

# A HAUGHTY STATE



Hawkers stand in queue maintaining physical distance before the workshop

## VS THEIR UNDAUNTED SPIRIT

City hawkers show courage & unity amid pandemic despite govt trying to queer their pitch

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

November 19, 2020, will always be remembered as an important day for the Meghalaya and Greater Shillong Progressive Hawkers and Street Vendors Association (MGSPHSVA). It was on this day that the organisation inaugurated a free tuition programme for children of hawkers to help them prepare for their board examinations.

After the state government announced that board examinations will take place early next year, preparations for the exams became an important concern for the parents. Even in a normal school year, students invariably take tuitions to get the extra edge as they look to getting a good start to their academic life. With the enforced lockdown of educational institutions, this has become more difficult for the students from lower income family, like the hawkers, who depend almost exclusively on lessons taught in schools.

Online classes were not being able to replicate the teaching procedures in school and that was exacerbating their difficulties. It was at this moment that the members of MGSPHSVA, with the support of Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR), decided to start free tuitions for their children. Four teachers were identified, two of whom had parents who were still are hawkers. This was a good example of hawkers taking an active role in tackling the problems plaguing the local community. And this was not the only one.

Covid-19 disrupted lives to a great extent around the world and the repercussions were felt here as well. One of the biggest problems that one faced initially was in terms of getting the message out regarding the ways in which the virus can be contained, i.e., prevention. Without a vaccine, extended lockdown was the only viable solution to help check the spread of the virus but this also disrupted the functioning of the economy. And with the economic in doldrums, lower income groups are the most affected. The government did an admirable job in getting the information on Covid-19 out but it was not a substitute for a physical training. With that in mind they called for civil society groups for support to conduct the workshop on Covid-19.

Tura-based musicians of Fame The Band

This was a common feature for the hawkers. As mentioned earlier, one of the teachers who were going to take the tuitions had a mother who still sells clothes on the footpath. The day he finished his board examinations with distinction was the day his mother's stock was confiscated by the police. Many a time the items removed were never returned. It is not difficult to assume that the vegetables taken away from the Kongs (most of the vegetable sellers are Khasi women) must have been carried home by the officer who supervised the raid. Upon reaching home, he must have called to his wife, "Dear wife, see I brought you free vegetables. Cook a good stew for me and our children. We will all enjoy the dinner today."

It is not difficult to imagine it at all. This notice for delay was nothing but a tactic on the part of the state authorities to prevent giving legitimacy to MGSPHSVA though they had gone through proper channels. Realising the ploy and after having already completed the preparations, the association decided to go ahead with the workshop.



Registration for the hawkers' workshop in progress

The training began on the scheduled day. The state health officials who were supposed to supervise the whole operation stayed away for the first few days. The training, however, went on. After a few days, realising the futility of the whole situation, the health officials decided to attend the programme. They were impressed by the detailed nature of the preparation and the amenable nature of the participants. The workshop went on for 10 days (October 12-16 and October 19-23) and was attended by more than 700 people.

The workshop gave a detailed presentation on the various ways in which Covid-19 can spread. Posters as well as short videos were utilised to impress upon the participants about the do's and don'ts when it comes to prevention. Washing of hands, wearing of masks and avoiding necessary contact were stressed. The use of hand sanitiser not just for the sellers but also for the buyers was an important message. Some of the participants had masks but were not wearing them properly. But when they were shown the correct way of wearing masks, they promptly adjusted their masks. One could observe that the message was getting through and the participants were taking in the information. All in all, it was a successful workshop. As a follow-up to the training, members of MGSPHSVA distrib-



Artists have always been at the receiving end of the state apparatus' penchant for criminalising their presence in the local economy, though the law is on the side of the hawkers. Undue harassment and confiscation of wares were a chronic problem faced by the hawkers. There was a particular story of a family of hawkers that sounds eerily disturbing and hard to believe that it happened in a city like Shillong that has a small-town temperament.

## Changing rhythms

not only affected artistes but also technicians and other people associated with the ancillary section. The local music industry has been weakened by the viral attack and this may have a long-term debilitating impact on it, feel many artistes. But social media has been a saviour. Artists have been using the internet to stay connected with their listeners throughout the pandemic and there are even a few underground live rap cyphers starting to happen again in Shillong. I think these events are a good sign that the music scene (more particularly, the independent rap scene) here is starting to stabilise again," says Lyndem of Cryptographic.

The North East India Archive, an audio-visual archiving initiative by the Department of Mass Media at St Anthony's College, took on board 32 creative youths to document the pandemic. In the process, Kham stories of distress, survival and sustainable measures were unearthed and presented in the form of essays, paintings, photography and audio-visuals. Sunday Chimes, in collaboration with NE Archive, will publish one presentation from Archive Kham every week to draw a holistic picture of the pandemic. This is the second edition of pandemic stories, this time narrated by people from Garo Hills villages

# Cautious hope for life & living



Villagers in Buripara during an interaction with the author. (Photo by Ruby Tengchina W Momin)

Let us dive down a diverse path while the world is at a standstill. An interesting take on our common folk from Meghalaya where there is an existing difference in our approach of rural and urban access to freedom and comfort. The question is, would we understand it better if we experience both?

We can begin by understanding our privileges, dating back to almost 50 decades with our State's birth the progress has been phenomenal. While you and I sit here, contemplating the level of progressiveness, the reality of us sharing the same grounds with the very sweat-drenched agriculturally dominated folks proves our diverse culture. Our forefathers and their thirst for a better future and a control life pushed us here. One of the most interesting ancestral characteristics our forefathers had comes from the very roots instilled in music. The ancient musical instruments found in Khasi, Jaintia and the Garo ancestry still inhabit in our modern era. We can witness our laid-back attitude and love for arts and culture stemming from the past. Fast forwarding to our current state, we find a lifestyle of curiosity and chit-chats in a cafe over coffee.

Let us begin with, 2020 is the year of the inevitable advancement of the underdogs. After the government-mandated lockdown throughout the state, we have witnessed a hike in local entrepreneurs. In these trying times, the exchange of goods and crisis in income is consuming the state, people also look to finding alternate means to earn as well. A few lists of womenfolk took to this trend include but are not limited to:

1. The first group that came under my radar had the means to market and draw consumers via the internet and technology in general.
2. The second group, however, has done sole marketing with word of mouth. Usually, this type of business is either done at the ease of their own home, or on similar grounds.

Schools were shut and the children spent most of their time at home with family. The youngsters take time to visit their grandparents in their locality using a motorcycle as a means to go about or even walking. Family gatherings and meeting close-by relatives casually are very normal and it happens even on weekdays. While away and not severely jumbled in the chaos, education somehow does not act as a priority during these times, and children in some of the rural areas are not required to partake in online class lessons. However, there had been cases in other areas where a requirement for mobile devices had pushed the family to economic turbulence. Most of the parents do not have a stable income enough to budget newly made demands for this literary requirement. The dependence on the monetary gain from selling their farm vegetables and cattle came about as an option to purchase technology for such immediate circumstances. All in all, their simple living has hints of curiosity, which surfaces in their conversation. To quote Albert Einstein, "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day." We are, after all, bound by the same drive that makes us question what is so different about us from others.

## Biblio-File

The Awasthis of Aamagri by Shubha Sharma

Families are like the sweet messes of Aamagri—crests and sticking together through all times. The Awasthis of Aamagri are the quintessential Indian family who bump through their lives encountering missing jewels and stolen eggs, deaths foretold, averted and a suspected suicide with no body. The mysteries are solved by the inquisitive minds of young Lakshmi and Gaddu and the saffron-clad Guruji. Shubha Sharma's second novel, published by Nivgohi Books, tells the story of the Awasthis sailing through life and its quirks.

## A Promised Land by Barack Obama

The book by former US president Barack Obama is a deeply personal account of history in the making. In this first volume of his presidential memoirs, Obama tells the story of a young man searching for his identity to leader of a democratic country. The compelling narration of his earliest political aspirations to the pivotal Iowa caucus victory is worth reading for the time and events of US politics.

## Rhythm of War by Brandon Sanderson

After forming a coalition of a human resistance against an enemy invasion, Dalinar Kholin and his Knights Radiant have spent a year fighting a protracted, brutal war. Neither side has gained an advantage. This is an eagerly awaited sequel to the NYT bestselling *Outlander* from a popular fantasy writer at the top of his game.

## From baby boomers to Generation X

Let us explore the very first generation from our context, covering retired and independent persons to residents still working their days off. People from this generation are mostly occupied with government services and private businesses. There are very few in the creative field where the current flexibility and work from home subsist. They particularly carved a platform for the succeeding generation, supporting and building a wider perspective.

## Spellbinding story of a young wizard

Ronald Dahl's *Mimpins* for little Billy but for an adult, they are a fragment of a child's wild imagination. Every adult at one point in their childhood has had closed his or her eyes and imagined that the world had become a better place.

## FLAMINGO IN VAMPRICKLE LAND

Nayaab Suhel found magic because she lives in her world of wild imaginations. The 13-year-old author of *Flamingo in Vamprickle Land* barely utters a word in front of strangers but her mind works like a witch's spell that gives birth to stories from the magic lands where wizards travel by air balloons and there is solution to all problems. So when Flamingo and her sister, Calera, realise that they do not have money to pay at Vamy's Vampire restaurant in Vamprickle land, the owner comes up with a unique solution. Those who cannot pay may sing.

There is more magic in the book than one can imagine as the two young wizards embark on a journey to participate in a wizardry contest. How about Gobbo, the goblin, who has the blessings to scratch his head and get all he wishes for? There is also a ride on Stripponia Dog, a wonderland creature that may be a genetic miscalculation of a crazy meadow or a young vampire's mischievous thought.

## Book Review

**Book: Flamingo in Vamprickle Land; Author: Nayaab Suhel; Publisher: Xpress Publishing; Price: Rs 90**

## Humanity amid crisis

Ruby Tengchina W Momin quit her job in an auditing company in Mumbai and came back to her hometown, Tura, because of "health reasons" during the pandemic. She started work as a freelancer but that too has been affected because of the pandemic, "closing the freedom of movement and travel".

## Strains on a pregnant mother

My desire was to provide an outlook of an expecting mother in these trying times. With the opportunity of close contact with a relative, this experience was both undercurrent and shared.

## How can the different impacts of pandemic on different social strata be tackled?

The pandemic has been an eye-opener, pushing citizens from all background to put a little more effort into our mundane routine. However, this little effort is directed at the more privileged. For the poverty-stricken community, it is more than just an effort, and it is not only an inconvenience as their daily wage is compromised. We did witness compassion, where the community came together to help the worst-hit. The dependence on funds from the government can only take you so far. Hence, I believe the foundation lies in the societal grounds and simply in waking our humanity.

## How was your experience in working with NE Archive?

The two months creating the project and collaborating with NE Archive was truly a fresh experience. It acted as a silver lining and a voice, contrasting to the current situation. One can only hope to have further rich experience such as this.

Author: RUBY TENGCHINA W MOMIN  
COORDINATOR: DR AMANDA C TONGPER

## The woman reigns no more

### LOST 'N' FOUND

A 16-year-old girl was gang raped by a group of about four men this year in the mountains of the Garo Hills. The expedition were intriguing and the adventure breath-taking. I remained a silent follower sans the vagaries of the journey. But I was transported back to the present every time she narrated the tales of women, their love and marriage, their right to choose and reject and their social supremacy, only to draw a comparison between the two faces of the same village in East Khasi Hills was repeatedly raped by several men, including a legislator and a professor. In a guest house in the city that was owned by another legislator's family.

## A young Garo girl (the fiancée)

The contrast with modern time, where a woman victim barely gets justice despite her constitutional rights, is stark. In Khasi Hills too, women enjoyed equality in marriage and divorce. "...divorce is generally a matter of mutual agreement..." Bertrand wrote. Unlike modern times, no man can leave a woman without paying an indemnity to her. But the book, which is not easily available in the market now, is all about women's rights and their social status. The book gives a vivid description of the rites and rituals of the tribes, their animist ways of life and the social fabric within a clan and among different clans. The anecdotes are not only helpful in knowing the demography of the particular region but also identifying and understanding the transformations in the tribal societies.

I followed in the footsteps of Bertrand and her team to time-travel to the hostile