of the Indian Union. Arunachal Pradesh shares boundaries with the states of Assam and Nagaland to the south and, international boundaries with Bhutan in the west, Myanmar in the east and, China in the north. The state commands a diverse ethnic and tribal population. There are altogether 26 tribes in Arunachal Pradesh with distinct languages, folklore, customs, and belief systems. The state's major tribes are Adi, Nyishi, Galo, Tagin, Apatani and Mishmi. Nyishi and Adi are the most widely spoken languages in the state. Nepali, Tagin, Bhotia and Wancho are some of the other languages spoken in Arunachal Pradesh. With its diverse society, Arunachal Pradesh is known for its unique cultural practices including dances, festivals and material cultures including handloom weaving.


**Technical Specs:** 120mm B/W and 35mm B/W.

**Cameras Used:** Asahi Pentax 35mm SLR camera, Rolleiflex 120mm TLR camera and, Nikon F90X 35mm (Colour).

**Photography Context:** Arunachal Pradesh is one of the first states where Ahmad Hossain worked as a young photographer and his work can be divided into two phases: an early phase when he contributed photography to government agencies like the Census of India and the Ministry of Home of Affairs. A second phase of photography was undertaken after NEFA became a Union Territory (1972). In this latter phase, most of Hossain’s assignments were independent.

Ahmad Hossain’s photographs from Arunachal Pradesh provide comprehensive insight into the state’s cultural diversity. Over a span of more than 30 years, Hossain has documented the ways of living of numerous communities and how those have evolved over time. The different tribes who Hossain has documented include: the Khampti, Mishmi, Padam, Adi, Galo, Nyishi, Tagin, Wancho, Nocte, Monpa, Tangsa, Bokar, Digaro Mishmi, Gong, Idu Mishmi and Apatani.
Documenting Arunachal Pradesh: Nestled in the Himalayas, Arunachal Pradesh is a lesser known region of northeast India. Its breathtaking natural beauty, variegated landscape and diverse cultures offered Ahmad Hossain rich materials for photographic documentation. Hossain extensively photographed various tribes, their distinct cultures and ways of living. He undertook photography in and around Tezu, Aalo, Itanagar, Khomsa, Daporijo and Tawang. Hossain’s camera focused on varied themes across the sites he documented: some have dense concentrations of tribal peoples; others are remote and quiet landscapes; and yet others are centres of lively economic activities.

Local Environment and Living Practices: Some of the most striking photographs that Hossain developed in Arunachal Pradesh focus on the dances of the state. He documented festive folk dances, ritualistic performances, recreational dances and dance-dramas that depict mythological stories bearing moral messages and values. A few of the dances we glimpse in Hossain’s images include: Rikhampad, Amhinnum, Minyong Punong, Aka, Hogum, Galo, KA Fifai dance and the Tapu war dance. The tribes represented through these dances include the Mishmi, Khampti, Padam Adi, Galo, Bokar, Nyishi, Tagin, Wancho, Nocte, Monpa, Tangsa and Gong. With an eye towards the distinct cultural practices of different tribal communities, Hossain also photographed some festivals including the Oriah and Mopin. Hossain has documented a relatively new cultural festival organized by the state government called the Arunachal Pradesh Spring Festival. It is an annual festival organized in one of the state’s oldest towns, Pasighat. The festival includes a cultural programme that showcases the state’s arts, cultures, eco-adventures, local cuisines and handicrafts.

Hossain’s photographic compositions are characterized by a sense of presence among the peoples and activities that he witnessed. Monks performing a mask dance at the famed Tawang monastery before hundreds of spectators; Tagin women making offerings to a deity at the Mopin festival; an Apatani girl working in a field; a Nyishi girl wearing a decorated head-band at the Mopin festival; a Tangsa girl holding a gong for a dance performance; animal sacrifice during a community ritual; and, Tagin men sharpening their tools to clear a forest — viewers can see glimpses of the vibrant everyday life-worlds of Arunachal Pradesh’s many communities.

Given the bent towards anthropology in Hossain’s work, in Arunachal Pradesh he documented livelihood practices of various communities. Hossain’s detailed documentation of Jhum cultivation aka slash-and-burn, popular across northeast India, comes to mind here. In one set of photographs Tagin women can be seen marching from their village to the forest, burning it, making dribbling sticks and sowing seeds. In some photographs Hossain focuses on

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1 Photographs during the period 1963-66 are not inventoried. These photographs were taken during Hossain’s service period. All the negatives/ positives of the photographs taken during this period are with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The copyright and ownership lie with them.

2 ‘Wancho’ is popularly spelled in two different ways: ‘Wangcho’ and ‘Wancho.’ Visual Histories of Northeast India uses the latter spelling i.e. ‘Wancho.’

3 Some tribes of Arunachal like the Khampti, Digaro Mishmi and Monpa Tribe dance wearing masks that are popularly called as the ‘Ka Fifai dance.’
other cultivated produce and these include images of a coffee plantation in Daporijo; an Apatani paddy field with girl farmers at work; and palm plantations scattered across the state.

Some of the crafts Hossain focused on in Arunachal Pradesh include bamboo basket and furniture-making. While documenting livelihood practices Hossain’s photographs emphasized people at work as opposed to the finished goods they produced. For example, a series of photographs depict Wancho women dehusking rice in their homes using a traditional method. In other images viewers see women manually carrying firewood or knitting in their courtyards. Elsewhere we see men at work: making a shelter using dried leaves or, repairing a gun at their village.

The different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are deeply connected to their natural environments. Their traditional dress and ornaments including headgear, neckpiece and wristbands are made of natural materials, found abundantly in the state’s hilly terrain. Often tied to these materials are the region’s folklore and folk ritual practices. Hossain documented Wancho, Apatani and Monpa women weaving on the traditional loin loom. They can be seen composing distinctive designs that have symbolic meanings for their communities. Some photographs depict material culture in situ; for instance, bison horns and musical instruments hung on the walls of an Apatani house.

As Hossain travelled across the state, he occasionally pictured the natural environment of Arunachal Pradesh. Some photographs depict bison, locally known as mithun, and highly valued in Arunachal’s tribal communities. Natural and infrastructural features such as village roads, canals, bridges and rivers are the subject of some photographs that reveal Arunachal Pradesh as a lived environment. These photographs overcome stereotypical perceptions of the state, which can be traced to colonial times, and that hold the entire northeastern region as remote and inhospitable, in the worst sense.

During his work in Arunachal Pradesh, Hossain documented visits of dignitaries to the state. In 1972 Hossain documented President V V Gir’s visit to Naharlagun, the earlier state capital of Arunachal Pradesh on the occasion of the inauguration of the state. The photographs depict President Giri addressing a public audience and in some images we see him being greeted by the Nocte and the Nyishi tribal peoples. In 1976 Hossain documented President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh. We see him being welcomed by the then Lt. Governor K A A Raja and being greeted by the Adi and the Apatani tribal (Footnotes) peoples. In 1980 Hossain documented Lt. Governor R N Haldirpur and Former Director of Sangeet Natak Akademi, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay’s visit to Tezu where they attended an open field cultural exhibition of different tribes of the state. The exhibition was organized by the DIPR, Arunachal Pradesh State Government.

The photographer’s notes: One of the earliest and most important influence on Hossain was the renowned anthropologist, B. K. Roy Burman. Burman was Deputy Registrar General of the Census of India, the organization that had hired Hossain to document Arunachal Pradesh’s tribal population between 1963-66. Hossain’s

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4 A dribbling stick is an agricultural tool. It is a pointed wooden stick used for making holes in the ground so that seeds, seedlings or small bulbs can be planted.
photography assignments for the Census of India were overseen by Burman who noted in them the workings of an unrecognized anthropological eye. Burman, Hossain recollects, guided him in the nuances of anthropologically informed documentation. Following his exchange with Burman, Hossain developed the understanding that a meaningful photograph of human subjects is one that situates them in their social and cultural context. Hence in Hossain’s entire body of work it can be noted that his compositions seldom extract human figures out of their environments say through a blurred or soft-focus background. Hossain’s compositions often depict people in active terms, doing some kind of work or activity. The framing is such that people are seen working in their immediate milieu, which in turn gives the viewer a sense of the conditions in which people live, what the world they inhabit looks and feels like. Hossain expresses a deep sense of gratitude to Burman for introducing him to the field of Visual Anthropology.

Looking back at his early years of work in Arunachal Pradesh, Hossain remembers his travels to the interior regions of the state on foot. A number of journeys involved long treks aka foot-marches in which he would often be accompanied by a team of 6-7 government officials. Some of these include: a 2-days march from Yeangtiang/Ingtiang village to Dalbing; a 3-days march from Daporijo to Ram Singh to Tallha; a one-day march from Ziro to Tsara; a one-day march from Tezu to the bank of Lohit river and to Chowkham village on foot; and then a one-day march to Momong village. At that time, there was no surface transportation to these locations. On these foot-marches Hossain and the entire team would interact with local communities who he remembers as being very hospitable. He also remembers offering presents to villagers including tea leaves, shawls, etc. In the 1970s infrastructural development picked up in Arunachal Pradesh and many parts of the state got connected with local transportation.

Hossain undertook a number of assignments with the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. In 1980, the Publicity Department had planned a 15-days cultural exhibition representing various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Hossain was invited to develop photographs for this exhibition with a condition that on completion of the project he would supply the department with 100 colour transparencies of the images he developed. This invitation was a great honour for Hossain and it reflected his growing reputation as a photographer of northeast India. Having worked previously in the state he commanded depth knowledge about the cultures of Arunachal Pradesh’s various tribes and at one event, he remembers, he nearly served as a guide explaining the cultures and practices of all the tribes and sub-tribes represented in the exhibited to a wide audience.

As Ahmad Hossain browses through his albums he notes how over the years the life-worlds he had documented have changed. The Apatani tribal women he had photographed used to wear nose plugs called, Yating Houillo. 24 years after having photographed them, on a return visit to Arunachal Pradesh he noted that the daughters of those who he had photographed were not wearing the Yating Houillo. He states: ‘The changes in the culture and beliefs have been immense and, the photographs record this transition very humbly.’ Another notable change he observes is in the state’s architecture. When Hossain had travelled and documented villages, tribal communities tended to live in clusters, close to one another, the closeness serving as a form of protection from outsiders. ‘The social
security of the villagers was a concerning issue at that time and it was addressed by collective efforts, by living in groups. With time the plans for housing have changed to less clustered housing. When I visited Apatani villages in 2004 the houses were in lower densities, fewer houses together”; Hossain stated.

GLOSSARY

Oriah Festival: This festival at Longding aims at the unification of all the Wancho villages irrespective of their origin of migration to the present settlements. Held on 16th of February every year, they exhibit elaborate headgears, colourful clothing and props used while dancing.

Mopin Festival: The Mopin Festival is an agricultural festival celebrated by the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh who reside in East Siang and West Siang districts.

Rikhampad Dance: This is a medley of dances and songs collectively performed by one of the largest tribes, the Nyishi Tribes of Lower Subansiri district during the Nyokum festival introduced by their migrated forefathers “Abotani” to honour various Gods.

Punong Dance: Ponung dance is a celebratory dance to mark the arrival of the crop season based on mythological songs where young women execute the dance holding each others’ hands and moving in circles.

Monkey Dance: Beesu-Naayi or Monkey Dance is a unique dance where performer mimics a monkey. The dance is based on the mythological story of four brothers: Niinur Bote (a blacksmith), Robo (an evil spirit), Tani (man) and Beesung (monkey), in which Beesung secretly kills Niinur Bote on the instigation from Robo. Hence it is also known as the Monkey Dance.

Nocte Dance (Chalo Dance): The Chalo or Nocte Dance is part of Arunachal Pradesh’s most awaited festival, called Chalo Loku, takes place every year in October and November and is a celebration of paddy cultivation of the Nocte tribe.
**Oriah Dance:** Oriah dance is performed during Oriah festival on 16th of February every year displaying extensive postures with gongs and drums that assist the dancers to derive rhythm.

**Tapu War Dance:** Tapu war dance is performed by only males during the festival of Aran. It is performed to drive away evil spirits from villages. In the Tapu war dance, the dancers vigorously re-enact the actions of war, its gory details and the triumphant cries of the warrior. It is celebrated on 7th of March every year to herald the season of shifting cultivation.

**Khampti Dance:** Khampti Dance is a dance performed by the Khampti tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Khampti’s basically follow Buddhism and this dance form is similar to the religious dance dramas of the Buddhists. Through dance drama, Khamptis unfurl mythical stories that deliver a moral. Khampti dance is mainly performed during religious festivals such as Khamsang, Potwah and Sankian, which is the most entertaining part of the festival. In this dance form, women do not take part in the performance and every role is played by the male members of the group.

**Mask Dance:** Some tribes of Arunachal believe that ghosts sweep down and kidnap nubile girls. The Ka Fifai dance or Mask Dance is performed using elaborate headgear and even masks. The dance recreates the drama of a ghost kidnapping a girl and the tribe members rescuing the girl with the ghost receiving just desserts.

**Idu Mishmi Dance:** The Idu Mishmis have a ritual-dance and a fertility-dance. The ritual-dance is performed by the priest or priestess in the local ceremonies Ai-ah, Ai-him, Mesalah and Rren.

**Amhinnum:** Amhinnum is a dance relating to Jhum cultivation.

Mithun: Mithun, also known as Gayal or ‘Cattle of Mountain’ is an important bovine species of Arunachal Pradesh and is also the state animal.

**Jhum Cultivation:** Jhum cultivation, also known as Slash-and-Burn cultivation is a practice of cultivation where a piece of land or forest land is cleared, burnt and then used for cultivation. This results in the soil being rich in potash and other minerals to sustain the crop.

**Ranganadi River:** The Ranganadi River is a sub-tributary of the Brahmaputra River in the Indian state of Assam. The river originates from Nilam, Marta and Tapo mountain ranges of Himalayan foothills of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Yating Houlo:** Yating Houlo is a black nose plug adorned by the Apatani women. Many Apatani women believe these nose plugs and tattoos define them as members of their tribe.

**Byopa:** Byopa is a traditional headgear of Nyishi tribe comprising a beak and feather of a hornbill atop a cane cap considered as one of the most important cultural attire. It is generally worn during important socio-cultural occasions to symbolise the identity of the tribe.
ASSAM

Assam is one of the largest states in northeastern India that extends south of the eastern Himalayas along the river Brahmaputra. It is bordered by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh to the north; Nagaland and Manipur to the east; Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Bangladesh to the south; and West Bengal to the west.


Technical Specs: 35 mm/colour; 35 mm/BW; 120 mm/BW.

Cameras Used: Asahi Pentax 35mm SLR camera, Rolleiflex 120mm TLR camera.

Photography Context: Hossain travelled mostly to the upper reaches of Assam including Haflong, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar. These areas are dominated by tribal populations and hence he extensively covered the life and culture of Assam’s tribal peoples. Hossain holds that in Assam an admixture of different tribes can be found in different parts of the state. Prominent tribal groups include the Mar⁵, Zeme Naga⁶, Dimasa⁷, Hrangkhawl⁸, Karbi⁹, Phakial¹⁰, Tai Ahom tribe¹¹, Bishnupriya Manipuri¹², Lalung¹³, Chutia¹⁴, Nyishi¹⁵, Rajbongshi¹⁶, Kuki¹⁷, Rabha¹⁸, and Deori¹⁹. He has documented persons from a range of tribal groups including the Zeme Naga, Dimasa, Karbi, Phakial, Tai Ahom, Lalung, Nyishi, Karbi, Kuki, Dimasa, Mishing, Rabha, Rajbongshi, Bodo and Chutia groups — often depicting men and women from these communities in their traditional attire, posing in front of their homes or village compounds and, occasionally performing their traditional dances. He undertook photography in the following locations: Naharkatia, Nam Phake village, Dibrugarh district, Sonitpur district, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Haflong, Dudhnoi, North Lakhimpur, Maibang, Nagaon, Kokrajhar, Hojai, Jorhat and Sivasagar.

⁵ Also written as Hmar tribe, migrated from China and settled first in Burma and scattered in and around Manipur, Mizoram and North Cachar Hills in Assam.
⁶ Zeme Naga is a Naga tribe from northeastern India spread across Peren district in Nagaland; Tamenglong, Senapati in Manipur and Dima Hasao district (NC hills) in Assam.
⁷ The Dimasa are an ethno-linguistic community presently inhabiting Assam and Nagaland states in northeastern India.
⁸ Hrangkhawl is one of the 21 scheduled tribes of Tripura state of India also found in the North Cachar Hills of Dima Hasao district, Assam.
Art and Culture: Dance plays a very significant role in Assamese culture with most tribes having their own distinctive styles of movement. OSSAIN has photographed the ornate Satriya\textsuperscript{10} dance, one of the two classical dances from northeast India, performed at a Satra\textsuperscript{21} in North Lakhimpur. Then are photographs of Mishing men and women performing the Assamese folk dance, Bihu\textsuperscript{22} at their village home. There are pictures of Tai Ahom men and women performing a dance in Dibrugarh and Dimasa musicians performing during a dance at Maibang.

Local Environment and Living Practices: Silk production and weaving are integral to Assamese culture and, Assam boasts the highest concentration of handlooms and weavers in India. OSSAIN was contacted by the Assam state textile ministry to document and publish a monograph on handloom weaving in Assam. OSSAIN got deeply involved in this project, inspired by the motifs and methods unique to the different tribal communities of this region. He undertook documentation in different parts of Assam. He extensively covered weaving in Sualkuchi, a small village outside Guwahati that is considered as the hub of weaving in Assam. Besides Sualkuchi he also travelled to Haflong and surrounding areas where he undertook documentation of weaving among a range of tribal communities.

Across the northeastern region, weaving is principally performed by women and they work with two kinds of looms: the backstrap or loin-loom and the shuttle-based handloom. OSSAIN documented women from a range of communities, weaving in their domestic spaces on one of the two looms. For instance, we see images of a Nyishi tribal woman, a Karbi woman and a Phakiai woman — all weaving on backstrap looms in their village homes. There are numerous images of women weaving on the shuttle-based handloom. These include images of Lalung, Zeme Naga, Tai Ahom, Hmar, Rabha and Rajbongshi women — all seen weaving on their handlooms installed in their village homes. There are also images of women performing supplementary activities such as spinning and ginning of cotton such as those of a Bodo, Lalung and Deori women. In a unique photograph we see a Manipuri woman preparing cotton for Laisingphee weaving\textsuperscript{23} at

\textsuperscript{9} The Karbi community is the principal indigenous community in the Karbi Anglong district and West Karbi Anglong district of the Indian State of Assam.

\textsuperscript{10} Phakiai also known as Tai Phake belong to the Tai-speaking indigenous ethnic group living in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district of Assam.

\textsuperscript{11} The Ahom or Tai-Ahom is an ethnic group from the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

\textsuperscript{12} The Bishnupriya Manipuris are a group of Indo-Aryan people that are indigenous to the Indian state of Manipur and are also found in neighbouring Assam, Tripura and northeastern Bangladesh.

\textsuperscript{13} Tiwa (Lalung) is an ethnic group mainly inhabiting the states of Assam and Meghalaya in northeastern India.

\textsuperscript{14} The Chutia kingdom emerged in early medieval times in eastern Assam on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra and was one among other ethnic kingdoms—Ahom, Dimasa and Tripura.

\textsuperscript{15} The Nyishi community is the largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh in Northeastern India.
her village near Hojai. Traditionally all looms are installed in the front or backyards of village homes and in most of Hossain’s photographs, we see these as the backdrop. However, because Hossain often documented exhibitions and trade fairs, there are some images that depict weaving as a display during an exhibition. For example; images of Dimasa women engaged in weaving activities during an exhibition in Maibang and a Dimasa woman weaving on the handloom and ginning cotton\(^{24}\) also seen at the same exhibition.

**Tea and Assam:** Assam is the tea capital of India. Without a visit to a tea garden, no documentation of Assamese life can be considered complete. Hossain has taken pictures of sprawling tea gardens where we see workers plucking leaves. These were photographed in the tea gardens around the Kaziranga area. There are number of portraits depicting typical tea pickers i.e. women with baskets on their back with a head rest for support.

**Tribal Ways of Living:** Rice is the staple food of Assam and much of tribal everyday life centers around rice. In order to represent this Hossain has taken extensive pictures of rice and activities associated with it. There are numerous photographs that focus on rice pounding, dehusking activities onto preparations of rice such as rice cakes often sited in the courtyards of village homes. Specifically, there are images of Dimasa women pounding rice in a dheki\(^{25}\) or urai\(^{26}\) for making pitha\(^{27}\). Then there are pictures of a Mishing woman husking paddy and pounding rice. We also see Dimasa woman pounding rice to make pitha. Some photographs depict Phakial men and women undertaking paddy winnowing in a village in Naharkatia. Elsewhere we see them sorting seedlings from paddy bundles for sowing and storing paddy in their courtyard. In one set of images Hossain photographs a Tai Ahom woman boiling paddy in her courtyard. Last, we see images of Dimasa and Phakial farmers thrashing paddy using their cows.

**Environment and Geography:** Assam is rich in forest resources and home to the famed Kaziranga National Park\(^{28}\), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Kaziranga is the only landscape where the great Indian

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16 Koch Rajbongshi is an ancient tribe originally from the ancient Koch kingdom.
17 The Kuki people are an ethnic group native to the Mizo Hills (formerly Lushai), a mountainous region in the southeastern part of Mizoram and Manipur in India.
18 The Ahom or Tai-Ahom is an ethnic group from the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
19 The Deori are one of the major indigenous communities of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and are commonly associated with Bodo-Kachari group.
20 Sattriya, or Sattriya Nritya, is a major Indian classical dance with origins in the Krishna-centered Vaishnavism monasteries of Assam, and attributed to the 15th century Bhakti movement.
21 Satras are institutional centers associated with the Ekasarana tradition of Vaishnavism, largely found in the Indian state of Assam and neighbouring regions.
single-horned Rhinoceros is found. Hussain documented the Kaziranga National Park taking pictures of numerous birds and animals in the wild such as the eagles, wild elephants and the one-horned Rhino. He also documented the National Park including images of tourists and rest-houses.

During his time in Assam, Hussain also documented some landscapes of the state. These include images of the Rudrasagar and Joysagar lakes at Sibsagar; and, expansive views of the mighty Brahmaputra river seen at sunset.

Religion: The Satras of Assam are prominent institutional centers associated with Vaishnavism in the region. Satras are centers of prayer, culture, community gathering and learning. Appreciating their significance in Assamese culture, Hussain visited a Satra in North Lakhimpur. He took photographs of the Satra structure from different angles and documented ceremonial activities inside it. Other than Satras, he also composed photographs of prominent places of worship such as the Sivadol, Joydol and Devidol temples at Sibsagar. He also photographed a Hanuman Mandir and stone sculptures of Hanuman and Ganesha at the Mahabhairab temple complex in Tezpur.

Other than Hindu places of worship, Hussain has focused on the presence of Buddhism in Assam by photographing a Buddhist temple in the Namphakial village in Naharkatia where Tai Ahoms, who largely follow Buddhism, reside.

History Through Photography: The Ahom dynasty (1228–1826) ruled the Ahom Kingdom in present-day Assam for nearly 598 years. The Ahoms built a number of structures that are archaeological and architectural marvels. Through Hussain’s camera we get a glimpse into the rich history of Assam as we see images of the magnificent structures the Ahoms built. Hussain photographed the Talatal Ghar, Rang Ghar, Kareng Ghar and the Charaideo Maidam documented at Sibsagar. In other photographs related to Assamese history Hussain photographed clay idol of deities and demons at the Assam State Museum and brass sculptures of idols & deities along with inscriptions and stone sculptures inside the Cole Park in

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22 Bihu is a set of three important Assamese festivals in the Indian state of Assam – ‘Rongali’ or ‘Bohag Bihu’ observed in April, ‘Kongali’ or ‘Kati Bihu’ observed in October, and ‘Bhogali’ or ‘Magh Bihu’ observed in the month of January.
23 The Lasingphee or quilted cotton material is woven on a fly shuttle loom.
24 A machine for separating cotton from its seeds.
25 It is an agricultural tool used mostly in Assam and Bangladesh to thresh and separate rice grains from their outer husks.
26 Urali is a sand clock-shaped grinding tool.
27 Rice cake is made on special occasions.
28 Kaziranga National Park situated in Assam state of India, is a UNESCO world heritage sites of India and known for Great Indian one horned Rhinoceros.
29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36
Chilralekha Udyan, Tezpur. Hussain has also documented some rare manuscripts such as those of the Tai Ahoms preserved in Dibrugarh; manuscripts at select Assamese Satras and inscriptions at a Satra in North Lakhimpur.

**Photographer’s Notes:** A lasting memory of working in Assam for Ahmad Hussain is the documentation he conducted of Assamese handwoven textiles. With characteristic alertness he notes that some of the designs women weave, overlap with each other even though they may come from distinct tribal and social groups. While he was personally interested in Assamese textiles, it was his fortunate encounter with the Director of the Handloom section of the State Ministry of

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29 The temple is popularly known as the Kesavanarayan or Joydol Temple. It was built during the reign of Ahom king Rudra Singha and dedicated to Lord Vishnu.
30 Dedicated to Goddess Durga, Devi Dol is a centuries old temple located in Sivasagar district, Assam.
31 The ancient Mahabhairav Temple is located at a hillock on the northern part of Tezpur town in Assam, India.
32 The Nam Phake or Nam Phakial village is the largest of the Tai-Phake villages of Assam. All of the people in this village are Buddhist in religion.
33 The Talatal Ghar is a 18th century palace and military base located in Rangpur, 4 km from present-day Sivasagar, Assam, India.
34 Rang Ghar is a double storeyed structure from the historical treaures of Assam (Assam) and was built by Ahom King.
35 Kareng Ghar is the name given to four storeys of Rangpur palace, which served as the palace of Ahom royal family.
36 Charaideo Maidam refers to a group of pyramids in Assam. The term 'Maidam' though close to the Hindi term, 'maidan' (field) refers to a tumulus in Assam.
37 Cole Park, Tezpur is a very picturesque park near the centre of Tezpur. It has recently been renamed as Chitralekha Udyan. Both names are synonymous.
Textiles, Indrajit Gupta, that led to the monograph on Assamese weaving for which Hossain travelled to Assam and undertook photography. Hossain feels that Gupta was committed to popularising Assamese culture and it was for that reason that the monograph on handloom textiles was commissioned by him. Gupta provided Hossain infrastructural support including an official and a vehicle to travel through Assam in order to conduct his documentation. Unfortunately Gupta died before the publication of the monograph and Hossain laments this.

GLOSSARY

Ahom dynasty: The Ahom dynasty ruled the Ahom Kingdom in present-day Assam, India for nearly 598 years. The dynasty was established by Sukaphaa, a Shan prince of Mong Mao who came to Assam after crossing the Patkai mountains.

Rice winnowing: Rice winnowing is a process of separation of small and large rice grains by air flow.

One horn Rhino: The greater one-horned rhino is identified by a single black horn about 8-25 inches long and a grey-brown hide with skin folds, which gives it an armor-plated appearance.

Sukaphaa: Sukaphaa (r. 1228–1268), also Siu-Ka-Pha, the first Ahom king in medieval Assam, was the founder of the Ahom kingdom and the architect of Assam.

Sivasagar: Sivasagar the sea of Shiva, is a city and headquarters of the Sivasagar district, Assam.
A state in Northeast India, with the city of Imphal as its capital, the name of Manipur means the ‘Land of Gems’ or translated as ‘Jewelled land’. Once a princely state during the days of the British Indian Empire, it was through constant efforts by its people between 1917 and 1939 that the state went for a democratic set up. The princely state of Manipur negotiated with the British administration in the late 30’s to be a part of the Indian Empire, rather joining Burma, which was being separated from India. These negotiations were interrupted with outbreak of World War II in 1939 and a change in leadership led to signing of the Merger Agreement, merging the kingdom into India, which led to its becoming a Part C State. This sowed the seed for many disputes and differing visions leading to a 50-year insurgency in the state for independence from India, with periodic episodes of violence among ethnic groups in the state. The state shares its borders with the two regions of Myanmar, Sagaing Region to the east and Chin State to the south. It is also bounded by the intra-state border of the states of Nagaland to its north, Mizoram to its south and Assam to its west.

With a total population of 2,855,794 as per 2011 Census, a majority of Manipur’s population belongs to the Meitei community, while other groups of people are Nagas in the North and the Kukis in the South. Meitei is the major language spoken by the people of Manipur which is the lingua franca in Manipur also listed in the Eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution. Other Sino-Tibetan languages like the Kuki-chin languages – Thadou being one and the Naga languages like Tangkhul, Poula, Rongmei, Mao, among others are also widely spoken.

There are 33 recognised tribes in the state which either fall under the Nagas or the Kukis, the two different conglomerates of Manipur tribals. The two communities are differentiated mainly from their distinctive dialects, costumes, cultures and traditions. Ahmed Hussain through his photographs covers the tribes from both the conglomerates, namely the Kabui Naga, Meitei, Rengma, Tangkhul Naga, Mao, Mar and the Paite tribes and in a way attempts to bring into life the cultural diversity prevalent in each tribe through his lenswork.

Several development of the traditional dance forms including the classical Manipuri dance, Raas Leela, Lai Haraoba,
among have remained the predominant cultural identity of the Manipuri people. Ahmad Hussain has documented the classical dance forms that are more in tune with the religious beliefs. One of them has been the Pung Cholom dance which is a unique classical dance of Manipur usually a prelude to the Ras Lila. Other photograph’s of his includes the Lai Haraoba dance celebrated to please the deities. Some other dance forms are reflective of the individual cultural identities of the different communities like that of the Khamba Thaibi Dance or the Rengma dance. Noteworthy, that a very limited representation of the Manipuri culture finds way into the mainstream media, which could be attributed to the lack of documentation. Ahmed Hussain through his tell tale lenses gives out the most vivid narrative of the different tribes, cultural diversity as well as an unbiased insight into the structure of the socio-economic and socio-cultural structure of the state.


Technical Specs: 120mm B/W and 35mm B/W.

Cameras Used: Asahi Pentax 35 mm SLR camera, Rolleiflex 120 mm TLR camera and Nikon F90X 35 mm Colour

Photography Context: The pictures of Manipur are clicked by the photographer for his own personal collection and were not part of any assignment. Ahmed Hussain undertook an expedition to Manipur for social visits and this quest to explore the richness of Manipuri culture and way of life has led to a rich collection of photographs that are an anthropological treasure. Without being bounded by any assignment, he extensively covered the state ranging from Imphal west to east covering all the adjoining areas around Imphal, Ukhrul, Mao, Churachandpur district, Manipur, Kangleipak, Nagaland (during hornbill festival), near Koina temple, Yearipak area, Jiribum - between Manipur and Cachar border, Lamphalpat, Ukhrul, Churachandpur Mao village and Moirang. There have been pictures taken at Ukhrul, Nubgbi, Zoo, Iroisemba, Imphal, Orchid Preservation Centre, Khongkawpat along with Moreh in the Burma border.

Most of the pictures were taken in the year 1985, 1986 and 1991. A few pictures were taken by the photographer in the year 2009 during a trip to the Govinda Jee Temple, east Imphal and a few pictures were taken on his visit to the Hornbill festival, Nagaland in the year 2009 where Manipur’s cultural troupe participated.

Documenting Manipur: Manipur, has two distinct physical regions, one an outlying area of rugged hills and narrow valleys, and within the boundaries of these hill are flat plains along with associated landforms which adds to the picturesque view of the state. The state is well known for its diverse biodiversity as it falls within the Indo-Burma hotspot of the world. These natural diversities have been extensively covered by the photographer. Pictures of different zoo birds at Manipur Zoological garden, pictures of the Sangai which is an endemic and endangered subspecies of Eld’s deer found only in Manipur also the state animal find way into his images. The photographer has also taken pictures of the Loktak lake which is the largest natural freshwater lake, famous for its phumdis

40 Ras Lila is one of the eight major Indian classical dance forms, originating in Manipur. This dance form is characterized by devotional themes of Madhura Raas of Radha-Krishna that are portrayed with gentle eyes and soft peaceful body movement.

41 Hornbill is an annual festival in Nagaland that showcases the rich cultural heritage of different tribes from Northeast.
Moreh is a border town located on the India–Myanmar border in Tengnoupal district of Manipur.

Capturing the Agrarian economy and livelihood: Manipur as a state has been self-sufficient in a way that it relies solely on its agrarian economy. Hussain through his extensive travelling into the length and breadth of the state has tried to establish this element of a sustainable economy as well as give a detailed insight into some of the socio-economic practices. Some of the photographs include the detailed coverage of the paddy cultivation which is done by different communities. The fact that the photographer had been able to identify the groups engaged in the traditional agrarian practices is because most people adorn the traditional dress three decades back in the day to day life.

Different communities engaged in the plantations have been photographed like that of the tea cultivation, coffee cultivation as well as the rubber cultivation which were the binding elements of the rural economy. Pictures of Manipuri people fishing at a fish farm as well as the pictures of people working at the Heirit Fruit processing centre at Lamphal Pat, poultry farm at Ukhrl with its owner feeding the chickens, piggery farms, general view of maize production field, dairy products processing by the workers at a dairy farm, men engaged in hatching activities in the hatchery have been taken. Ahmad Hussain has taken exclusive pictures of people working at the Manitron TV production unit under Government of Manipur with its employees during their working hours and has also taken pictures of the rickshaw manufacturing factory at Imphal which has been reflective of an active economic machinery in progress during that time.

Women at the helm of affairs in Manipur: Some of the most striking photographs that Hossain developed in Manipur focus on the womenfolk of the state. Women have always played a significant role in the state building of Manipur. A sizeable number of images show women playing a pivotal role in running the socio economic thread of the state. Pictures of the Ima market, which is also known as Ima Market or Nupi Keithel (women’s market) is a market run exclusively by women in Imphal. There are a huge chunk of photographs that have been taken of woman being actively involved in the fishery, weaving, paddy cultivation, food processing, harvesting of rice plants, plucking chilies after its mass production, mushroom cultivation or rearing cocoon as a process of sericulture. There are also pictures of Mao women harvesting potatoes from the field, some plucking fruit from trees, undergoing tailoring class or engaging in activities under some industrial units in Imphal that reveals a lot about the identity driven women of Manipur. These pictures have been an eye opener of sorts to understand the level of involvement of the women in Manipur in the socio economic activities of the state. Women have also been seen working in industries as well as participate in work like loading and unloading of rice bags in and from trucks in Moirang. Interestingly the pictures were taken nearly three decades ago and are reflective of the independent streak and the very spirit and strength of Manipuri women like women riding scooter on the main street for their daily mobilization and riding cycles for running their daily errands.

A display of its Material culture: Manipur ranks the fourth position in terms of the number of looms in the country.
Manipuri dance dolls are hand-made, handly crafted Solid Dolls based on Manipuri classical dance Manipuri.

There are also pictures of an artist making Manipuri dancing doll as part of a traditional business. There are pictures that showcase various Nungbi potteries, bamboo canes of Manipur at the Craft center, Meitei

A hint at the history of Manipur: The Battle of Imphal took place in the region around the city of Imphal, from March until July 1944. Japanese armies attempted to destroy the Allied forces at Imphal and invade India, but were driven back into Burma with heavy losses. Together with the concurrent Battle of Kohima on the road by which the encircled allied forces at Imphal were relieved, the battle was the turning point of the Burma campaign, part of the South-East Asian theatre of World War II. There are pictures taken of the war cemetery of the second world war when the Japanese tried to invade Manipur These pictures are a picture of the Shaheed Minar in Imphal a statue of Netaji Statue at INA Matyrs' Memorial Complex in Moirang and a frontside view of Kangla gate in Imphal hints at the history of Manipur’s involvement in the World War II. Ahmad Hussain

The Japanese were defeated at Kohima and Imphal, many of the Japanese deaths resulting from starvation, disease and exhaustion suffered during their retreat.

Given the bent towards anthropology in Hossain’s work, in Arunachal Pradesh he documented livelihood practices of various communities. Hossain’s detailed documentation of Jhum cultivation aka slash-and-burn, popular across northeast India, comes to mind here. In one set of photographs Tagin women can be seen marching from their village to the forest, burning it, making dribbling sticks and sowing seeds. In some photographs Hossain focuses on other cultivated produce and these include images of a coffee plantation in Daporijo; an Apatani paddy field with girl farmers at work; and palm plantations scattered across the state.

As a native of northeast India, Hossain documented local crafts-based livelihood practices with much enthusiasm. Some of the crafts he focused on in Arunachal Pradesh include bamboo basket and furniture-making. While documenting livelihood practices Hossain’s photographs emphasized people at work as opposed to the finished goods they produced. For example, a series of photographs depict

The photographer’s notes: Hossain claims that his exploration of Manipur has been very fruitful as he started documenting the daily record of what he came across. He was however aware of the fact women held a very significant position in the Manipuri society and the women are extremely industrious. Ahmad says, “Manipuri ladies riding cycle for their daily communication to market as opposed to the normal trend of the male office-goers were

43 Manipuri dance dolls are hand-made, handly crafted Solid Dolls based on Manipuri classical dance Manipuri.
44 INA Matyrs' Memorial Complex is a war memorial at Moirang, Manipur, dedicated to the soldiers of the Indian National Army
45 Cultivation of the earth after clearing for jhum cultivation is usually accomplished by hoe or dribbing stick
quite an amazing sight”. He was also very pleased to see the industrious streak of Manipuri women, which was why he took detailed pictures of the ‘Ima Market’.

Ahmad Hussain’s attempt was to capture a slice of the war history in Manipur when Japan’s move to invade the state was thwarted. Hossain wanted to understand how recovering of bombs of World War – II in the state could be a normal affair this was the impetus that made him document pictures of ‘War Cemetry’, ‘Shaheed Minar’ among others.

GLOSSARY

**Ima Keithel**: Ima Market or Nupi Keithel (women’s market) is a market run exclusively by women in Imphal, India.

**Loktak Lake**: Loktak Lake is the largest natural freshwater lake and ancient supervolcanic caldera in India.

**Nungbi pottery**: It is the Longpi (Nungbi) village though that has taken the lead outside the state and made a mark with its black earthenware crafted by Tangkhul tribe who reside in Nungbi village.

**Heirit Moraceae**: Elephant ear, Fig Heirit Moraceae Fruit and Bark is used against dysentery, diabetes and lungs disease.

**Khamba Thoibi**: It is a folk dance of Moirang, an ancient kingdom of Manipur. The dance was believed to be first performed by Khamba, a legendary hero in Manipuri mythology and his lover Thoibi, the then princess of Moirang in the premises of the ancient Lord Ebudhou Thangjing Temple.

**Ngada Festival**: It is the harvest festival of the Rengma tribe

**Japan War Memorial Complex at Maibam Lokpa Ching**: Japanese war veterans constructed a monument at the foot of this hill and it was named as “Indian Peace Memorial”.

**Kawna Craft**: The wild water reed, bulrush grown in Manipur is called kauna and a number of Kauna products were originally made for local utility purposes.

**Mura**: Mura is a traditional seat made of bamboo and cane in Manipur.
Meghalaya Crossing Simsang River
Meghalaya — *abode of clouds* — is a state in Northeastern India, formed by carving out two districts from the state of Assam: the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Garo Hills on 21st January 1972.

To the south, the state is surrounded by the Bangladeshi divisions of Mymensingh and Sylhet. To its west, it is surrounded by the Bangladeshi division of Rangpur, and to its north and east by the Indian state of Assam.


**Technical specs:** 35 mm/colour

**Cameras used:** Asahi Pentax 35mm SLR camera/ Nikon F90 35 mm SLR

**Photography Context:** Of all the states Hossain photographed, Meghalaya, his home state is the one he has documented in greatest detail. Meghalaya is divided into autonomous councils named after the three major matrilineal communities of the state: the Garo,* the Khasi,* and the Jaintia.* Ahmad Hossain covered all the tribal communities of Meghalaya. His photographs emphasize their lifestyles and means of livelihood, giving a rich insight into the cultural life-worlds of each community. Being a resident of the state, he travelled extensively and attended numerous cultural, social and political events. He undertook photography in the following locations: Sadolpar, Rongram Garo Hills, Tura Bara Bazaar, Dawki Bazaar, Dawki Muktapur, Jaintia, Tyrshang village, Sohmyydong Ruga, Balchol, Songsak, Darugiri-Songsak Road, Nongtalang village, Ampati village, Sasatgre village, Tura, Tarang Blang village, Kwatar village, Pamatadong village, Balpakram village, Nongboreh village, Pdeng Amslang, Jowai, Adokgre and the East Khasi Hills. On his visits he was often an invited guest and so he had the opportunity to interact with eminent figures from a cross-section of Meghalayan society as well as dignitaries visiting the state. Without restricting himself to the distinctive natural landscapes of Meghalaya, Hossain has also documented in much detail

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* The Garo’s are a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group from the Indian subcontinent, notably found in the Indian states of Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, and some neighbouring areas of Bangladesh.
* The Khasi people are an ethnic group of Meghalaya in northeastern India with a significant population in the bordering state of Assam, and in certain parts of Bangladesh.
* The Phar, also known as Jaintia, are a sub-tribal group of the Khasi people in Meghalaya, India.
A hotel located in the heart of the city Shillong. His photographs of Shillong include pictures of a golf-player at the Shillong Golf Club; an outside view of the club; the Shillong Centre Point Hotel; ornamental light decorations on Christmas Eve; the neighbourhood of Lachumiere; the Meghalaya State Central Library; and, some well-known markets of the city.

Unlike other states where Hossain had to organize visits over several years, Meghalaya being his home state was convenient to access at any time. Hence Hossain’s photographs from Meghalaya are characterized by a subtle sense of closeness and knowing that contrasts with his images from the other states. Hossain admits that he has strong feelings of attachment to Meghalaya. Hailing from a prominent business family of the region that contributed towards the making of contemporary Shillong, make this region and its peoples especially dear to Hossain and his camera. He also notes that in Meghalaya he felt an increased sense of responsibility as a photographer. He carried a deep awareness that the images he was devising at a given time will keep accruing greater value with the passage of time.

Local Environment and an Agrarian economy: Meghalaya is a predominantly agrarian society with a large portion of its produce being sourced from its dense rainforests. Hossain’s photographs cover the state’s vast vegetation and some of the most important crops it produces including potatoes, rice, maize, pineapples, bananas, papayas, and spices. He has also made a consistent effort to document a wide range of agro-based products. There are pictures of women working in a cashew nut unit; pictures of different berries native to the state; cotton, tea, coffee and areca nut plantations; shops selling dry fish; cock and hen farms, rice pounding in village homes; and, displays of betel leaves and paddy seen across the state.

Areca nut is consumed across India and in the northeastern region its consumption is significantly high. It holds deep cultural meaning for the communities of the region. Being easily accessible and very affordable, in Meghlaya it is the most widely offered gift to guests and outsiders. The areca nut symbolizes the Meghalayan peoples’ values of egalitarianism. Areca nut is grown widely across the East Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills, the West and East Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Hossain has documented the process of areca-nut production beginning with images of ripe areca nuts seen on trees right onto their packaging in gunny bags as they are prepared for wholesale marketing and sale on the streets. Other photographs by Hossain depict the clearing of forests for Jhum cultivation, a ginger wholesale market, agricultural fields, roadside stalls, vegetable markets, citrus indica (a wild relative of orange), jackfruit, papaya and banana plantations.

Handicrafts in Meghalaya: Meghalaya is famous for its handicrafts. Cane and bamboo are central materials for Meghalaya’s arts and crafts. Understanding how varied forms of weaving (handloom and bamboo) are integral to the state’s culture, Hossain has documented various forms of weaving. There are photographs of Jaintia men and close-up shots of an old man — both seen weaving bamboo baskets. Hossain has also documented local jewellery-

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49 A hotel located in the heart of the city Shillong
50 Meghalaya holds 5th position in the production of Areca nuts, producing 3.3% of total production of Areca nuts in India. Areca nut is consumed in fresh, cured and dry forms along with betel leaves and lime.
Hossain has documented the processes by which the unique green clay pottery of Meghalaya is made. We see mud being prepared, mud-thrashing, layering, designing and the display of pottery items for sale. There are also pictures of one family of potters at the Tyunschang village seen alongside their produce. Other crafts photographs depict Jaintia men making *muras*\(^{52}\) of bamboo and other bamboo-based crafts. Through his documentation we get insight into the everyday life-worlds of the state’s peoples, social life in villages, local markets and shops, activities related to agriculture, local crafts and industry.

**Cultural Life:** Meghalaya is one of three states of India that has a Christian majority population with about 75% people practicing the faith. The common denominations include the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Church of God, and the Catholics. Hossain has taken pictures of the state’s numerous churches and scenes of Shillong when it is lit up for Christmas. There are also pictures of chorus performances by girls inside the Hawakhana church in Tura\(^{53}\) and pictures of devotees attending religious functions inside churches.

Though predominantly Christian, the people of Meghalaya closely practice their tribal ways of living too. Being an anthropologically inclined photographer Hossain has taken pictures that depict tribal practices, rituals and performances. For instance he has documented the various activities that make up the Wangala\(^{54}\) festival of the Garo peoples. Hossain’s coverage includes: numerous objects erected as part of a ritual performance during the festival; the Rugala puja\(^{55}\) performed a day before the Wangala festival; indigenous games people play during the festival; Garo boys beating traditional drums; musicians blowing horns, ornately decorated headgear\(^{56}\) worn by Wangala dancers, Wangala dancers dancing, shields used in the dance; and, Garo men and women participating in an ethnic wear show at the festival.

Hossain has documented end-of-life and funerary customs of the region. Some photographs focus on the Delang\(^{12}\) at the courtyard of a Garo village house during a traditional funeral ceremony. There are also pictures of offerings in a deceased’s house, accompanied with drums and gongs being played during the rituals. There are pictures of Kima songa\(^{57}\) — a traditional memory post built in the deceased’s courtyard after the funeral ceremony; a sacrifice stone in Ampati village; and, monoliths erected in memory of dead people near Pamtadong village.

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\(^{51}\) Jhum or shifting cultivation is an agricultural system in which plots of land are cultivated temporarily, then abandoned while post-disturbance fallow vegetation is allowed to freely grow while the cultivator moves on to another plot

\(^{52}\) Seats made of bamboo or cane

\(^{53}\) Tura is a municipality in the West Garo Hills district and one of the largest towns of the Indian state of Meghalaya in Meghalaya.

\(^{54}\) Wangala Festival is a harvest festival held in honour of Saljong, the Sun-god of fertility celebrated by the Garo Tribes

\(^{55}\) The first session of Wangala features ‘Rugala’ (puja and other religious formalities of offering crops to the gods) where the Khamal (chief priest) prays and implores their gods to receive the crops

\(^{56}\) Feathers of fowl worn on the head of the dancers

\(^{57}\) A small hut with a bamboo structure is erected on the courtyard of Garo’s house for the spirit that is known as Delang.
Hossain also undertook extensive documentation among the Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya. He pictured the plate dance with detailed images of Jaintia girls performing the dance in a village near Dawki. There are close shots of Jaintia men playing a musical instrument. Then there are photographs of men and women performing the Laho dance and musicians beating drums — all seen from several angles. Besides tribal societies, Hossain also took pictures of Kirtan performers posing with musical instruments as seen at the Nartiang Durga temple on the occasion of Durga puja, and at the Kali temple in Dawki.

**Natural landscape:** Meghalaya boasts a stunning natural landscape that is dotted with rolling hills, picturesque waterfalls, serene lakes, circuitous rivers and streams. The natural landscapes of Meghalaya have been extensively photographed by Ahmed Hossain. Besides well-known natural landmarks, Hossain has travelled to the interiors of the state and documented lesser-known natural features. In the Garo Hills he has photographed the Samanda and Chibagre rivers. Striking images of numerous waterfalls including Pelga, Thlumawi, Ampunga, Amdap, Amramiang, Krem Ksiar, Amkhloo, Woh Kawang, Kyndon Chyndon, Umsyripai, and Umpunge — can be found in Hossain’s collection. Even more rare features such as the Umpubon bridge to Syndai cave, the Tasek Wari Lake and the Sohpetbuning peak have been photographed.

Meghalaya’s subtropical forests are part of the larger Indo-Burma biological hotspot with many endemic species not found anywhere else in the world. Hossain has documented the teak and sal forests near Mongre; rare trees and wild flowers in the forest region of Rongram; and, the Sung valley.

Meghalaya is home to over 3000 species of flowering plants and it makes up about 18% of the total flora of India. Pictures of a wide variety of wild cultivable plants, edible fruits and orchids found in the forests of Meghalaya have been documented with a keen eye by Hossain, who is known for his sharply focused images of northeast India’s rare orchids. Some of the subjects of his photographs include the Pitcher plant in Tura; a typical formation of the Ficus root; blooming Rodendron flowers, Tyrshang flowers, the Lipstick plant, Curcuma Pseudomontana and numerous rare, wild orchids.

Meghalaya is also known for its ‘sacred groves’. These are forested tracts found across the state and protected by local communities. Hossain has photographed the Lyngdoh Sacred Grove near the Amprai river, which is believed to be a river of Goddess flowing inside the sacred groves in the Garo hills. Hossain has documented the famous

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58 Kima Songa is a traditional Garo totem or memorial post that is built in memory and honour of a dead family member.
59 Shad Pliang’ or plate dance was performed in the royal palaces to please royal quest. This dance was performed in fields also.
60 An Essential Folk Dance in Behdienkhlam Festival observed by the Jaintias of Meghalaya
61 Nartiang Durga Temple is a 600-year-old temple located in the West Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya in northeastern India. It is one of the 51 Shakti Peeths and is one of the holiest sites for devotees of the Shaktism sect of Hinduism.
62 Durga Puja, is an annual Hindu festival in the Indian subcontinent which worships Hindu goddess Durga and celebrates Durga’s victory over the demon Mahishasur.
63 Kali is a Hindu goddess who is considered to be the master of death, time and change.
Meghalayan living roots bridges\(^{67}\) including the one over the Amtren stream near Nongtalang river and another bridge over the Amsohkmri river near Khonlal village.

Hossain also photographed man-made structures within the natural landscape including water dams, canals and terrace farms. These photographs depict how human presence shapes nature.

Tribal Women at Work: Communities in Meghalaya practice matriliney and therefore women play a prominent role in society. Hossain has documented women’s active participation in the social and economic life of the state much of which is centered around agriculture. We see photographs of women engaged in pineapple, areca nut and turmeric cultivation; making pottery, weaving clothes, making baskets and participating in all the associated tasks. These photographs establish women’s active participation in the social and economic life of the state. There are pictures of Garo women working while carrying their children on their backs and in other pictures we see them selling farm produce in the local marketplace. Notable in Hossain’s collection are pictures of a Nokma woman (village head woman) in the Garo hills.

**Archaeology:** Meghalaya is home to rich archaeological materials such as ancient caves, places of worship and rock art. Hossain has photographed the Syndai cave\(^ {68}\); the remnants of a Jaintia King’s temple; the Umpubon bridge; images of Ganesh, the sun, the moon, an elephant, a tiger chasing a woman all engraved on big rocks at Dein Waliiah on the bank of Myntdu river near Pasadawar village. A view of the altar of the river goddess of Amprai has also been taken.

Relevant to modern history are photographs of the remnants of an old fort at Khonlal village, which was built by locals about a hundred years ago to protect themselves against British soldiers.

**The photographer’s notes:** Ahmad Hossain’s ancestors opened one of the first shops in Police Bazar — the main market and hub of Shillong in the mid-nineteenth century. They also introduced and operated the first Tonga service on the Guwahati-Shillong (GS) Road, and later introduced the first automobile service on the same route in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, respectively. His ancestors were also responsible for developing the town’s golf link. Hossain’s strong family roots in Meghalaya make him deeply connected to this and the northeastern states. His family has no background in photography and he takes great pride in being the first professional photographer from it.

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\(^{64}\) Hill Turmeric is an erect herb, growing to 75 cm tall, found on moist, shaded areas of wet forests.

\(^{65}\) They are small or large areas of forests or natural vegetation that are usually dedicated to local folk deities or tree spirits or some religious symbolism over many generations, often since ancient times.

\(^{66}\) The grove is so named because it belongs to the Lyngdoh Mawphlang clan (the priestly as well as the ruling clan of the traditional state of Mawphlang), which had sanctified and dedicated it to God and the guardian spirit, U Ryngkew U Basa.

\(^{67}\) A living root bridge is a type of simple suspension bridge formed of living plant roots by tree shaping made by Khasi and Jaintia tribes.

\(^{68}\) The 970-m long Syndai cave was used as hideouts during the wars between Jaintia kings and foreign intruders.
During documentation for this project, Hossain recalled a rare event when he had to photograph wild elephant training at a depot in Dainadubi, East Garo hills. The Forest Department of Meghalaya had wanted to make a documentary film on the training of wild elephants and at that time Hossain was present in the department. Hossain worked closely with the then Chief Conservator of Forests with whom he went to Dainadubi. They stayed at the Dak Bangla (an old bungalow) for five days and Hossain photographed the training process. What Hossain had documented was rare. However, his photographs could not be publicized as wild animals’ training and capture for training purposes had not been not legalized at that time. He has no negatives of those photographs. But in his mind, he vividly recalls the agile and labour-intensive practice of training wild elephants.

Hossain broke many barriers in order to document the socio-cultural lives of the people of Meghalaya. In terms of the challenges he faced, Hossain recalls that often there was neither a place to stay nor any basic facilities when he went on field trips for documentation. Despite such challenges, Hossain has documented rare aspects of Meghalaya’s social and cultural lives. He was helped by his friends in the Forest department and the Soil Conservation Department.

**GLOSSARY**

**Monoliths:** Monolith is a large single upright block of stone, especially one shaped into or serving as a pillar or monument.

**Puja:** Puja means worship in India.

**Ganesh:** Ganesh also known as Ganapati and Vinayaka, is one of the best-known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon.

**Bharat Scouts and Guides:** The Bharat Scouts and Guides is the National Scouting and Guiding association of India.

**National Cadet Corps:** The National Cadet Corps is the youth wing of the Indian Armed Forces with its headquarters in New Delhi, India.

**Rice Beer:** Rice beer is an ethnic symbol of North-East India’s rich and diverse culture. Brewed using traditional methods, rice beer is consumed by the natives of North-eastern tribal communicates that inhabit the mountains.
Mizoram is a landlocked state, located in the southernmost part of India’s northeastern region. It was previously a part of Assam and in 1972, it was carved out as a Union Territory. In 1986 the Indian Parliament adopted the 53rd amendment to the Constitution that led to the creation of the State of Mizoram on 20 February 1987, India’s 23rd state. The name of the state is derived from the self-described name of the native inhabitants: ‘Mizo’ and ‘Ram’ which in the Mizo language means ‘land of the Mizons.’ Mizoram shares its borders with three: Tripura, Assam and Manipur along with a 722-kilometres-long international border with Bangladesh and Myanmar.


**Technical Specs:** 120mm B/W and 35mm B/W.

**Cameras Used:** Asahi Pentax 35mm SLR camera, Rolleiflex 120mm TLR camera and, Nikon F90X 35mm (Colour).

**Photography Context:** Ahmad Hossain frequently visited and extensively photographed the state of Mizoram. He travelled to Mizoram 19 times and on each visit he developed a detailed record of the state’s cultural life and natural landscape.

The Mizo people are mainly divided into tribes and sub-tribes. The major tribes that are found in Mizoram are Chakma, Dulia, Ralte, Poi, Jahao, Pankhup, Lakher, Paite, Falam, Tangur, Khuangli, Dalang, Sukte, Fanai, Leillul and Mar. Hossain has documented most of these tribes, their traditional practices with an emphasis on their attire, ornaments and their rich material cultures.

Hossain has extensively covered locations including the Assam Rifles Ground during official programs, Bilkhetri, Hmuifang, Champhai valley, Hmuifan Saitual, Bongkawn, Lungleh, Paithar (South Mizoram), Chitelui Farm Saiha (near Burma Border), Muiphang village, Darlung village, Lawngtla, Kolodyne riverside, Thingfall, Tlangkawn village, Tuipang village, Bualpui village, Lungjwrthm village, Maubawk village, Theiva (South Mizoram), Theiri village, Paithar, Lunglei town towards south, Selesi farm, Nahlan Village (near Burma border), Hnathial dist., Palak lake, Phura village, Thenzawl town, Blue Mountain, Berawtlang, Dutlang, Leiton, Near Mat village, Ailawng village, Kolasib town, Mamit district town, North Vanlaiphei, Aizawl Bazaar, Kolasib district, Serchhip town in Mizoram, Bilkhawthlir, Kolasib Dist, Biate village and Bongkawn among others.
**Documenting Mizoram:** Mizoram is replete with picturesque hills, rivers, valleys, wetlands, mountains, and waterfalls all of which Hossain has documented. Extensive pictures of Champai hills, the Blue Mountain, Kolodyne river, sal forest, reserve forest, *Jhum* fields, *Mithun* herds, flowering bamboo and bamboo forest have been documented, reflecting the natural diversity of Mizoram.

The climate in Mizoram is ideal for growing flowers. Wild flowers like Vayu and Fartuah bloom extensively across Mizoram. Hossain has documented the state’s flora including images of such flowers as the Bird-of-Paradise also called the crane flower and the Rhododendron. Hossain also took pictures of *Anthurium* cultivation along with packaging of Anthurium flowers for export.

Mizoram shares its border with Myanmar, hence Hossain has taken pictures of Myanmar, in particular a splendid sunrise at Rih Dil lake located in the northwestern Chin State seen from a border village of Mizoram.

**Local Environment and Living Practices:** As an anthropologically-informed photographer, Ahmad Hossain developed a bond with the Mizo community and hence the Mizo people appear quite at ease before Hossain’s camera. Further, Hossain intentionally covered Mizoram from October to January since this is a festive season and during autumn the natural landscape appears in significantly rich palette of colours.

Some of the most striking photographs that Hossain developed in Mizoram focus on the dances of the state. He photographed festive folk and ritual dances like the *Lakher, Chapchar, Khuallam, Cheraw* and *Thalfavang Kut, Cheraw* is a very old dance of the Mizos. It is usually performed in a ceremony called *Khuangchawi*. The community’s participation in this ceremony has been effectively documented by Hossain. *Chailam* is another popular dance performed on the occasion of *Chapchar Kut*, which is celebrated to thank the Gods for saving the people from harm during the clearing of forests on hill slopes for *Jhum* cultivation at the beginning of each year. Hossain covered the *Chailam* dance with an emphasis on the attire and accessories that the dancers wore.

Hossain documented the livelihood practices of Mizoram’s various communities. These include a trading scene of Alzawl Bazaar; the making and display of handicrafts; people frequenting the state’s numerous fruit markets; indigenous items like tobacco leaf on sale; firewood collection; squash plantation; people working in pineapple gardens, coffee bean fields and paddy farms.

More than 98% of Mizos are considered Christians and the photographer has tried to cover this dimension of Mizo

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69 Overlooking the hills of the neighbouring nation of Myanmar the highest peak in the state of Mizoram, Phawngpui, which is also known as the Blue Mountain.

70 *Jhum* cultivation is an agricultural system in which plots of land are cultivated temporarily, then abandoned while post disturbance fallow vegetation is allowed to freely grow while the cultivator moves on to another plot.

71 *Mithun*, also known as Druung ox is a large domestic cattle occupying an important role in the Mizo-society since immemorial time.

72 A bamboo plant will flower, go to seed, and then die. This phenomenon is called monocarpic flowering.

73 *Anthuriums* are one of the most expensive flowers in India and Mizoram is the highest exporters of this flower in the country.
life. Hence there are pictures of theological centres, presbyterian churches, evangelists, and numerous gatherings at churches.

**Transitions in indigenous practices:** Ahmad Hossain notes that during his visits to Mizoram he witnessed transitions in the daily lifestyles and cultural practices of the Mizo people. So, some of his pictures depict different stages of de-husking and hauling rice using indigenous methods, which are not in practice any longer. A change in the methods and designs of construction is also noticed in Hossain’s photographs. Hossain has documented numerous man-made structures like cemeteries, churches, restaurants, schools, district councils and govt. offices. Pictures of villagers loading daily commodities; people at a burial gathering; a view of Lawngtlai\(^\text{77}\) and Hnahthial\(^\text{78}\) have been taken — all reflecting everyday life and activities of the Mizos. According to Hossain, Mizoram witnessed a change in construction switching to concrete materials for buildings, bus stands and other sites under National Buildings Construction Corporation Limited (NBCC) around 2009.

**Official coverage:** Ahmad Hossain has taken pictures of official programs like a Teacher’s Day celebration attended by the first Vice-Chancellor of the North East Hill University, Mr. Deba Nissan in 1977. There are close shots of the ceremony which included dances and sport activities among other programs. Hossain also covered the Chapchar Kut festival organised by the Govt. of Mizoram and the Central Young Mizoram Association, 2003. The then Chief Minister of Mizoram, T. Zoramthanga is seen addressing the crowd. Also seen is the then Governor of Mizoram, Amolak Ratan Kohli. Other public

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\(^{74}\) Cheraw existed way back in the 1st Century A.D., while the Mizos were still somewhere in the Yunan Province of China, before their migration into the Chin Hills in the 13th Century A.D and eventually to the present Mizoram.

\(^{75}\) During this ceremony, the guest invited and made to sit in the performing area.

\(^{76}\) In this dance, men and women stand alternatively in circles, with the women holding on to the waist of the man, and the man on the women’s shoulder. In the middle of the circle are the musicians who play the drums and the Mithun’s horn.

\(^{77}\) Lawngtlai is the district headquarters of Lawngtlai district in the state of Mizoram in India. It is also the headquarters of Lai Autonomous District Council, one of the three autonomous district councils in Mizoram.

\(^{78}\) Hnahthial is the headquarters of Hnahthial district in the Indian state of Mizoram.
engagements he covered include an event held at the Assam Rifles Ground, Aizawl in 2006.

The photographer's notes: For Ahmad Hossain undertaking photography in Mizoram was a magical experience. The state stands out for its warm hospitality, love for community and the trust that the people of the state expressed towards him. Hossain’s photos were taken when insurgency was at its peak in Mizoram. However, Hossain wanted to focus on everyday life in the state and he cites instances when a group of Mizo boys guarded him through the valleys, village lanes, into the village houses while he was trying to undertake some photography. Hossain recollects how friends and acquaintances supported his work in the state, often taking him to nooks and corners in pursuit of his photographs. He especially notes the support from his friends at the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), Mizoram: Thanzuwana, Sailo and Denguwana; along with the collective efforts of several officials at the Agriculture Department, Soil Conservation Department and the Veterinary Department.

GLOSSARY

Lakher: Lakher tribe is a small tribe located in the Lushai Hills of Mizoram. The Lakher refer to them as ‘Mara’ because they speak in ‘Mara Chin’, a language belonging to the Sino-Tibetan Phylum.

Thalfavang Kut: Thalfavang Kut is celebrated when weeding or the process of removing wild weeds from the farms is completed and the farms are ready for the next set of crops.

Rih dil lake: Rih Dil is a lake located in Burma, just about 3 kilometers from the Indian border and is associated with Mizo folklore.

Solakia dance: Solakia dance is an impressive dance originating from the Pawi and Mara communities in the southern part of Mizoram. This dance is known as ‘Sarlamkai’ whereas the Lushais referred to it as ‘Rallu Lam’.

Rhododendron: Rhododendron is the common and genus name for a large and diverse group of woody shrubs and small (rarely large) trees in the flowering plant family.

National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC): It is a blue-chip under the ownership of Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India.

Bamboo stilt walking: Stilts are used from ancient times as a tool to walk on rugged terrains or flood plains.
Nagaland is a mountainous state bordering Myanmar. Other states with which it shares boundaries include Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Assam in the west and Manipur in the south.


**Technical Specs:** 120mm B/W and 35mm B/W.

**Cameras Used:** Asahi Pentax 35mm SLR camera, Aries Flex 120 TLR camera and Nikon F90X 35mm (Colour)

**Photography Context:** Nagaland is home to multiple indigenous tribes with striking festivals and markets celebrating their distinct cultures. It is evident in Hosain’s photographs that he was attracted to the vibrant tribal cultures of Nagaland. There are about 16 tribes and sub-tribes in Nagaland which include the Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Dimasa Kachari, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchunger, and Zeme-Liangmai (Zelian). For his photography, Hosain travelled to villages including Chui, Wokching, Poilwa, Naginimora, Shangnyu and the Mon district.

**Culture and community:** The tribes of Nagaland have tightly defined kinship patterns and they are very closely-knit. Each community has a distinctive lifestyle and on the whole Naga tribal societies are people- and community-centric. Keeping this in mind, Hosain focused principally on community-based activities. For instance there are photographs of a Chui village Chief aka Angh at his home, seen in traditional attire with a vast display of trophies. Other photographs focus on Konyak homes and villages. For example, in some distant views we see Konyak homes and villagers returning from a field. There are photographs that depict the locking system of a Konyak granary.

Hosain keenly depicts tribal people in their everyday activities. There are images of tribal persons making shelters with palm leaves; preparing meals in the midst of their work; collecting firewood; consuming wine in a group; and pounding rice etc. There is a striking image of Naga men carrying the trunk of a tree to their village. ‘Morung’ is an Assamese word, used to refer to a house or hall where bachelors of a clan sleep. The Naga Morung is used as a

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79 The Angamis are a major Naga ethnic group native to the state of Nagaland in North-East India.
80 The Ao Nagas are a major Naga ethnic group native to Mokokchung District of Nagaland, Northeast India.
81 Chakhesangs are the former Eastern Angamis, now recognized as a separate tribe.
82 Chang is a Naga tribe of Nagaland, India. It is one of the recognized Scheduled Tribes.
centre for important village ceremonies and it is usually one of the largest buildings in the village. It is an institution that occupies a high status in Naga villages. Hoassain has documented this institution during his visits to the famous Hornbill festival of Nagaland. In one photograph we see a Chang tribal man posing in traditional attire in front of a Morung. Elsewhere, we see community speakers addressing performers during the Hornbill festival from under a Morung.

The Hornbill Festival of Nagaland: The Hornbill Festival is celebrated in Nagaland to encourage inter-tribal interaction. It commemorates Nagaland Day (1st December), the day when the state was formed. It is organized at Kisama, a site located between 2 villages named ‘Ki’gwema and Phe’sama’ 91. 12 kms from Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. It is organized by the state government of Nagaland and is a large and one-of-its-kind festival of indigenous cultures. On several occasions Hoassain was invited as a guest to witness this festival and his photographs offer a rich and detailed profile of this event. There are pictures of women in their traditional dresses; dancers from a number of tribal communities posing after their performances; different tribes displaying their cultural practices say through their dances and costumes. Notable are pictures of Angami singers performing traditional songs with the hornbill musical instrument. Elsewhere we see performers from numerous Naga tribal and sub-tribal groups including the Chang, the Phom, the Konyak, the Ao, the Chakhesang, the Lotha, the Khiamniungan, the Sema or Sumi, the Zeliang, the Dimasa and the Deori. 92

Hoassain’s collection includes images that depict Khepkai — an indigenous circus performance as demonstrated by the Khiamniungan tribe during one festival. We also see tribal communities from other states of northeast India participating at the Hornbill Festival, for example a group of Bodo participants performing the Bagarumba 93 dance and a Khasi 94 man seen with his drum at the end of a performance. Hoassain’s photographs of the Hornbill Festival depict numerous activities including men beating a log-drum inside a Morung; Naga men singing in a group; a Lotha bride displayed at the festival. Besides performances, an exhibition of tribal cultural artefacts is also organized during the festival and some of Hoassain’s photographs focus on this. The Hornbill Festival is also attended by

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91 The Dimasa people are an ethnolinguistic community presently inhabiting Assam and Nagaland states in northeastern India
92 Khiamniungan is one of the major Naga tribes, with approximately 35% of the population found in Noklak district of Nagaland
93 The Konyaks are one of the major Naga ethnic groups. In Nagaland, they inhabit the Mon District—also known as ‘The Land of The Anghs’.
94 The Lotha Nagas are a major Naga ethnic group native to Wokha District in the Indian state of Nagaland.
95 Phom is a Naga tribe from Nagaland, India. Their traditional territory lies between the territories of Konyak in the north-east, the Ao in the west and the Chang in the south.
96 The Pochury identity is of relatively recent origin. It is a composite tribe formed by three Naga communities: Kupu, Kuchu and Khuri.
97 The chief of the Konyak village is known as Angh.
98 The term ‘Klsama’ is a compound derived from the names of the two villages between which this site is located.
99 The Deori are one of the major indigenous communities of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
participants and representatives from foreign countries and Hussain’s photographs depict Thai musicians playing musical instruments during a Thai dance performance; a Korean man and woman demonstrating puppetry and performing a dance; a group of Myanmar girls performing a group dance; and, Bhutanese dancers performing a traditional dance. In a reflexive move, Hussain also documents European tourists taking photographs at the Hornbill festival.

**Local Environment and Tribal Practices:** Ahmad Hussain’s photographs provide insight into the complex and textured social fabric of Nagaland. Most subjects in Hussain’s photographs are tribal and he has depicted them in a range of activities in flourishing contemporary terms. Besides extensive documentation of tribal cultural practices we also see images of Nagas in day-to-day activities for instance, images depicting a group of Naga men changing tyres of a jeep; or, a group of villagers queuing to collect milk at a local dairy; or Naga men & women cutting kodo grass in a village; or, a view of a Naga lady drying crops outside her village home.

Hussain has systematically documented the everyday life of Nagas in their immediate environments. There are shots of a Mithun kept at a farm of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) in Kohima alongside pictures of cherry blossoms blooming across the same city. There are numerous photographs depicting tribal persons in their traditional attire that includes hunting weapons. For example, an Aao man poses with swords in hand. There are numerous pictures of Naga girls such as those from the Rengma, Chakesang, Angami and Zeliang communities— all seen in their traditional attires. Hussain has documented contemporary society including ethnic sports, tribal agricultural practices and the steady growth of modern industries in Nagaland.

**Craftsmanship:** Nagaland, like other northeastern states is known for its arts and crafts. Hussain’s photographs cover diverse Naga crafts and their processes of making. There are pictures of wood carving materials at the Kohima museum; a bamboo basket at a village house on display at the Kohima museum; and, numerous Naga ornaments displayed at the Kohima museum. Also seen are images of Naga tribesmen’s hunting tools. We see images of a Naga craftsman giving finishing touches to his work at his home in Chui village. Some images depict village blacksmiths at work in Wakching and Monyak villages. In a close shot we see Naga women selling clothes at the Mokokchung bazaar. There are also photographs of a Naga man making a chisel at his village home. At the Hornbill Festival’s exhibition section Hussain has recorded a Naga couple making swords alongside a range of wood carving activities. Also at the festival are pictures of girls and men ginning cotton and, Naga women spinning a wheel.

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93 Bagurumba dance is a folk dance practiced in the Assam state of India also called as the “butterfly dance” due to its motion resembling a butterfly.
94 The Khasi people are an ethnic group of Meghalaya in northeastern India.
95 Btai (“foot mask”) Korean is a form of puppet theatre from Korea.
96 Kodo, grass is a drought-tolerant annual plant that is cultivated extensively in India.
97 Mithun, a ruminant species belonging to the family Bovidae and assumed to be the domesticated form of wild gaur (Bos gaurus) is indigenous to the eastern Himalayas.
Ahmad Hossain has consistently focused on the log-drum\textsuperscript{98} used by various Naga tribes. A long slit along the length of a log is used to hollow it and this hollowed log is used to make a log-drum. When the log-drum is pounded, the sound it produces reverberates. Hossain’s images of the log-drum offer insight into a very unique cultural form that the Nagas consider to be a ‘living deity.’

**Topography and Wildlife:** Nagaland is a mountainous region with breathtaking natural landscapes. Hossain has documented these from different angles including aerial views of Kohima and Mokokchung towns, the Poilwa village and the Nagaland hills. In one image we see a roadside view of a Nagaland town surrounded by forests. There are hilltop views of Naga villages and towns. Nagaland is rich in biodiversity and Hossain has focused on this. There are pictures of a bamboo forest and orchids documented in Mokokchung town; a distant view of the Kodo grass seen fully grown in a local village. Hossain has also taken fine images of animals like Mithuns and local sheep. One image shows a Mithun on a hillside road, another shows a man feeding a Mithun while a third shows a herd of Mithuns outside Kohima. In one striking photograph we see a Naga shepherd girl looking over the hills near Poilwa village.

**Photographer’s Notes:** Hossain visited Nagaland for the first time in 1984 to attend a trade festival. He was deeply interested to learn about and document the culture and ways of living of the state’s tribal communities. On one of his trips, he remembers his stay at Ghaspani for 2-3 days when he shot photographs of the Mithun. These photographs were later used for research purposes by the state’s agriculture department. Hossain found this experience to be very gratifying and after this, he became well known in Nagaland. Besides the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), Hossain also liaised and worked with the state’s Soil Conservation Department.

Of all his work in Nagaland, the process of documenting the Hornbill Festival remains the most poignant memory in Hossain’s mind. He had visited the festival in 2001. ‘There were more cameras than visitors’, states Hossain. During

\textsuperscript{98}Cotton Ginning “is one of the oldest processes done by hand which actually separates cotton fiber from cotton seeds

\textsuperscript{99}Log-drums have long been of characteristic and significant importance to the Nagas, particularly in association with the socio-religious and cultural facets of their village republics, a “living deity” as their forefathers would believe.
that year, he remembers that he was struck by the popularity of the festival and how people from different regions of the world had arrived in Kisama, most with cameras in their hands. It was difficult for him to identify who was an amateur or a professional photographer. Over the years that he visited the festival Hossain notes that its popularity only grew. Where in the first year he had only seen dance groups from Manipur, West Bengal and Assam; in his later visits dance groups from Thailand, Korea, Myanmar and Bhutan also came to perform at the festival.

As he recollects his time and work in Nagaland, he remembers how the culture of the region was steadily changing. For instance, the log-drum, which had been historically used as a tool for communicating messages in Naga villages, especially during times of crises such as wars and, which Hossain had documented in detail in 1984, was by the 2000s being used less and less given the proliferation of contemporary means of communication.

GLOSSARY

Rengma: Rengma is a Naga tribe found in Nagaland and Assam states of India. The local traditions, the Rengmas and the Lothas (or Lhotas) were once part of a single tribe.

Sumi: The Süm Naga also known as Sema Naga are a major Naga ethnic group in the Indian state of Nagaland.

Yimchunger: Yimkhuing is a Naga tribe whose traditional territory includes Shamator and Kiphire District in the Indian state of Nagaland and western areas of Burma.

Zeme-Liangmai: The Liangmai tribe inhabits Nagaland and Manipur states of Northeast India. Their villages are mostly spread across Peren district in Nagaland.

Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR): The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.

Soil Conservation Department: The Department of Soil Survey & Soil Conservation is the nodal department for the conservation and management of the precious soil and water resources in India.
SIKKIM

Sikkim is a state in northeastern India, bordering Tibet in the north and northeast, Bhutan in the east, Nepal in the west and, West Bengal in the south. Sikkim is close to India’s Siliguri Corridor near Bangladesh. It was integrated into British India as a princely state in 1890. Sikkim is the least populous and second smallest of Indian states. 35% of the state is covered by the Kangchendzonga National Park – a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Dates:** Photographs taken in 1978 & 2007  
**Technical Specs:** 120mm B/W and 35mm B/W.  
**Cameras Used:** Asahi Pentax 35 mm SLR camera, Rolleiflex 120 mm TLR camera and Nikon F90X 35 mm Colour

**Photography Context:** Ahmad Hussain travelled to Sikkim only twice with a gap of nearly three decades between his visits. Consequently, his photographs from Sikkim depict two kinds of society: one, Sikkim as a modern state with a sprawling urban lifestyle and contemporary architecture; and, two, breathtaking natural landscapes dotted with glimpses of the old ways, the traditional practices of the Sikkimese peoples. While working in Sikkim, Hussain became very interested in the Buddhist way of life of the state and so his collection from Sikkim includes photographs of numerous monasteries and their serene, natural surroundings. Other than these, Hussain photographed the lively Gangtok Bazaar and city, Geyzing Bazaar and other market scenes across the state.

**Documenting Sikkim:** Sikkim is situated in the Eastern Himalayan region with cold deserts, alpine meadows, dense green forests and crystal-clear mountain lakes. A major portion of Sikkim is situated in the Himalayan mountains and so, the state is characterized by mountainous terrain, wide valleys and a number of natural water bodies. Ahmed Hussain has covered the Tsomgo Chho Lake, hilltop view of Khechiopalri lake, view of the river Rothang that is formed at the downstream of the Kanchenjunga waterfalls, the mighty Teesta, Rangeet, Rangpo and Lachen rivers; the Riksim, Kanchenjunga, Kayasong and Phamrong waterfalls and; the Yuksam lake.

**Sikkim and the Kanchenjunga:** The Mt. Kanchenjunga has a deep place within the culture of Sikkim. The southern face of Kanchenjunga, which runs between 3,000–3,500 m (9,800–11,500 ft) high, falls in Sikkim. Hussain has composed distant views of the Kanchenjunga in the early morning hours from a range of angles that bring out the majestic, subtle and fierce presence of this mountain that towers over and is inseparable from of our perception of
Tsomgo Lake, also known as Tsongmo Lake or Changgu Lake, is a glacial lake in the East Sikkim district of the Indian state of Sikkim, some 40 kilometres from the capital Gangtok.

Teesta River is a 414 km (257 mi) long river that rises in the Pauhunri Mountain of eastern Himalayas, flows through the Indian states of Sikkim and West Bengal.

Kangchenjunga, also spelt Kanchenjunga, is the third highest mountain in the world.

The Chogyal were the monarchs of the former Kingdom of Sikkim, which belonged to the Namgyal dynasty.

A gompa is a room where a Buddhist meditates and listens to the teachings.

Nyingma (literally ‘old school’) is the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism founded on the first lineages and translations of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Tibetan in the eighth century, during the reign of King Trisong Detsen.

The Kagyu school, also transliterated as Kagyü, or Kagyud is one of the main schools (chos lugs) of Himalayan or Tibetan Buddhism trace themselves back to the 11th century Indian Mahasiddhas Naropa, Maitripa and the yogini Niguma, via their student Marpa Lotsawa (1012–1097), who brought their teachings to Tibet.

Rumtek Monastery, also called the Dharma Chakra Centre, is a gompa located in the Indian state of Sikkim near the capital Gangtok.
Agro-based Economy: India produces about 4200 tons of cardamom annually and Sikkim contributes 86 percent of the total cardamom produce. Hossain has photographed cardamom plantations in mountainous villages and also documented the entire process from harvesting to drying and preservation of the spice.

The photographer's notes: For Hossain, documenting the views of Kanchenjunga – the third highest mountain peak in the world from different angles was a most enchanting experience that will remain with him for long. He feels honoured to have photographed a majestic and deeply sacred range as the Kanchenjunga. About his work in Sikkim, Hossain recalls the hospitality he received from the local people and also the breathtaking views from his lodging at Pelling. His room had an exclusive view of the Kanchenjunga mountain peak. Hossain recalls waking up at 3.30 am to photograph the mighty Kanchenjunga as the first rays of the sun fall upon the mighty peak. He would pull the curtains, set the camera on the stand and wait till a glistening glimpse of the peak would appear. Sometimes there would be a red hue on the peak touched by the soft first rays of the sun. Hossain would keep clicking the mountain peak from different angles and magnifications till it turned pure white (snow) under the strong rays of the morning sun.

Hossain also recalls climbing the hill on the way to the Dubdi Monastery on foot which is about an hour’s walk. He expressed his satisfaction at having been able to walk all the way up, having overcome his health shortcomings post a bypass surgery in 1999.

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108 Sikkimese carpets are also hand knotted and woven in fixed vertical looms which are kept standing with the support of a wall.
GLOSSARY

Namgyal dynasty: Namgyal dynasty was founded by Phuntsog Namgyal in 1642.

Lepcha: The Lepcha are among the indigenous peoples of Sikkim, India and Nepal, and number around 80,000.

Dharma Chakra: The dharmachakra or wheel of dharma is a widespread symbol used in South Asian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and especially Buddhism.

Chhorten: Lamaist shrine or monument.

Dubdi Monastery: Dubdi Monastery, occasionally called Yuksam Monastery, is a Buddhist monastery of the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism near Yuksam, in the Geyzing subdivision of West Sikkim district, in eastern India.

Lingdum Monastery: Lingdum Monastery is a Buddhist pilgrimage center following the Zurmang Kagyu sect of the ancient school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Pemayangtse Monastery: Pemayangtse is a Buddhist monastery near Pelling which is one of the oldest and premier monasteries in Sikkim.

Do-drul Chorten: Do-drul Chorten is a stupa in Gangtok in the Indian state of Sikkim. The stupa was built by Trulshik Rinpoche, head of the Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhism.

Tashiding Monastery: Tashiding Monastery is a Buddhist monastery of the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism in Western Sikkim, described as the “Heart of Sikkim/Denzong”.

Zurmang Kagyud Monastery: Pal Zurmang Kagyud Monastery or also known as Lingdung monastery founded in 1999.

Khecheopalri Lake: Khecheopalri Lake, originally known as Kha-Chot-Palri, is a lake located near Khecheopalri village, 147 kilometres west of Gangtok in the West Sikkim district of the Northeastern Indian state of Sikkim.

Nyingma: It is the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism founded on the first lineages and translations of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Tibetan in the eighth century, during the reign of King Trisong Detsen.(Footnotes)
The third-smallest state in the country, Tripura is bordered by Bangladesh to the north, south, and west, and the Indian states of Assam and Mizoram to the east. Ruled for several centuries by the Manikya dynasty, Tripura was an independent princely state under the British Empire. The independent Tripuri Kingdom (also known as Hill Tippera) joined independent India in 1949.

**Dates:** Photographs taken in 1997 and 2007

**Technical Specs:** 120mm B/W and 35mm B/W.

**Cameras Used:** Asahi Pentax 35mm SLR camera, Rolleiflex 120mm TLR camera and, Nikon F90X 35mm (Colour).

**Photography Context:** Ahmad Hossain travelled to Tripura only twice. But despite the limited travel, his photographs provide rich representations of the cultures, tribes, the natural landscape and the royal heritage distinctive to Tripura.

Tripura has rich cultural fabric comprising 19 tribal communities, some of whom had migrated from the nearby countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh. These are: Tripura/Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Uchai, Chakma, Mog, Lushai, Kuki, Halam, Munda, Kaur, Orang, Santal, Bhil, Bhutia, Chaimal, Garo, Khasia, and Lepcha. Hossain distinctly remembers that during his 1997 visit to Tripura, the tribes could be easily identified through display of their distinctive cultures.

**Documenting Tripura:** Much cultural heritage of Tripura has long and deep history to it. The Sanskrit name of the state ‘Tripura’ is linked to the Hindu goddess of beauty, Tripura Sundari. Tripura Sundari is the presiding deity at a temple of the same name in Udaipur that is considered one of the 51 Shakti Peethas. The state’s name also references the legendary tyrant king, Tripur, who reigned in the region several decades ago. The cultural beliefs and traditional practices that Hossain saw in 1997 and 2007 find their representation into his photographic collection of the state.

**Locations:** Hossian undertook photography in the state capital Agartala and also travelled to different parts of the state to photograph historical monuments and sites as well as the natural landscape. He documented the Rudrasagar lake, Jampui Hills, Melaghar, the Mizoram-Tripura border at Kawnpu village, Udaipur, Sipahijala, South
The Shakti Pitha] are significant shrines and pilgrimage destinations in Shaktism, the goddess-focused Hindu tradition.

Tirthamukh had been a holy place of the Hindu Tripuri tribals. Both tribal and non-tribal people assemble every year on the occasion of the Uttarayan Sankranti to perform a holy dip in the river Gomati at its place of origin.

Generally observed in the month of January, this day of Sankranti is the day when the sun transits to the tropic of Capricorn, marking the start of winter in the Northern Hemisphere.

Lebang Boomani dance (also Lebang Bumani) is a harvest dance performed by the Tripuri people of Tripura, India. It is performed during the month of Baisakha, the festival celebrated by the Tripuri people to mark the end of the harvest season.

Garia dance is a dance of the Tripuri people performed during Goria puja, the festival to celebrate the sowing of new crops and prayer for a good harvest during the month of Baisakha.

The Tirthamukh Mela is celebrated by both the tribals and non-tribals of Tripura. It is a unique festival where thousands of people take a dip in the Gomati river, worshipping divinities, performing rituals and sacrifices such as shaving their heads as offerings to their ancestors. The festival is accompanied by a two-day long fair where tribals and non-tribals gather to sell and exchange goods.

Hossain covers the livelihood practices of the tribes and non-tribes of Tripura. Tripura has an agrarian economy and so Hossain photographed a significant part of Tripura’s economy, which is also documented as part of the diaries of bamboo sticks for agarbatti (incense sticks) and table mats making by bidders and products of bamboo products such as mats and baskets are sold at the fair.
pressed clay crafts.

Handloom weaving is central to tribal communities everyday lives and cultural practices. Like in other states of the northeast, in Tripura too Hossain documented different handloom weaving practices. A Reang woman weaving clothes on a loin loom; a Lushai lady spinning cotton in her courtyard; a group of Chakma women and another group of Halam girls weaving on their loin looms — these are some of the many images depicting handloom weaving in Tripura.

In Tripura Hossain was also interested in indigenous architecture and so his collection from that state includes images of different tribes posing in front of their homes. We see a Lushai woman in her traditional costume outside her home engaged in traditional practices, Reang women in front of their house or the Hrangkhawl women working near their homes.

**Natural Environment:** Tripura has a number of water bodies that adorn its natural landscape. Hossain has developed elegant and picturesque compositions of Tripura’s lakes including the Rudrasagar, the Kalyan Sagar, the Jagannath Dighi, the Dhani Sagar, the Amarsagar, the Sipahijala and the Dumbor lake. Some of these have been photographed from dawn to dusk and these images illustrate how the quality of the water bodies and landscape as a whole changes with the passage of time and light. Hossain has also extensively documented the Gomati river.

Other natural scenes that Hossain has photographed include the Durgabari Tea Estate near Agartala; the Sipahijala wildlife sanctuary, a Sal forest, and a forested area at the Jampui hills. In these photographs we see images of migratory birds, monkeys and wild ducks.

Tourism: Contemporary touristic sites are the subject of some of Hossain’s photographs. These include a distant view of Rajarshri Yatri Niwas — a government-run tourist lodge; the Malancha Niwas — where Rabindranath Tagore stayed on his visits to Agartala; the Sagarmahal tourist lodge; the Pantha Niwas in South Tripura, Udaipur; a Tourist Lodge from outside was taken in Sipahijala and Vanbung in Jampui Hills; a roadside rest-house documented on the way to Nirmahal palace, among numerous others.

**Royal heritage:** Tripura was ruled since the 15th century by the Manikya dynasty and in some of Hossain’s

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114 Hojagiri dance is performed on the occasion of Hojagiri festivals or Laxmi Puja, held in the following full moon night of Durga Puja. Generally after 3rd day of Dashera, the Goddess Mailuma (Tipra Indigenous Goddess) is worshipped.

115 Reang tribe is also called the Kaubru in the local region.

116 Terracotta, terra cotta, or terra-cotta in its material sense as an earthenware substrate, is a clay-based unglazed or glazed ceramic where the fired body is porous.

117 Lushai is another tribe under Kuki-chin group of tribes. Their main concentration is under Kanchanpur Sub-Division of North Tripura District. Lushai’s are commonly known as Mizos.

118 The Chakma people are a tribal group from the eastern-most regions of the Indian subcontinent.

119 A tribe of Tripura named by former Maharaja of Tripura.

120 Hrangkhawl is one of the 21 scheduled tribes of Tripura dwelling in the Teliamura sub-division of West Tripura.
photographs we can catch glimpses of the erstwhile royalty of Tripura. The Ujjayanta palace\textsuperscript{121} in Agartala, the Nirmahal palace\textsuperscript{122} near the Rudrasagar Lake in Melaghar and, the Pilak palace have been documented in detail by Hossain.

Local Environment and Living Practices: With a secular lens that respects the social and cultural diversity of Tripura, Hossain developed photographs of different religions, their places of worship and practices. He made pictures of Hindu temples, old mosques and secluded monasteries. Some of the religious sites he has documented include the Benuban Vihar\textsuperscript{123}, the Jagannath Temple, the Laxminarayan temple, the Gedumia' Masjid, the Uma Maheswar or Kali temple adjacent to the Ujjayanta palace.

A mosque that was in 1996, the Dimatoli mosque, documented from different angles in Melaghar. Hossain also covered the Dargah of Badar Shahib in Udaipur built in honor of Fakir Badar Sahib, a famous Muslim ascetic of Chittagong, who had come to Tripura about 400 years ago.

Historical significance: There are photographs of historical significance in Hossain’s collection. These include images a stone sculpture of Durga, Ganesha and Bishnu at the Pilak historical palace; the Unnakoti rock carvings in Unnakoti historical palace and the ruins of a palace in Udaipur.

The photographer’s notes: “I was never influenced by any political tendencies. In fact, I must share that in 1997, politics was more or less influenced by the cultural ethos in Tripura”, states Ahmad Hossain about working in

\textsuperscript{121} The Ujjayanta Palace (Nuyungma in Tripuri language) is a museum and the former palace of the Kingdom of Tripura situated in Agartala, which is now the capital of the Indian state of Tripura.

\textsuperscript{122} Neermahal is a former royal palace built by Maharaja of Tripura Kingdom Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya bahadur of the erstwhile Kingdom of Tripura.

\textsuperscript{123} Benuban Vihar is one of the most attractive Buddhist destinations of Tripura, located at Kunjaban area in northern part of Agartala city.
Tripura.
A particular incident in Tripura has stayed with Hossain when he unintentionally documented the Dimatoli Mosque, that was only known to the people after having accidently discovered in the year 1997. Hossain saw this mosque while crossing a jungle on his way to the Bangladesh border. The structure of the mosque was similar to the Babri Masjid. Hossain documented the mosque with an eye towards its construction and design. In 1997 the mosque appeared well preserved. However, when he visited Tripura a decade later in 2007 the outer appearance of the mosque had changed and tiles had been used to furnish its roof. Hossain’s images of the mosque from 1997 bear archaeological value for the original structure has been substantially altered in recent times, a development that Hossain himself bemoans.

GLOSSARY

Mela: Mela is a Bengali term for fair.
Puja: Puja is a Bengali term for worship
Melaghar: Melaghar is a small town located in the Indian state of Tripura and a Municipal Council in Sipahjala district situated about 50 km from capital Agartala.
Noatia are one of the Tripuri clan of Tripura state of India. The clan mainly lives in Dhalai and the North Tripura districts.
Malancha Niwas: Malancha Niwas is the house where Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had stayed during his visit to Agartala in 1919.
Uchai: Uchai Tribes are living in Tripura since time immemorial. They have migrated in Tripura from Arakan Hills of Myanmar.
Pilak: Pilak is an archaeological site in the Santirbazar sub-division of South Tripura district of the Indian state of Tripura. Many images and structures, belonging to Buddhist and Hindu sects, have been discovered here since 1927.