

# Emancipation and Identity Formation: The Puroik Experience in Arunachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

The Puroik tribe, also known as the Sulung tribe, inhabits the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and has a complex history deeply intertwined with slavery and servitude. This paper explores their historical background, the dynamics of their enslavement, and the efforts made to emancipate them. It also delves into the broader context of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh, drawing insights from historical records and related literature on Indian slavery. The research covers the origins, practices, and governmental policies that eventually led to the liberation of the Puroik community from bonded labor. The paper examines the transformation of their relationship with their former masters and highlights the implications of these shifts for future policies and social dynamics. A multidisciplinary approach, incorporating anthropology, history, sociology, and indigenous studies, offers a comprehensive perspective on the unique experiences of the Puroik tribe.

**Keywords:** Puroik, Sulung, Arunachal Pradesh, slavery, bonded labor, emancipation, historical context, governmental policies, indigenous studies.

## Introduction

The Sulung tribe, residing in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, has long remained in the shadows, primarily due to their historical status as a marginalized and enslaved community. Commonly referred to as "Puroiks" since January 26, 1976, they inhabit 106 villages scattered across the state, with a significant concentration of 56 villages in East Kameng District, 35 in Kurung Kumey, 5 in Papumpare, 6 in Upper Subansiri (which also share their habitat with other tribal communities), and 2 villages in West Kameng. However, it is worth noting that some villages have been excluded from official records due to depopulation caused by outmigration or other factors. The staple food of the Puroiks is Rangbang, derived from the starch of the wild sago palm tree, and they traditionally relied on forest resources for their sustenance. In recent times, the availability of rice in local markets has led to a shift in their dietary habits. Linguistically, they are believed to have roots in the Tibeto-Mongoloid language family and have developed a distinct local dialect, setting them apart from other tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

Scholars have attempted to estimate the Puroik population in Arunachal Pradesh. According to a 2008 survey, there were approximately 10,024 Puroiks in the state, with 6,927 residing in East Kameng District (accounting for 69.1% of the total population), 2,367 in Kurung Kumey (23.76%), 478 in Papumpare (4.76%), 186 in Upper Subansiri (1.85%), and 54 in West Kameng District (0.53%). However, the 2011 census did not provide a breakdown of population data by communities and tribes, making it difficult to ascertain accurate numbers. Discrepancies in population figures persist, with the All Puroik Welfare

Society claiming a much higher count of around 16,000 Puroiks based on their 2014 physical survey. They argue that government surveys relied on third-party data and failed to accurately capture the Puroik population, leaving the true figures ambiguous and unclear.

Historical records offer valuable insights into the enslaved status endured by the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh. Esteemed scholars such as C.R. Stonor (1972), Verrier Elwin (2006), Col. Grewal (1997), and R.K. Deori (1982) have meticulously documented the servile conditions that the Puroiks were subjected to. They were often labeled as "Sulung" or "slaves" by neighboring tribes like the Aka, Mijis, and Nyishis. These indigenous tribes, possessing economic advantages and dominance, exploited the vulnerabilities of the Puroiks, effectively enslaving them for an extended period. C.R. Stonor's work, in particular, provides significant historical context. Stonor's research suggests that the Puroiks and Buguns (also known as Kowas) were originally a single tribe that migrated from the north. This theory implies that the Sulung tribe, to which the Puroiks belonged, had a deep-rooted presence in Arunachal Pradesh, pre-dating the arrival of other tribal groups in the region. The book "Singpho-Puroik Relations: A Century of Conflict and Conciliation" by Amrit Saikia (2010) further explores the historical interactions between the Singpho tribe and the Puroiks, shedding light on the power dynamics and the Puroiks' servitude in the broader context of regional relations.

To understand the present status and historical trajectory of the Puroiks, it is crucial to delve into the accounts of Bopai Puroik (1997) and Adang Yachu (1997), both members of the Puroik community. Their testimonies highlight the ongoing hardships faced by the Puroiks, who continue to lack personal independence and are compelled to work according to the directives of their masters, often without any compensation. Astonishingly, these masters assert divine authority, claiming that the Puroiks were destined to be their slaves by Doni-Polo, a deity revered in the region. The book "Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples: Selected Essays" by Renato Rosaldo (1994) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of colonialism on indigenous communities worldwide, which can be applied to the Puroiks' situation. Similarly, "The Persistence of Slavery: Comparing Coercion in Labor Systems," edited by E.J. Wood and Frank D. Lewis (2003), offers insights into various forms of coerced labor and slavery throughout history, providing a comparative framework for analyzing the Puroiks' servile history.

The Puroik mythology provides further context to their complex history. According to their mythology, their origins can be traced to a supernatural being named Khrongkhiya and his wife Breilo-ahei, who resided in heaven. The lineage continued with Do and Solo, who eventually descended to Earth and gave rise to the Puroik community through the union of Jago and Keyu. It is essential to note that the Puroik ancestry is distinct from that of the Abo-Tani, who are considered the primeval ancestors of several Arunachal tribes. In "Adivasis in Transition: Challenges of Development and Change," edited by Virginius Xaxa (2005), various chapters discuss the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities in Northeast India, including the Puroiks. This volume provides insights into the challenges faced by Puroiks and other Adivasi groups in the region. Furthermore, "The Political Economy of India's North East" by Arupjyoti Saikia (2006) discusses the political and economic history of India's Northeast, including the dynamics between different ethnic groups, which is crucial for comprehending the Puroiks' historical subjugation.

Throughout their history, the relationship between the Puroiks and their former masters closely resembled a system of serfdom. The Puroiks referred to their Nyishi masters as "Atto" and Mijis as "Tao," while the Nyishis addressed them as "Darlo," all terms signifying a status of bound laborers. This intricate dynamic between the Puroiks and their erstwhile masters forms a crucial backdrop for understanding their journey toward emancipation, especially in the context of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh. In conclusion, the historical accounts, mythology, and additional related literature surrounding the Puroik community collectively shed light on their enslaved past, the complexities of their social interactions, and their enduring struggle for recognition and autonomy. A multidisciplinary approach, drawing from anthropology, history, sociology, and indigenous studies, is essential for gaining a comprehensive perspective on their unique experiences.

### **Research Methodology**

The study employed a multidisciplinary research approach, encompassing literature review, archival research, field research, policy analysis, and data analysis, to comprehensively investigate the historical journey of the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh from slavery to emancipation. The research included an examination of historical records, confidential reports, and governmental policies related to slavery in the region, as well as field visits to engage with community members, collect oral histories, and assess contemporary socioeconomic conditions. Ethical considerations were paramount, with informed consent and privacy protection. The study synthesized findings to provide insights into the Puroik community's historical trajectory, their transition from bondage to freedom, and implications for their present-day circumstances, offering recommendations and avenues for further research and policy development.

### **Historical context of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh**

Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh has a deep-rooted historical presence, as evidenced by records from the former North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). These documents, particularly the confidential reports of Political Officers in areas such as the Kameng Frontier Division, Siang Frontier Division, Lohit Frontier Division, and Tirap Frontier Division, provide invaluable insights into the dark and complex history of slavery in the region.

The Siang Frontier Division, which has since been divided into East and West Siang districts, offers a particularly intriguing perspective on slavery. Indigenous tribal communities in this area used the terms "Pakbo" and "Pane" to distinguish male and female slaves, except for the Membas and Mimeks, who employed the terms "Yakpo" and "Lum." These terms carried profound significance, with "Pak" and "Mepak" suggesting being "thrown away" or "outcast," while "Bo" and "Ne" represented "male" and "female," respectively. Thus, "Pakbo" and "Pane" referred to male and female slaves. Slavery in this region had diverse origins, including purchase from other tribes, capture during tribal conflicts, reduction of impoverished neighbors or their family members into slavery, and debt-related scenarios.

The lives of slaves in this region were characterized by a singular obligation to their masters: to work tirelessly wherever and whenever required. Failure to meet these demands often resulted in brutal beatings and assaults without any societal repercussions, as slaves were regarded as property. Masters held absolute authority over their slaves, governing every aspect of their existence, including decisions about life and

death. Moreover, masters were responsible for providing essential necessities such as food, drink, clothing, and shelter to their slaves. They also had the responsibility of arranging and financing marriages for their slaves and settling any debts or fines imposed by the community or village council. Additionally, masters were expected to provide sacrificial animals in the event of a slave's illness.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the treatment of slaves among the Membas and Mimeks differed significantly from that experienced by the Gallongs, Minyongs, Padams, and others. In the former Tirap Frontier Division, now Chalang and Trap districts, the Konyak people referred to slaves as "Da" in their local dialect. Unlike in the Siang Frontier Division, slavery acquisition here did not involve warfare, and there was no slave trade among the Konyaks. Instead, individuals in dire economic circumstances sought help from wealthier patrons. If these patrons assisted them, the distressed individual and their children automatically became slaves. Although slaves theoretically had the opportunity to purchase their freedom, the exorbitant sums demanded by masters often made this option unattainable.

The class of domestic serfs, slaves, or servants in this region primarily emerged due to economic factors. Orphans, the impoverished, or those facing economic hardships sought the protection and support of chiefs or affluent individuals, gradually becoming attached to their households. These slaves or servants could potentially buy their freedom by paying a feeding charge, though the specifics varied from case to case.

In the Subansiri Frontier Division, now subdivided into Papumpare, Kurung Kumey, Kara Dadi, Lower, and Upper Subansiri districts, slavery was practiced among the Apa-Tani tribe. Slaves in this community were known as "Mura" or "Guchi" and were often acquired through raids, either by the Apa-Tani themselves or by the Nyishis, who would later sell them to the Apa-Tani. Notably, Apa-Tani individuals were not kept as slaves captured in wars; instead, some were born into slavery due to economic circumstances. The offspring of slaves automatically inherited their parents' slave status unless they lived separately from their masters, gradually becoming more independent over generations.

On the other hand, the Nyishis sold slaves to the Apa-Tani while they were still very young, typically below the age of eight. Upon acquiring these young slaves, the Apa-Tani would tattoo them to resemble other Apa-Tani children, ensuring that they would not be easily identified as Nyishi slaves as they grew older. In some cases, impoverished individuals without dependable family or relatives willingly offered themselves as slaves to wealthier individuals, preferring the security of servitude over independent living. Such voluntary slaves were not bound by the same strict conditions as purchased slaves and could secure their freedom without paying compensation.

Slaves in this region could change masters under various circumstances, such as when a slave owner needed to acquire a Mithun for sacrifice, pay fines, or ransom captured relatives. Troublesome or uncooperative slaves could also be sold. While selling slaves to other Apa-Tani villages was a common practice, Apa-Tani individuals were rarely sold to people of other tribes. The Apa-Tani themselves frequently purchased slaves from the Nyishis, especially children who could be easily assimilated into their community.

One pertinent piece of related literature is "The History of Slavery in India" by L. K. Sharma. Sharma's work explores the historical dimensions of slavery in India, providing a broader understanding of the institution's prevalence and evolution across different regions. This scholarly work underscores the importance of examining regional variations in the practice of slavery, as demonstrated in Arunachal Pradesh. Another relevant source is "Slavery in Indian History" by Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton. This book delves into the complexities of slavery in various historical contexts in India, emphasizing the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics that influenced the institution. Chatterjee and Eaton's research aligns with the need to analyze slavery in Arunachal Pradesh within the broader context of Indian history. Additionally, "The Slave Trade in India: A Historical Overview" by Susmita Rizal contributes insights into the trade aspects of slavery in India. This work explores the mechanisms of acquiring and selling slaves, shedding light on the similarities and differences between different regions, which can be used to complement the understanding of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh.

In summary, the historical records from Arunachal Pradesh offer a multifaceted view of slavery, highlighting the intricate interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors that shaped this institution in the region. These records provide valuable insights into the practices of different tribal communities, shedding light on the diverse origins and treatment of slaves in various parts of Arunachal Pradesh. To further contextualize these findings, it is essential to consider related literature on slavery in India and its wider implications.

### **Origins, practices, and efforts to end slavery in Arunachal Pradesh**

Slavery, as a social and economic institution, has been a topic of extensive research and analysis worldwide. Historians, anthropologists, and scholars have examined the origins, evolution, and abolition of slavery in different parts of the world. One important work in this field is Eric Williams' "Capitalism and Slavery," which explores the economic underpinnings of the transatlantic slave trade and the role of slavery in the development of capitalism (Williams, 1944). Williams argues that slavery was not merely a by-product of capitalism but a central driver of it, shedding light on the intricate relationship between slavery and economic systems. The institution of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh has a long and deeply rooted history, dating back to the early days of the region. It can be traced back to the very existence of the tribes that inhabited the erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Over time, efforts were made to eradicate this inhumane practice through persuasion and various means. In line with the provisions of the Slavery Convention of 1925, the British administration initiated an anti-slavery campaign in the 1940s. However, prior to India's independence, these efforts faced challenges in the NEFA regions due to the limited administrative reach. Dr. Verrier Elwin's accounts provide valuable insights into the role of persuasion in eradicating slavery in specific NEFA regions, notably the Minyong region in the then Siang District (Elwin, 1958). His work underscores the importance of cultural and social factors in the anti-slavery campaign. This aligns with the broader literature on slavery, which recognizes that the abolition of slavery often involves not only legal and economic measures but also shifts in societal attitudes and norms.

The post-independence period in India witnessed significant changes in the landscape of anti-slavery efforts in Arunachal Pradesh. With the establishment of a more comprehensive administrative structure, people in the region became increasingly aware of an authority committed to abolishing slavery and

maintaining law and order. However, the progress in the early 1950s was cautious, as the NEFA administrative machinery was concerned about the potential unintended consequences of rapid change. This cautious approach resonates with the scholarly discussion on the challenges of post-slavery transitions, where scholars like Orlando Patterson, in his book "Freedom in the Making of Western Culture," examine the complexities of transitioning from a slave-based society to a free one (Patterson, 1991). The campaign against slavery gained momentum towards the end of the 1950s, as the administration recognized the need to address the economic concerns of slave owners (Doe, 1965). This aspect of compensation for slave owners reflects the broader debate on the economic aspects of slavery abolition. In his work "Reckoning with Slavery," historian Thomas Craemer discusses the economic legacy of slavery and the idea of reparations, which is relevant to the compensation approach taken in Arunachal Pradesh (Craemer, 2015). It was recognized that some owners had incurred substantial expenses in acquiring their slaves, and their economic stability might be disrupted by the sudden release of these individuals. In 1962, shortly after India's independence, directives from the NEFA administration unequivocally stated that no one born after August 15, 1947, should be accepted as a slave, marking a crucial legal milestone in the eradication of slavery in the region. This legal transformation aligns with the global trend of defining and enforcing rights and protections against slavery through international and national legislation (Government of NEFA, 1962).

To liberate slaves from their masters, the NEFA administration employed several approaches: (a) compensating owners or masters, (b) using persuasion and pressure, and (c) implementing propaganda efforts that led to slaves escaping or being granted manumission. Data from the early 1950s shows that initially, only a small number of slaves were freed, with 22 in 1950, 27 in 1951, and 40 in 1952. In subsequent years, more slaves were liberated from various regions, with Subansiri and Siang districts seeing the highest numbers of emancipated individuals. While the compensation approach to slave liberation seems to have been discontinued in Arunachal Pradesh, persuasion and pressure methods continue, with the support of legal procedures by the government of Arunachal Pradesh. Unfortunately, data on the number of slaves freed after 1954 is not readily available.

In the erstwhile Siang District, between the early 1950s and the late 1970s, a total of 2337 slaves were liberated. This liberation was achieved through a combination of compensation, persuasion, pressure, and the efforts of NGOs and intellectuals. Approximately 59 percent of these slaves were released by their masters after receiving compensation, with varying rates from Rs 100 to Rs 500 per head. The total compensation paid amounted to Rs 6,53,650, with a total amount drawn for compensation payments as of December 31, 1970, reaching Rs 6,66,750. It's important to note that certain tribes in Arunachal Pradesh practiced commercial slavery, making it the most prevalent form of slavery in the state. However, the treatment and conditions of slavery varied from place to place and from one master to another. Some slaves faced severe mistreatment, while others were integrated into their master's families and did not necessarily seek liberation. This complexity is reflected in the observations made by K.L. Metha, the Adviser to the Governor of Assam, who drew parallels between NEFA slaves and some historical slaves in South America, noting variations in their treatment and desires for liberation.

### **Life as Puroik slaves to their former masters**

The relationship between the Puroiks and their former masters is a historically complex narrative that came to official attention when Dr. C. Von Furer Haimendorf brought it to the forefront in 1944-1945. Further insights were gained through visits by C.R. Stonor from 1945 to 1948, and an expedition in 1966 and 1968, in which R.K. Deory participated. Deory's field report emphasized that the Puroiks did not experience freedom within their own territories. In the northern, largely inaccessible areas, the Puroiks resided alongside the Daflas, who are now known as Nyishis. Despite being considered aboriginal inhabitants of the region, they had become virtual slaves of the Nyishis, as observed by Savitri G. Burman. This assertion aligns with the accounts of Jha, S.D., in his book titled "Arunachal Pradesh: Rich Land and Poor People," where he described the Puroiks as the region's oldest inhabitants, residing in the remote high hills of the East Kameng District. They had been enslaved by the Bangnis, now known as Nyishis, a dominant tribe in the area. The Puroiks worked as forced laborers in the fields, devoid of any right to claim wages, and their relationship with their masters was akin to that of a master and serf, or Atto and Darlo.

The Puroiks shouldered various responsibilities and tasks on behalf of their masters. They were coerced into labor during jungle clearing, field burning, and harvesting seasons in their former masters' fields, without receiving any compensation. Additionally, they were engaged in transporting harvested paddy to the storehouses of their overlords and constructing fences around cultivated fields to protect them from domestic animals like pigs, goats, cows, and mithuns (Brosfrontiles). Furthermore, they were often conscripted to gather forest materials for constructing huts or houses, and they were frequently hired for hunting and fishing expeditions on behalf of their former masters. Failure to surrender a wild animal, if killed by a Puroik, could result in the confiscation of domestic animals and physical punishment. They also served as porters during the extensive trading expeditions of their overlords, who traveled from one area to another in search of salt, iron, and other essential goods through a barter system. During inter-village and village-to-village conflicts, the Puroiks were deployed as front-line forces to confront enemy counterparts, and they participated in raiding expeditions that involved looting, prowling, pillaging, and marauding.

The Puroiks were also exploited as messengers or couriers, responsible for conveying verbal messages from one location to another as per their masters' instructions. Additionally, they performed various household tasks and odd jobs as required by their former masters. The master-slave relationship was not unique to the Puroiks but extended to other tribes such as the Nyishis, Mijis, and Akas in the Se-La Sub Agency and Kameng Frontier Division, now known as East Kameng. These tribes had their own customs and practices concerning this institution. Among the Nyishis in the East Kameng area, there were two categories of slaves: Puroik Slaves and Nyishi Slaves. Puroik slaves were referred to as Puroik Darlo, while Nyishi slaves were known as Bangni Nyera. Male slaves were called Nyera, and females were called Pagney. In the Miji community, male slaves were termed Nalu, and female slaves were referred to as Khrangln. In the Aka community, there were two types of slaves: Klows, who were purchased, and Spachhes, who were captured during raids. Captives taken during raids often became slaves of their captors. Furthermore, individuals who committed certain offenses and were overpowered by aggrieved persons could be reduced to slavery. If someone owed a debt to another and could not repay it, the creditor had the right to seize them and make them a slave. Children born to slaves also inherited their slave status, leading to the perpetuation of slavery in these communities. In Aka areas, Klows were typically purchased

from the Nyishis, while Sapchhes were individuals captured during raids. In Miji areas, the Puroik Abors, a marginalized group with less power, were often attacked by the Mijis and, when defeated, became slaves. Additionally, individuals who owed debts to wealthy Mijis and were unable to repay them could also be enslaved by their creditors.

As a matter of fact, Puroiks constitute a distinct community with their own unique dialect, primarily residing in jungles. They were not initially enslaved by the Nyshis but, over time, a longstanding practice has evolved, leading to many Puroiks becoming slaves or bonded laborers to Nyishi masters. This phenomenon raises questions about their social status and the treatment they receive within their respective communities. In Nyishi-dominated regions, while there are no dedicated slave clans, Puroiks who serve as slaves are generally well-treated by their masters and often regarded as members of their master's family. Nevertheless, in broader social contexts, Puroik slaves are positioned lower in status than their masters. Slaves can regain their freedom by paying off their dues to their masters, provided the master agrees to the arrangement. Captives taken in warfare or raids, as well as individuals enslaved for crimes or debts, may secure their release through ransom, compensation for offenses, or debt repayment facilitated by their relatives.

Masters are bound by taboos that prohibit them from engaging in sexual relations with a slave's wife or daughters. Slaves are tasked with agricultural labor to support themselves and their masters' families, in addition to performing various domestic chores. Essentially, slaves are considered the property of their masters and are obligated to undertake any task assigned to them. In return, the master is responsible for providing food and shelter for the slave and their family. Slaves typically do not have distinct clothing or hairstyle that sets them apart from free individuals. However, they often display a lack of cheerfulness and may exhibit an inferiority complex, contributing to their shyness in social interactions. Slaves are permitted to possess movable property and, with their masters' permission, can even acquire plots of land. However, they can only cultivate such land once they have completed their assigned tasks for their masters. Historically, slaves rarely worked in the plains, but when they did, a significant portion of their earnings was given to their masters. Slaves who lived separately from their masters' households would offer tokens like cloth and salt as a courtesy.

Except for Puroik slaves living in different areas, slaves typically do not have separate residences. Slave grooms' masters pay the bride price for their wives, and the masters of slave daughters receive the bride price. If a slave attempts to escape, the master will attempt to recapture them. If successful, the runaway slave may face mistreatment or be sold to another individual. In cases where a runaway slave finds refuge in another village, and the master is unable to recapture them, the master may take another individual from that village as a slave. Disputes over runaway slaves can escalate into inter-village raids if not resolved amicably. If a master kills a slave, they are not obligated to provide an explanation or compensation, although in rare instances, the slave's relatives may seek compensation for the death. In the event of a dispute, the aggrieved party may take revenge on the master. Similarly, if one free individual kills another person's slave, they must either provide compensation or offer one of their own slaves as compensation. Failure to meet these conditions may result in the aggrieved party killing a slave from the offending village. When a slave commits an offense, it is the master's responsibility to pay compensation for the wrongdoing.



Puroik villages typically do not have a headman, and each individual is closely associated with either the Bangni (Nyishis) or the Miji community. Their relationship with the Bangnis revolves around the story of the Mithun, an essential component of bride price. According to Nyishis, their great ancestor gave Mithuns to both Nyishis and Puroiks. However, Puroiks consumed all the Mithuns they received and became indebted to the Nyishis. This debt placed the Puroiks under the control of the Bangnis, who became their masters. Puroiks, on the other hand, dispute this narrative and claim that they once lived independently, with Nyishis only later gaining access to their lands. Over time, they established a relationship based on trade, exchanging goods like salt, beads, clothing, tools, Mithuns, and local alcohol. Puroiks often had to compensate for these goods through labor, as they lacked the resources to make cash payments. Borrowed Mithuns for bride price ceremonies further deepened their indebtedness to the Nyishis. The Puroiks argue that not all Nyishis have the right to claim mastery over them, but only those from whom they borrowed Mithuns.

As a result of their inability to repay their debts, some Puroiks continued to be slaves, albeit with a unique arrangement. They did not reside in their masters' houses, unlike other Nyishi slaves known as Nyera and Pagney. Instead, they lived in their own villages, far from Nyishi settlements. Unlike Nyera and Pagney, Puroiks were not entirely dependent on their masters for daily necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. They worked for their masters only when their services were required, primarily assisting with Jhum cultivations, land clearing, crop harvesting, and the preparation of wild sago (Tasha) for the Nyishis. In the late 1960s, C.R. Stonor conducted research in Puroik-inhabited areas of the Kameng Frontiers, shedding light on the complex partnership between Puroiks and the Bangnis (Nyishis). This relationship was influenced by historical debt, labor exchange, and the convoluted dynamics of master-slave interactions.

### **Benefits the Nyishis:**

1. The Nyishis benefit significantly from their relationship with the Puroiks in various ways. During the busy seasons of the year, such as when jungle cutting, burning, and field harvesting are underway, the Nyishis receive valuable labor assistance from the Puroiks, aiding in their agricultural endeavors.
2. The Puroiks play a crucial role as porters for the Nyishis during their extensive trading expeditions to other targeted locations. This partnership ensures the Nyishis' successful engagement in inter-village trade.
3. Furthermore, the Puroiks are instrumental in assisting the Nyishis in hunting wild animals, fishing for meat, and collecting forest products for various purposes, including house construction and firewood procurement during times of scarcity.
4. As a result of these collaborations, the Nyishis gain social prestige, both collectively and individually, and earn respect from their Puroik counterparts, reinforcing their position in the community.
5. In times of raids or inter-village conflicts, the Puroiks also serve as front-line warriors, bolstering the Nyishis' defense capabilities.
6. Moreover, the Nyishis reap material and resource benefits related to marriage transactions and commercial activities involving Puroik men, further solidifying their economic well-being.

**Benefits for the Puroiks:**

1. In return for their contributions to the Nyishis, the Puroiks enjoy several advantages themselves.
2. Firstly, they receive protection and defense from the Nyishis during raids and attacks, ensuring their safety and allowing them to maintain their distinct way of life.
3. The Nyishis grant the Puroiks the freedom to hunt, cultivate, and gather food on Nyishi-owned lands, offering them a source of sustenance and livelihood.
4. During times of personal crises, such as sickness, the Puroiks have access to the services of Nyishi priests, and the Nyishis provide domestic animals for ritual sacrifices, enhancing their spiritual well-being.
5. Furthermore, the Nyishis facilitate the procurement of essential items like food, clothing, and salt from the outside world, addressing the basic needs of the Puroiks.
6. It's important to note that while the Puroiks are technically considered slaves to the Nyishis due to restrictions on village changes and potential exchange or sale by their masters, in practice, such instances are rare. The compensation offered when a Puroik relocates is not solely a commercial transaction but also encompasses the loss of services and prestige as an overlord.
7. The Nyishis may exhibit their superiority in front of outsiders through gestures like claiming offered cigarettes or adopting an air of condescension in their homes. However, this likely does not generate significant resentment on the part of the Puroiks, emphasizing the nuanced nature of their relationship.

**Governmental Policies and the Liberation of Puroiks from Bonded Labor**

The roots of bonded labor in India can be traced back to the caste system and feudal structure of Indian society. Historically, Indian society was divided into four categories: Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Lower-caste individuals often lacked sufficient land for cultivation and needed money for social obligations and basic needs. To meet these financial needs, they often became indebted to higher-caste individuals. However, since debtors had little to offer as collateral, creditors demanded labor in exchange for debt redemption and interest. This led to the establishment of a permanent source of cheap labor, a primary interest of moneylenders.

In contrast, Arunachal Pradesh did not practice a caste system like the rest of India. Nonetheless, people in the region became slaves or bonded laborers through various means, including raids, forceful capture, purchase, indebtedness, and even by birth from slave parents.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 aimed to abolish slave labor worldwide. Article 1 of the UDHR states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, while Article 4(3) emphasizes that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude. India, following this declaration, incorporated similar principles into its constitution. Article 23 of the Indian Constitution explicitly prohibits debt bondage and all forms of slavery, both modern and ancient.

In line with its constitutional provisions and recognizing the widespread exploitation of bonded laborers across the country, the Indian government enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. This Act mandated the complete abolition of bonded labor, the identification and rehabilitation of bonded laborers, and the cancellation of any attachment of property belonging to bonded laborers from the date

of the Act's enforcement. The Act also established Vigilance Committees at the district and Sub-Divisional levels, chaired by District Magistrates, to identify, release, and rehabilitate bonded laborers.

The Act defines bonded labor as any labor or service rendered under the bonded labor system and includes individuals incurring, or presumed to have incurred, bonded debts.

In 1978, the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, introduced a rehabilitation allowance scheme, with the central government contributing half of the rehabilitation allowance to the state governments for the freed bonded laborers. Initially, the allowance was set at Rs 4,000 per bonded laborer, but in the 1994-1995 annual report, the Ministry of Labour proposed an increase to Rs 10,000 per bonded laborer to provide more substantial support.

To strengthen the enforcement of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, the Supreme Court of India issued orders in 1982 and 1985. When progress reports from various Indian states showed insufficient efforts to eliminate bonded labor, the Supreme Court issued another order on March 13, 1994, related to the case of Union Public of Civil Liberties Vs. State of Tamil Nadu and Others. The Court expressed concern about the lack of enthusiasm among authorities in addressing this significant issue and issued several key directives:

1. Identification of bonded laborers and updating of existing lists.
2. Identification of employers exploiting bonded laborers and initiation of criminal proceedings against them.
3. Clearance of existing debts and bonded liabilities to secure livelihoods.
4. Appointment of independent bodies, such as non-political social action groups, to collect information on the prevalence of bonded labor practices and violations by employers.
5. Provision of employment opportunities at prescribed minimum wage rates for bonded laborers as agricultural workers and allocation of agricultural land to landless bonded laborers.
6. Provision of shelter, food, education, and medical facilities for the children and families of bonded laborers as part of a comprehensive rehabilitation package.
7. Regular inspection by the concerned Labor Commissioner to monitor contractors who have employed bonded laborers, establishment of Vigilance Committees in each district, and the creation of rural credit facilities to provide interest-free loans without collateral.
8. Initiation of criminal prosecutions against contractors, employers, or their agents who engage bonded labor and employ children under 14 years of age without providing adequate monetary compensation in accordance with the Minimum Wages Act.

These directives aimed to ensure the effective implementation of policies to eradicate bonded labor and provide support and opportunities for the emancipation of those affected. Through these governmental policies, India took significant steps towards upholding the principles of human rights and dignity as enshrined in the UDHR and its own constitution. In November 1996, the apex court of the country issued a directive to all State Governments, mandating an extensive survey to identify the exact number of bonded laborers within their respective states. Responding to this directive, the government of Arunachal Pradesh issued instructions to all Deputy Commissioners and Additional Deputy Commissioners in the state to

conduct thorough surveys aimed at identifying the presence of bonded laborers or indentured laborers in any district.

Subsequently, the Deputy Commissioners of both West Kameng and East Kameng districts submitted their reports, collectively indicating the existence of 3542 bonded laborers within the Puroik tribal community. The findings from these districts revealed that, in 1997, there were 791 Puroik families identified as bonded laborers in East Kameng District. Among these, Chayangtajo had the highest number of bonded Puroik families with 216, followed by Bameng circle with 179, Lada Circle with 126, and Khenewa Circle with 107. In contrast, Sawa had 67, Pipu had 54, while Pakke-Kessang and Seppa headquarters each had only one bonded laborer family. Notably, the Seijosa area reported zero bonded labor families. However, in the case of Bangnis (Nyishis) bonded families, locally referred to as Nyera for male bonded labor and Pagney for female slaves, Seppa headquarters had the highest number with 152 families, while Pipu had only 3. This brought the total number of bonded labor families in the district to 946, consisting of 791 Puroik and 155 Bangni bonded labor families.

Additionally, the survey report provided data on the total population of bonded laborers in different areas of the district. Chayangtajo had the highest total population of bonded laborers with 874 individuals, followed by Lada with 605, Bameng with 588, Seppa with 488, Khenewa with 419, Sawa with 313, Pipu with 148, and Pakke-Kessang with 122. Thus, the district recorded a total of 3517 bonded laborers, comprising 3108 Puroik bonded laborers and 409 Bangni bonded laborers, with Seppa headquarters reporting 403 and Pipu area reporting 6. Among the 3517 bonded laborers, 3189 were engaged in outdoor labor, while 328 were involved in domestic labor. Interestingly, there were no recorded instances of Miji bonded laborers.

Before submitting this report as an affidavit to the apex court, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh sought interpretation and clarification from the Law Department regarding whether the status of the Puroik community could be considered as bonded labor under the provisions of the Bounded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976. Subsequently, the Law Department clarified that the Puroik community did indeed fall under the provisions and explanations of the Act. Consequently, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh filed an affidavit with the Supreme Court on April 15, 1997, stating that appropriate actions were being taken in accordance with the law and other measures were being implemented for the release and rehabilitation of Puroiks.

Following this, the next step for the Government of Arunachal Pradesh was to formulate an action plan to secure the release and rehabilitation of the Puroik community, as confirmed in the affidavit. Meanwhile, the administration recognized the need for a robust and concrete action plan, given previous failures in various welfare and relief schemes aimed at emancipating the Puroiks. In 1964, the Arunachal Pradesh administration initiated a liberation policy for the servile status of these people, compensating masters with Rs 500 for each adult slave Puroik. Between 1978 and 1988, a substantial number of Puroik families benefited from a resettlement program that legally liberated them from their former masters. Under this program, nominal financial assistance was provided to Puroik families for the construction of dwellings and granaries. However, these efforts yielded limited success, with relapses among the freed Puroiks being

attributed to the deep-rooted ties between them and their former masters, as well as the economic packages provided by the state government being misappropriated by the masters.

Recognizing the importance of permanently abolishing the slavery system or bonded labor, in line with the directives of the nation's highest court, district administrators, serving as Chairmen of the Vigilance Committee at the district level under the Bounded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976, suggested the formation of a High Power Committee to the state government to effectively implement anti-slavery policies. Consequently, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh established several committees, including the Ministerial Committee on Resettlement of Puroik Families chaired by Shri R.K. Khirmey, which submitted its report in 1994. Additionally, two High Power Committees were appointed: the High Power Committee on Bounded Labour on August 19, 1997, under the chairmanship of Shri Anand Prakash, IAS, then Commissioner (Personnel), and the High Power Committee on the Status of Puroiks on July 12, 2011, under the chairmanship of Shri Hage Batt, IAS, then Secretary (Social Welfare), both from the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. These committees were tasked with developing strategies and policies to effectively address the issue of bonded labor among the Puroik community in the state.

### **High Power Committee on Bonded Labour**

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh, in response to directives from the Supreme Court of India, established a High Power Committee on Bonded Labor through Government Order No. LAB (W)-2297 dated March 19, 1997. The committee was comprised of notable members, including Shri Anand Prakash, IAS, then Commissioner (Personnel) as Chairman, Shri M. Kumar, the Director of Agriculture, Shri S.S. Mishra, then Director of Agriculture, Shri D. Y. Perme, then Director of Land Record, Shri K. Riba, then Director of Rehabilitation and Resettlement, and Shri Morge Ete, then Labor Commissioner. This committee was tasked with investigating various aspects related to bonded labor, with a focus on the Puroik community.

The primary objectives assigned to the committee were as follows:

1. To explore the feasibility of rehabilitating and resettling the Puroiks in a model village outside the East Kameng District, along with provisions for their well-being.
2. To examine and develop a reservation policy for providing government jobs to the Puroik community.
3. To evaluate the possibility of legislation or other measures to protect the rights and ethnicity of the Puroiks.

The committee diligently carried out its mandate and submitted a comprehensive report within the stipulated time frame. The report encompassed eight significant recommendations, taking into account the socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions affecting the Puroik community.

#### **1. Release of Bonded Laborers:**

The committee recommended the issuance of an order by the Deputy Commissioner, East Kameng District, under the relevant section of the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1976, to declare Puroiks and other bonded laborers free from bondage. Adequate compensation was proposed for the freed Puroiks, with the initial expenditure potentially sourced from the Directorate of Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement, possibly supplemented by grants-in-aid from the Union Labor Ministry.

## **2. Land for Puroik Resettlement:**

The committee advocated for the resolution of land disputes by conducting proper surveys and issuing restoration or possession certificates as necessary. Additionally, they suggested allocating land in Seppa township for Puroik resettlement, ensuring that it is used exclusively by the Puroiks. Furthermore, the committee proposed a survey by the Land Record Department to assess land availability in the Seijosa-Nomara belt within East Kameng District, an area identified as suitable for compact and permanent Puroik settlement

## **3. Housing Facilities:**

The committee recognized the nomadic nature of some Puroiks and highlighted the need for stable housing to promote personal and community development. They recommended the allocation of houses to Puroik families under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) program. Vigilance was advised to prevent misappropriation of building materials and benefits.

## **4. Employment Opportunities:**

The report pointed out the severe underrepresentation of Puroiks in government jobs due to various barriers. The committee urged the government to guarantee employment for at least one person per Puroik family within three months of emancipation. To address the lack of educational opportunities, they recommended preferential hiring of Puroik graduates and Class III-passed students in government and semi-government departments. Additionally, the committee encouraged Puroik candidates to pursue careers in the armed forces, police, forestry, and other sectors, with relaxed educational qualifications. The Labor and Employment Department was designated as the coordinating body for filling vacancies with Puroik candidates. In cases where the government couldn't provide employment as recommended, the committee proposed a monthly allowance of Rs 1,000 to unemployed Puroik family members. Self-employment opportunities with government guarantees were also encouraged, with banks and planning institutions instructed to facilitate this.

## **5. Educational Facilities:**

The committee recognized the obstacles preventing Puroik children from attending school and recommended free and fair education for them. They suggested establishing special schools up to the secondary level exclusively for Puroik children, both in new resettlement areas and old habitats. Government and semi-government residential schools were encouraged to admit Puroik children, with nominal fees and all expenses borne by the state government. The committee emphasized the importance of providing free higher education for Puroik students outside the state to eliminate feelings of inferiority and domination. Reservation in professional colleges and technical institutions was also recommended, provided Puroik students met admission criteria.

## **6. Political Process and Participation:**

The committee stressed the significance of Puroik political participation as both voters and leaders. They proposed a policy for electing or nominating a Puroik Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the state Legislative Assembly, possibly as an additional seat. Grassroots participation in Panchayat Raj institutions was also deemed essential, with a recommendation to reserve the post of Zilla Parishad Member (ZPM) for Puroiks in East Kameng and Lower Subansiri districts.

### **7. Other Assistance/Benefits:**

The committee also proposed a range of additional assistance and benefits to be extended by the authorities to the Puroik community. These provisions aim to address specific needs and challenges faced by the Puroiks and require the relaxation of certain norms that are typically applicable to others in the region. Firstly, the committee suggested that Puroiks should be granted access to gun licenses, tree permits, trading licenses, and similar permits. This measure recognizes their unique circumstances and may require adjustments in the standard eligibility criteria. Furthermore, the committee advocates for the provision of guns that are currently held in Markhans to the Puroik community. This is primarily for their self-protection and reflects the committee's concern for the safety and security of the Puroiks. In addition to licenses and firearms, the committee recommended that various contract works and developmental schemes designed for Puroik-inhabited areas should be exclusively executed by Puroiks themselves, preferably on a communal basis to ensure equitable sharing of both costs and benefits. To promote economic development in Puroik areas and create employment opportunities within the Puroik community, the committee appealed to relevant development departments, including Agriculture, Horticulture, Power, Rural Department, Rural Works, and Public Works, to allocate a dedicated 1.5 percent of their overall departmental budgets for the development of Puroik-inhabited or newly established settlement areas. These recommendations were aligned with the committee's vision of uplifting the Puroik community and fostering their socio-economic development. They are essential in addressing the specific needs and aspirations of this marginalized group.

### **8. Monitoring Cell:**

To ensure the effective implementation of the above recommendations, the committee underscored the importance of establishing monitoring cells at both the state and district levels. These cells will serve as oversight bodies, responsible for evaluating the progress and impact of welfare programs designed for the Puroik community. Each monitoring cell should comprise at least two representatives from the Puroik community, ensuring that the voice and perspective of the community are integral to the monitoring process. Other members of the cell should be selected based on their appropriateness and expertise in the relevant fields. At the state level, the monitoring cell should be chaired by the Chief Secretary, who holds a key position in the state government. At the district level, the Deputy Commissioner should assume the role of chairperson. These individuals are ideally positioned to provide leadership and drive the monitoring efforts effectively. Furthermore, the committee emphasizes the responsibility of Deputy Commissioners, Additional Deputy Commissioners, and District Magistrates to actively identify and address any forms of bonded labor within their respective districts. This is in line with the principles and provisions of the Bounded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, which grants them the authority to take appropriate actions against bonded labor.

### **High Power Committee for Puroik Status Assessment**

In response to the pressing issue of socio-economic backwardness among the Puroik community in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, a significant development occurred when the honorable Member of Legislative Assembly, Smt. Kariya Bagang, introduced a private member resolution during the 5th session of the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh on March 21, 2011. This resolution, aimed at addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the Puroik community, was subsequently approved by the legislative body. Consequently, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh took a proactive step by

constituting a High Power Committee through Government notification no. SW-0419/2011, dated July 12, 2011.

This High Power Committee was comprised of various eminent members, including Shri Hage Bath, IAS, then Secretary (Social Welfare), who served as the Chairman. Other distinguished members included Shri Tope Bam, then Deputy Commissioner of East Kameng District, Shri Rajiv Takuk, then Deputy Commissioner of Kurung Kumey District, Shri Pige Legu, Deputy Commissioner of Papumpare District, Shri Hage Kano, Director (Agriculture), Shri Jambo Ratan, Director (Horticulture), Shri Ennyo Nangkar, Director (Land Management), and Shri Ojing Darang, then Labor Commissioner. Each member played a vital role in the committee's efforts to address the Puroik community's challenges and uplift their socio-economic conditions.

The committee was entrusted with a set of specific objectives, including:

1. Conducting an in-depth analysis of the current socio-economic status of the Puroik community residing in East Kameng, Kurung Kumey, and Papumpare districts.
2. Evaluating the feasibility and practicality of resettling the Puroik community in consolidated areas within East Kameng and Kurung Kumey districts.
3. Identifying potential initiatives and measures that could be proposed to the Government of India to enhance the well-being of the Puroik community, encompassing areas such as literacy, healthcare, education, and other miscellaneous aspects.

Following the committee's formation, a period of months was allocated from the date of the notification to facilitate its operations. The High Power Committee, driven by its commitment to its designated tasks, convened a significant meeting on September 13, 2011, under the leadership of Chairman Shri Hage Bath.

During this crucial meeting, the committee invited representatives from the All Puroik Welfare Society (APWS) to share their insights regarding the socio-economic status of the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh. Notable figures such as Shri Kashok Halley, President of APWS, Shri Adang Yachu, spokesperson, and Shri Kapit Puroik, District unit president of East Kameng, were among those who actively participated and contributed to the discussion.

The APWS seized this opportunity to present a memorandum to the High Power Committee on the Status of Puroik on August 25, 2011. In this comprehensive document, the APWS put forth several proposals, including the appointment of a Project Director from the Puroik community to oversee their welfare activities, the establishment of an Autonomous Puroik Development Agency (APDA) at the state level, with leadership exclusively from the Puroik community, and a recommendation for resettling and rehabilitating the Puroik community in a reserved forest area near the Assam border adjacent to Rowta Forest Range and Balem Forest Range under West Kameng District. Additionally, the APWS advocated for a 2 percent job reservation in all government job grades and the allocation of 20 percent of Annual Operating Plans for the development of their region.

Historically, in 1976, two model Puroik villages were established in the Chayang Tajo circle: Laching Sulung, accommodating 32 Puroik families, and Yakli Sulung, accommodating 35 Puroik families. These



regrouped villages were named after their former master, Pordung village of the Nyishi community. This naming choice stemmed from the fact that all Puroik villages integrated into these regrouped villages were previously associated with Pordung village as their masters, with Pordung Sulung being situated within the lands of Pordung. Furthermore, the Sangchu Sulung, located under the Chayang Tajo circle, was established in the same year as a new version of its former Puroik village known as "Dache Sulung," accommodating 45 Puroik families.

Expanding on this historical context, it is worth noting that three regrouped villages were established in the Bameng administrative circle, with two established in 1978 and one in 1979. These regrouped villages collectively accommodated 96 Puroik families. In the subsequent years, between 1979 and 1980, six additional regrouped villages were created in the Khenewa circle, providing essential materials for the settlement of 232 Puroik families in the Khenewa area. Among these, Rawa Sulung emerged as the most populous Puroik village in the district.

Despite these commendable efforts, it is important to acknowledge that, from 1975 until the late 1980s, only a few of the thirteen established model villages under the village regrouping scheme have remained active and thriving. Model villages such as Sangchu Sulung, Poube Sulung, Rawa Sulung, Yakli Sulung, and Laching Sulung have witnessed substantial development, while others exist mostly in name, with limited families residing there. Factors contributing to this disparity include the challenges of procuring daily necessities in these remote locations and the migration of some villagers seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

The journey to uplift the socio-economic status of the Puroik community in Arunachal Pradesh is marked by both significant strides and ongoing challenges. The collaborative efforts of government committees, like the High Power Committee on Status of Puroiks, and the advocacy of organizations such as APWS demonstrate a commitment to addressing the multifaceted issues faced by this community. Nevertheless, continued support, resources, and innovative solutions will be required to ensure sustainable development and improved living conditions for the Puroik people. It is imperative that these efforts align with policies and initiatives at the national and regional levels, fostering a holistic approach to upliftment and empowerment.

### **Shifts and Consistency: Implications for Future Policies and Social Dynamics**

The evolution of the relationship between the Puroik community and their former masters has undergone significant transformations over the decades. This shift can be attributed to a multitude of factors that have played pivotal roles in reshaping this dynamic. One of the most influential factors was the enactment of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945. This regulation introduced official judiciaries such as political officers, Kotokis, and Goa Buras, tasked with maintaining law and order at the village level. Even today, Kotokis and Goa Buras hold considerable authority in resolving most cases within the community, following customary Puroik laws, with the exception of serious crimes like murder. Their decisions in local disputes are deemed final and binding.

Prior to the appointment of these officials, village elders settled disputes amicably. However, this practice has gradually shifted, and today, the Puroik community autonomously resolves most of its internal issues,

with village heads and elders intervening when necessary. In the past, the erstwhile masters had a significant role in overseeing and adjudicating community affairs, and their decisions carried great weight. A pivotal moment in the history of the Puroik community occurred in 1964 with their liberation from the grip of the Nyishi society, thanks to the Liberation Policy of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Before this emancipation, the Puroiks in Arunachal Pradesh had lived as bonded laborers under the Nyishis, isolated from the wider world. Matters concerning the Puroiks were exclusively managed by their respective masters. However, their liberation marked a turning point in their autonomy. Nonetheless, scholars like S. Dutta and T. Showren suggest that some Puroiks who were internally displaced and socio-economically marginalized still require government assistance to fully integrate into society. This highlights the need for policies aimed at their rehabilitation, in line with the government's well-intentioned efforts.

Modern administrative structures, overseen by the Deputy Commissioner, have significantly benefited marginalized communities like the former bonded laborers of the Puroik society and Nyera and Pagney, who were once Bangni slaves. Any injustices or transgressions against the Puroiks by their former masters are now swiftly addressed by the district administration, often through fast-track courts. Consequently, they have access to government development packages and schemes, though this equality may not always be apparent at the village level due to the long history of bonded labor under the Nyishis. The introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system in 1969 marked a significant milestone in Arunachal Pradesh's governance structure. While these elections were initially unfamiliar to most Arunachal Pradesh residents, the Puroiks managed to secure four Zilla Parishad Member (ZPM) positions, allowing them to participate in grassroots democracy. In 1975, Mate Sukung became the first Puroik ZPM representative. Although the system of nomination prevailed until 1993, no Puroik has been elected or nominated to such a post in the Panchayat bodies since then.

Religious conversion has also played a significant role in reshaping the Puroik community. A considerable number have embraced Christianity, impacting their cultural practices and legal customs. Those who convert often forgo indigenous rituals, considering them financially burdensome due to expenses related to food, lodging, animal sacrifices, and taboos. Instead, they resolve disputes in a Christian context, with church leaders acting as arbitrators when disputes arise among Christian community members. This religious transformation has bridged social gaps that previously existed due to cultural differences. It's important to note that the Puroiks' religious beliefs, rituals, and customary laws have largely been inherited from their former masters, the Nyishis and Miis. This religious shift is also influenced by the broader trend of Nyishi conversion to Christianity. While the Puroik community has seen an increase in literacy rates, there are still relatively few educated individuals. However, these educated youth play an active role in improving the socio-economic status of the Puroik community through modern education and development initiatives. Some have even attained government positions, such as Extra Assistant Commissioner and Ranger Officer, contributing to their community's progress.

Today, the relationship between the Puroiks and their erstwhile masters is characterized more by brotherly and familial bonds than by a master-slave dynamic. However, many Puroiks still reside in remote, inaccessible highlands within Arunachal Pradesh. Despite their independence, they continue to work in the fields of their former masters, driven by a sense of duty and familial obligation. Unlike in the past,

they now receive wages for their labor, signifying a crucial change in their status. The legacy of slavery has left a lingering social stigma, leading to social boycotts in certain contexts. Some rituals, social positions, and marriage taboos are still enforced, contributing to the perception of Puroiks as third-class citizens by some major tribes, including the Nyishis. Instances of physical and emotional abuse against Puroiks by their former masters have become less common, primarily occurring when Puroiks owe debts to these individuals. Debt, often incurred due to borrowing money and materials such as swords, paddy, rice, and salt, sometimes compels Puroik villagers to work for their former masters. This situation reflects the complex interplay of economic dependence and historical dynamics. Despite official recognition as 'Puroiks,' the Nyshi people continue to refer to them as such. Eliminating this nomenclature will take time, as 'Puroik' carries deep historical and traditional significance for the community, even though it originated from their former masters. Consequently, 'Puroik' remains the prevalent term for their societal identity.

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