

# THE SUNRISE STATES

by

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## SALUTING THE EIGHT STATES OF INDIA'S NORTH-EAST

TELL US OF OURSELVES  
TELL US OF THE SUNRISE STATES



## TELL US OF OURSELVES

They said,  
Tell us of ourselves.  
And the Seer in the Sky replied,  
You who live in all eight directions  
Beat with the one heart of this great land.  
But those of you in this, the north east,  
You are the special eight,  
For you welcome the first light,  
You are the Guardians of the East.

## **ARUNACHAL PRADESH**



### **FIRST RAYS OF THE SUN**

They said,  
Tell us of our sunrise states.  
And Donyi-Polo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
The first rays of India's new millennium  
Came to my valley of Dong in Arunachal  
Every day and future starts with this sunrise.  
Eight light minutes journeys the sun  
So that the eight of the east  
Can unwrap its radiance for all the land.

### **TAWANG**

They said,  
Tell us about Tawang.  
And Buddha Sakyamuni, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Tawang is Monpa terrain, spur of hill viewing a valley,  
And Gaden Namgyal Lhatse is its monastery.  
In homage to the Enlightened One, its ancient gompa,  
Its monks in prayer, its murals and manuscripts.  
Tawang is history, beauty and sanctity,  
It is spiritual grandeur, the refuge of the seeker.

### **YOU, DONYI-POLO**

They said,  
Tell us of yourself  
And Donyi-Polo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Donyi-Polo, the sun and moon, the cosmic power,  
Through which the supreme being,  
The world-spirit is made manifest.  
In my light, you see the truth,  
Truth that is tranquil, that is here, there, everywhere,  
Its beauty and purity, free of all coercion.

### **NATURE IN ARUNACHAL**

They said,  
Tell us about nature here,  
And Donyi-Polo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Green here received a rare invitation  
To tropical, subtropical, temperate, pine and alpine,  
Watered by five rivers, few equal this land  
In plants and mammals, birds and butterflies.  
See beauty all around, from an orchid to a leopard,  
A moth to a python, a flying squirrel to a slow loris.

# ASSAM

## DEVI KAMAKHYA

They said,  
Tell us about the Goddess,  
And Hori Deo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
She is Devi Kamakhya of the Nilachal Hill  
Drawing a million pilgrims and then more  
She is the primal energy, Shakti,  
Invisible except as all creation.  
She is light and dark, ferocious and benign,  
And takes on all forms of the Divine.

## THE MIGHTY BRAHMAPUTRA

They said  
Tell us about the mighty Brahmaputra.  
And Hori Deo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
The braided Brahmaputra, an ancient river,  
Coursing through names, legends and cultures,  
This free, timeless hymn to beauty and plenty,  
Is held in reverence, worshipped by millions.  
Cherish its waters that sustain life and land,  
And cherish the life within its flowing waters.

## THE GREAT ONE-HORNED RHINO

They said,  
Tell us about the Great One-Horned Rhino.  
And Hori Deo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
For eleven million years, he, my beloved  
Has bathed the Brahmaputra  
Rippling the waters with his horn.  
He can run and swim better than you can,  
Hear and smell better than you can,  
Know him, love the beloved, and let him live.

(The one-horned rhino is in danger of extinction.)



## MAJULI

They said,  
Tell us about Majuli.  
And Hori Deo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
This isle, the largest born of any river,  
Nestles in your Brahmaputra and looks at your hills.  
Sacred it is for the Satras of the Vaishnavites  
The Mishings dance there the Ali Ai Ligang,  
Majuli is home to so many peoples,  
And to my birds that migrate the seasons.



**BIHU**

They said,

Tell us about Bihu.

And Hori Deo, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 Bihu is celebration, worship and harvest,  
 Gratitude in song and dance  
 As the drums beat and cymbals ring.  
 In the fields, by the river, when the cuckoo calls  
 In earth's every flower swaying in the wind  
 For love that blossoms, for all is lush with life.

**MANIPUR**

**THE WOMEN OF MANIPUR**

They said,

Tell us about the women of the east.

And Atiya Shidaba, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 Is the earth heavy? She, our Mother, is heavier.  
 Every vendor at the women's market is an Ima.  
 In the home, in struggle, in weaving, crafting and playing  
 Mother, sister, daughter of you home,  
 Daughter of another home, each one an Ima  
 Waiting to realize her potential and power.

**NAT SANKIRTAN**

They said,

Tell us about Nat Sankirtan.

And Atiya Shidaba, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 It is humility, harmony and vigour together,  
 It is the visual chanting of the Lord's name,  
 It is song, dance and percussion in love  
 With the love of Radha and Krishna.  
 Nat Sankirtan is prayer in expression,  
 Thus, the sustenance of art and devotion.

**THIS LAND OF GEMS**

They said,

Tell us about this land of gems.

And Atiya Shidaba, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 Their lore, legend and loom, dance, art and craft,  
 The Meitei, Naga, Kuki and Meitei Pangal colour  
 With azure hills, emerald valleys and sapphire lakes.  
 Manipur, a little paradise, a flower on lofty heights,  
 As unique as its Shiroy lily on the Ukhrol hills.  
 Its brow-antlered Sangai deer, it's floating Loktak isles.

## **KHONGJOM**

They said,  
Tell us about Khongjom.  
And Atiya Shidaba, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
It is the stuff of legend, a battle like no other,  
With Thang-ta, the fearless sword and spear,  
A last stand against the invading cannon,  
Led by Paona Brajabasi of uncommon valor.  
Ballads of this land will always sing  
The Khongjom Parva, of daring and glory.

## **MEGHALAYA**



## **THE SACRED GROVES**

They said,  
Tell us about the sacred groves of the cloud-realm.  
And U Blei-Ka Blei, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
The Law Kyntang at Mawphlang, in the hollow of hills,  
Monoliths of your revered ancestors circling them,  
Are home to Lisan, the primeval, universal mother,  
To Ryngkew, of the first light, father of soil and water  
Through them I say to you, trees are sacred,  
And should never be spoken to with an axe.

## **THE GREAT CAVES**

They said,  
Tell us about the great caves in this region of clouds.  
And U Blei-Ka Blei, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
These caves and caverns, Krem Kotsati to Krem Dam,  
Sculpted by nature with millennial patience,  
They are the books of earth's own history.  
Steeped in myths, mystery and mysticism  
In these old pages, there is much  
Of the lore of your people, your terrain.

## **CHERRAPUNJEE**

They said,  
Tell us about Sohra.  
And U Blei-Ka Blei, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Sohra, that you called Cherrapunjee,  
The wettest place, a plateau of abundance  
Also of plants, animals, the rarest of birds  
Protect it, it's your wealth and variety.  
Since to get, it is not easy,  
A repeat order of nature's generosity.

## **MATRILINEAL PEOPLE**

They said,  
Tell us about the woman here.  
And U Blei-Ka Blei, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
For those who know descent from the mother  
'Long jaid na ka kynthei',  
From the woman, sprang the clan,  
And so, she gets the ancestral property.  
She who teaches the child of the family,  
About custom and continuity, of god and duty,  
She should have a field of her own.

## **MIZORAM**

### **TLAWMNGAIHNA, SERVICE TO OTHERS**

They said,  
Tell us about the heart of the Mizo.  
And Pathian, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
It is Tlawmngaihna, service to others,  
Even giving up life, expecting nothing in return.  
It is to be self-sacrificing, self-denying,  
Patient, persevering, self-respecting.  
This is Tlawmngaihna, so uniquely Mizo,  
Rendering to community, to nation, to humanity.

### **THE BLUE MOUNTAIN**

They said,  
Tell us about the Blue Mountain.  
And Pathian, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Phawngpui Peak is the high protector,  
Sacred sentinel of your land and light.  
A mountain meadow, draped by cloud and water,  
Adorned with the rhododendron and butterfly  
Hazed blue by the hills and valleys below  
So that in its beauty you may sense divinity.

### **THE CHAPCHAR KUT**

They said,  
Tell us about the Chapchar Kut.  
And Pathian, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Celebrate nature's bounty to you  
For none will give you as much.  
Sing together, old songs and new,  
Dance the Cheraw, pace the bamboo briskly.  
It's spring, the land is ready for a new planting.  
Remember, there is work after your gaiety.

### **THE SINGING TRIBES**

They said,  
Tell us about the singing tribes.  
And Pathian, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Music to the Mizos, is as air to another  
They sing in church, at a planting, a wedding  
In joy, in sadness, the long night and the next day.  
Together and singly, even silently to themselves.  
With drums, gongs, trumpets, flutes, sticks and strings  
Tell me, who captivates Pathian more with melody?

## **NAGALAND**



### **THE NAGAS**

They said,  
Tell us about the Nagas.  
And Gawang, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
More can always be said about the Nagas, but never all.  
For the Angami, Ao, Rengma, Sema and Sangtam  
Kachari, Kuki, Konyak, Khiamniungam, Chang and Chakesang,  
Laingmei, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Zeliang and Yimchungru,  
And more, each with own life, custom and celebration,  
But they all laugh, know colour, and sing of the misty mountain.

**THIS LAND OF THE NAGAS**

They said,  
Tell us about this land of the Nagas.  
And Gawang, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
Rivers flow between peaks, clouds tinge mountains,  
Valleys are velvet, slopes with thousand orchids,  
The paddy green gold, and bamboo the architecture.  
Then, when people paint with dance and attire,  
One visit will not do to this cradle of colour  
You must return, as Nagas say, to get back your soul.

**THE KOHIMA CEMETERY OF THE BRAVE**

They said,  
Tell us about the cemetery of the brave.  
And Gawang, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
It was Kohima that halted the assault  
Against you by a besieging army.  
And those who fought and gave their all  
In pride, to others they said, 'When you go home,  
Tell them of us, and say,  
For your tomorrow, we gave our today'.

**THE ARIJU OF THE AO NAGAS**

They said,  
Tell us about the Ariju of the Ao.  
And Gawang, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
The Ariju of the Ao is the Morung of other Nagas  
The common college of responsibility and community.  
Ariju, old as a village itself, hails the interdependence  
Of the collective and the individual.  
In the Ariju, an Ao grows from boy to man  
Learning custom and culture, knowing society and security.  
(Gawang is the Supreme Being for the Konyak Nagas.)

**SIKKIM**

**KHANGCHENDZONGA**

They said,  
Tell us about yourself.  
And Khangchendzonga, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
I am what I am and, to many of you, this I am.  
Lord of the snows, fiery-red, with a skull crown,  
Riding a white lion and holding victory's banner.  
My treasures, lacquered gold of sunrise and sunset,  
Silver snow, jewelled scriptures and divine armour.  
I am what I am, the many in one, the one in many.



**THE LEPCHAS**

They said,  
 Tell us about the Lepchas.  
 And Khangchendzonga, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 They, the first inhabitants of these hills,  
 They call me Kingsoom Zaongboo Choo  
 The bright, auspicious, forehead peak.  
 I call them children of my snowy ravines.  
 Shy, simple, sincere, with always a chunk  
 Of Nye Mayel Lyang, pure heaven, in their hearts.

**THE BEAUTY OF SIKKIM**

They said,  
 Tell us about the beauty of Sikkim.  
 And Khangchendzonga, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 In Sikkim, earth itself finds refreshment  
 In jungles, lakes, sublime solitudes and skies,  
 Flowery uplands at the feet of great glaciers,  
 Leopards, pandas, birds, butterflies and orchids,  
 Each uplifting your soul by its singular beauty,  
 Each saying, whatever you are, be also a priest of nature.

**CHAAM, THE MASK DANCE**

They said,  
 Tell us about Chaam, the dance with the masks.  
 And Khangchendzonga, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 Cham is the profound world of sacred masked dances,  
 Cymbals clash, drums beat, horns blow, monks chant,  
 And a meditative state of body, speech and mind  
 Releases dance, to change impurity to purity,  
 Convert the demon of thought into a deity,  
 For you to know enlightenment, become the Buddha.

**TRIPURA**



**THE BOROK PEOPLE**

They said,  
 Tell us about the Borok people.  
 And Sibrai, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 Of ancient origin, proud dwellers of the hills,  
 The Borok are many clans and communities,  
 Speaking Kokborok and its many dialects.  
 Borok also means person, partner, citizen,  
 Community, population, nation and people.  
 So, to the Borok, ever friendly, none is a stranger.

**UNAKOTI SCULPTURES**

They said,  
 Tell us about Unakoti.  
 And Sibrai, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
 Rock-cut images, belief carved on a mountain,  
 Unakoti, the unique, bas-relief sculpture,  
 Is an artist's dream, the biggest in the land.  
 Home it is to gods, one crore less one,  
 And garlanded by a stream is mighty Shiva.  
 Incomparable grandeur it is, deep in the forest.

**GODDESS TRIPURA SUNDARI**

They said,  
 Tell us about Tripura Sundari.

And Sibrai, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
She is Shakti, she is pure energy,  
A fierce goddess, beloved to the devout.  
For centuries, people have walked distance  
To see their Chhoto Ma, the little mother.  
In Matabari, the maternal hut, haven of piety,  
The pride of Udaipur, once capital of this state.

#### **THE BAMBOO**

They said,  
Tell us about the bamboo.  
And Sibrai, the Seer in the Sky, replied,  
The bamboo grows quickly, no plant as versatile,  
Becomes a basket, carving, flute, fabric or dwelling,  
As supple as the skill that shapes the desire.  
The bamboo, garlanded, becomes Lord Garia,  
The god who grants livestock, children and peace.  
It is friend to life and faith, friend to earth.

#### **MORE OF OURSELVES**

#### **OUR SUNRISE EIGHT**

They said,  
Tell us more of ourselves, our sunrise eight.  
And the Seer in the Sky replied,  
If I talk of a tribe a day, I will need a year,  
In courage, custom, colour, gaiety and smile,  
Faith, language, lore, dress, dance and music,  
Mountain, ravine, river, forest, crop and oil,  
Leopard, rhino, bird, orchid, butterfly and moth,  
This wealth and beauty, unrivalled on earth.

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