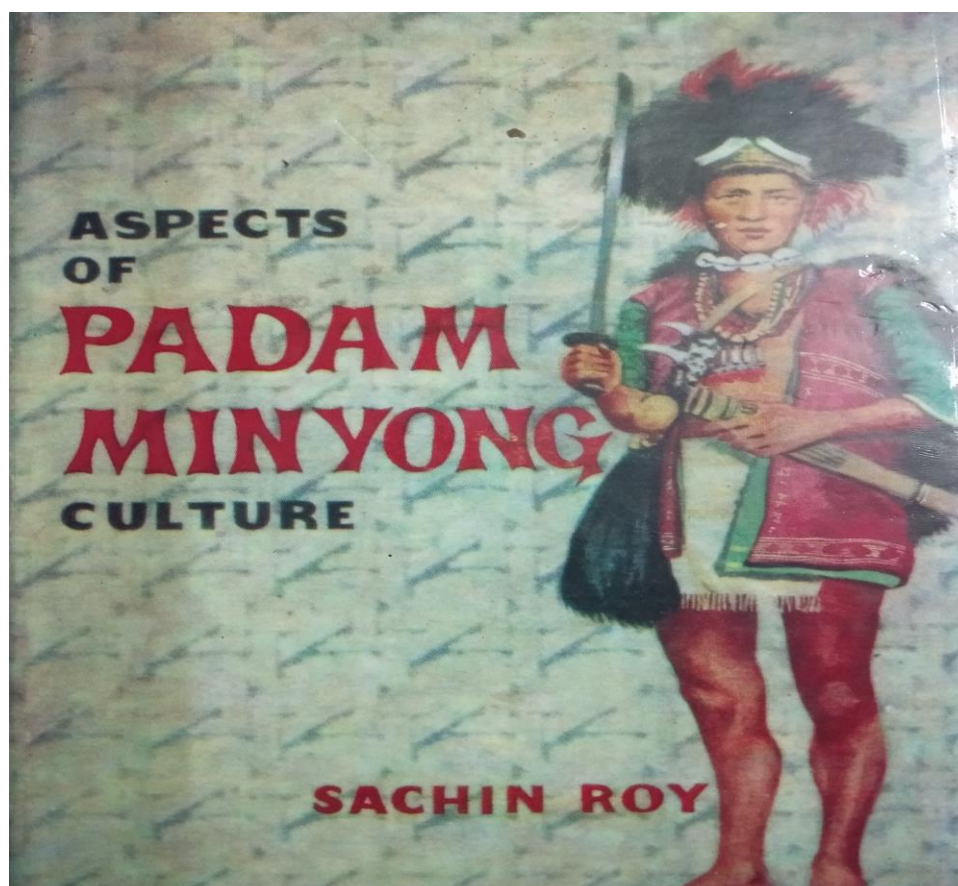


Book Review

**A book review on ‘Aspects of Padam-Minyong culture’ by Sachin Roy**  
(Forwarded by Harry Verrier Holman Elwin and Published by the Director of Research, Government of  
Arunachal Pradesh. Third Edition:1997.)

**Anand Gupta<sup>a,\*</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>Department of Anthropology, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, Falmer, BN1 9RH, United Kingdom.



ISBN-81-7516-9 | Year of Publication-1960 (First Edition) | Pages-XIII+311 | Price-130

The book review outlines the journey of a versatile, gifted, ‘little-known’ Indian anthropologist/museum curator and his contribution to the social anthropology of Northeast, India. The book *Aspects of Padam-Minyong culture* is one of the first kinds of post-colonial ‘tribal ethnography’ and a ‘descriptive monograph’ of the extended eastern Himalayan people of present-day Arunachal Pradesh. The book was the outcome of various tours carried

\*Corresponding author: [ag687@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:ag687@sussex.ac.uk)

Received on: 28.06.2020, Accepted on: 21.11.2020

Cite as: Gupta A. 2020. A book review on ‘Aspects of Padam-Minyong culture’ by Sachin Roy (Forwarded by Harry Verrier Holman Elwin and Published by the Director of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Third Edition:1997.), Dera Natung Government College Research Journal, 5, 72-75.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56405/dngcrj.2020.05.01.10>

by the author as a Political officer of NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) as well as an anthropologist at Siang Frontier Division<sup>1</sup> in 1956-57. The book was a product of his first-hand detailed ethnographic study of the frontier sub-tribes. In this book, the author argues that the Adi culture has a close affinity to the culture in the South (trans-Brahmaputra tribes) rather than the Tibetan culture in the North. His argument was later challenged by Stuart H. Blackburn and other Indian anthropologists who had worked among the other *Tani* groups such *Apatani*, *Galo*, *Tagin* and *Nyishi*. In contemporary times, the book brings new debates on the NEFA dress and tribal psychology, how the social change from the 'outside world' has impacted the cultural web of tribal life? In addition, the author has also engaged with sociological theories and approaches such as social change, acculturation, developmental policies, westernization, nationalization of the frontier state, and a philanthropological approach towards the people of Arunachal Pradesh<sup>2</sup>.

The author's academic journey has started under Prof. K.P. Chattopadhyaya at the Calcutta school of social anthropology of British India. Roy's connection with NEFA began in 1948. He studied the 'somatometry of the *Adis*' at the *Pasighat* community project under the supervision of Dr. B.S. Guha, the doyen of Indian anthropologists. Dr. Guha was also the founder of the Anthropology department at Guwahati University, Assam. Later, Sachin Roy joined as the Cultural Research Officer at NEFA for four years. Later, he became the first Indian keeper of the National Museum, New Delhi and completed his Ph.D. from Delhi University in 1966. Roy curated a North-eastern section in the National Museum to integrate/assimilate the tribal artifacts in the National Museum, Delhi. Interestingly, Roy also proposed the idea of building the first ethnographic museum to late Mrs. Indira Gandhi in order to display the diversity of the Indian tribes; this is now known as Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, and is located in Bhopal. On the occasion of Elwin's memorial lecture, Roy quaintly and picturesquely mentioned that Elwin, "has always been to me what Mentor was to Telemachus". Sachin was also a prolific photographer, keeper, and museum curator.

The book deals with the social and cultural life cycle of the *Padam-Minyong*, the two sub-tribes under the bigger family of the *Adis* indigenous tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh (earlier known as '*Abors*') inhabited the Eastern part of the Siang Frontier Division is now known as a part of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The book was the first full-scale scientific study of Patrilineal descent groups. *Padam* group comprises eleven named clans and is sub-divided into numerous lineages; *Minyong*, exogamous moieties of fifteen and sixteen clans.

---

<sup>1</sup>Under the British Raj, NEFT (North Eastern Frontier Tract) was divided into four frontier divisions. Siang Frontier Division was one of the Frontier Division of present-day Arunachal Pradesh inhabited by Galo and Adis. Galo and Adis come from the Tani groups and they are one of the twenty-six major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

<sup>2</sup> In Hindi, Arunachal Pradesh means 'the land of rising Sun'.

The author took an audacious attempt to understand the socio-cultural, religious aspects of the singular NEFA tribe at that time. The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapters elaborate the description of the origin of the *Adi* name, their animated landscape, unique form of barter system or exchange system with plain peoples and their communication or migration route. Chapter two deals with a detailed description of each and every object/ artifact used in everyday life by *Padam-Minyong* which is very authentic information for those who are interested in museum studies. Chapter three was emphasized on the specific household, village composition, and social life of two sub-tribes was merely concluded in twenty-five pages. In the fourth chapter, the author compares the Indian political structure with the *Adi* style of governance. The chapter depicts the importance of *Kebang* in *Adi* society. The role of political institutions is to govern their people with the help of the old custodians, skilled orators, young orators to mitigate any type of conflict related to property, marriage, thieves, envy, etc in the community. The author sublimely showed the proper use of old customary law which is equal for every *Adis*. The fifth chapter addresses the importance of religion in the *Adi* community. The concept of good and evil spirits resides in the *Adi* landscape and the idea of 'Epom' Spirits. The chapters have also created a space for the oral literature of *Adi*'s origin via mythological characters such as *Tani* (the trickster), and stories of envy and betrayal of two brothers, *Nibo* and *Robo*. The book chapters also contain the earlier mythological stories collected by Verrier Elwin, C. von Furer-Haimendorf, Durban and others on the *Adi* religion. This chapter seems a bit ambiguous, it should be more structural compared to the fourth chapter on the political life of *Padam-Minyong*.

The book contains a lot of unique sets of old photographs of present-day *Adis* and *Galos* indigenous tribal groups of Arunachal Pradesh. In this book, the author has used sketches of cane bridges, a precise description of *Adi* architecture, designs of *Padam-Minyong* bamboo houses, traditional dresses of women wearing beads, or other ornaments, photos of men wearing their traditional *Adi* war dress, *dao* (machete), traditional weaving tools, different types of bamboo trap to catch fishes and the hand-made drawings of their animated landscape. By doing so, the author brings a detailed observation of the *Padam-Minyong* material culture, by providing that space to re-discover the *Padam-Minyong* material culture through his writing/photography/sketches on the *Adi* sub-tribes.

## Conclusion

This book is still a valuable asset to understand the gripping old stories and debates of NEFA people of the Siang Frontier Division. The author's contribution towards postcolonial anthropology and ethnography was sublime. The book is still used as a reference point, to collect artifacts for museums in Arunachal Pradesh. His storytelling nature brings out the fascinating past of *Padam-Minyong* culture. This book attempts to clear the 'dark shadow' of British anthropology via created an unique style of writing in the field of social Anthropology as a literary discipline.

---

A must-read book for the under-graduate and post-graduate anthropology students. The book carries a lot of information on a singular sub-tribe of Adi groups. Especially for those researchers, administrative officers, and research department officers working among the *Adis* of Arunachal Pradesh. For me, it is a 'Bible' for the social anthropologists of North East India. This book is immensely popular among the research scholars and administrative officers of Arunachal Pradesh. The book is a benchmark for the 'outsider' on how to conduct social research in Arunachal Pradesh. It carries a lot of information on the material culture of the Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Overall, a pure classic that I have read after a long time in the context of Arunachal Pradesh. This book review is a tribute to all the 'little known anthropologists' who have contributed their life to the development of anthropology in India.

**References:**

- Barth, Fredrik. 1962.** 'Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture', *American Anthropologist*. American Anthropological Association, pp. 1333–1334.
- Needham, R. 1961.** 'Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture. By Sachin Roy (Book Review)', *Man*. London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, etc., 73– 74.
- Roy, S. 1997.** *Aspects of Padam-Minyong culture*. Director of Research Arunachal Pradesh: Itanagar.
- Rustomji, K Nari. 1988.** *Verrier Elwin and India's north-eastern borderlands*. North-Eastern Hill University Publications: Shillong.