

The well known anthropologist E.B. Taylor has given us a very popular definition of culture. According to him culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” The term culture originally came from the Roman philosopher Cicero who used the term *cultura animi* (cultivation of the soul) in his book *Tusculanae Disputationes*.¹ In it he takes the term *cultura* which means agricultural cultivation and applies it in a philosophical way to give it a teleological meaning of “a process of humanizing a person”. Interpreting this term, Samuel Pufendorf says that culture “refers to all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism, and through artifice, become fully human.”² Putting the two together, we understand culture as something fundamental to human beings something without which a human being would not be different from a wild beast. At the same time, culture is something so vast and so inclusive that no single definition can contain it. At best we can only describe its component elements.

The interest in the study of man and human culture goes back to the emergence of humanism in the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe. The Renaissance Humanism gave focus to the study of the so called *Studia Humanitatis* which modern universities call Humanities. Perhaps it was the great dedication given to the study of culture in Europe during those eras that consequently created a misconception among European colonists that European cultures were the best and that every group of people outside that continent should be considered “uncivilized” or “barbaric.” What followed such an attitude was a sort of “cultural colonization” which became a deplorable agenda of the colonists. Today it is an accepted fact that culture is specific to a group of people and so no external culture should be imposed on a community. Culture in fact, is what makes a group of people unique and which gives it an identity of its own. From this perspective, culture is true to its root which implies agriculture namely that it is usually specific to a place. It is wonderful to see that there are great initiatives taken today by scholars of different cultural contexts, to make a deeper study of their cultures.

The tribal scholars of North East India have shown great interest in the study of their people’s cultures. This has helped in unravelling the beauty and richness of tribal cultures of this region. This issue of our Journal contains a number of articles written by tribal scholars of this region on their particular cultures. We have articles describing the elaborate socio-cultural and religious practices of the tribal communities like the marriage of the Biaste society of Meghalaya or the marriage among the Lois of Manipur, the matriliney of the Khasis or the festivals of the Lepchas or the *Naknyulum* festival of the Chang Nagas. Other articles deal with some significant cultural elements like the Mizo *puan* or the use of tobacco among Thangkhol Nagas, the material culture of the Poumai Nagas and the cultural significance of each of these. Another article gives an ethnographic profile of the Thadou Kukis of Manipur. Two articles in this issue make a critical evaluation of the communities. One is a critical evaluation of the so called “civilizing” of the Mizos by the white people and the other is a critical outlook on the health schemes of the government for the Lisu community of Arunachal Pradesh.

These researched articles presented in this issue, are a great eye opener to those who are still new to these tribal cultures of North East India. We may safely affirm that there is so much still to be known, studied and understood about tribal cultures of this region. Comparatively, very little has been done so far in this regard. Considering the fact that this region is inhabited by more than two hundred tribes and sub-tribes, there are many facts that still remain unexplored. We have a double task in this regard, one is to explore and bring to light the hidden rich cultures of many of the unknown communities and the other is for our tribal scholars to rectify misconceptions about our cultures and traditions created by non-tribal scholars of the past which tended to put tribal cultures in bad light. A part of this attempt is already seen in this issue. We hope that this particular issue of our Journal will serve to enlighten the minds of readers who have either a curiosity or academic interest in knowing more about the tribal cultures of this region.

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1 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanes (Tusculan (45 BC) Disputation)* pp. II, 15.

2 Richard Velkley, “The Tension in the Beautiful: On Culture and Civilization in Rousseau and German Philosophy”, *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) pp. 11–30.