

## These Hills Called Home

An evening of Blues, Rock and Folk-Dance from the North East.

26<sup>th</sup> February, 2011 , 05:30pm

Safdar Hashmi Amphitheatre, Jamia Millia Islamia.

Across evergreen rain forests, Himalayan heights, the untamed Brahmaputra, green valleys and majestic hills, the music of the people of North-East India transcends ages, communities and borders. It is an enchanting melody which lulls the unsuspecting listener and leaves us with an emotion that is pain and longing together.

The origin of all genres of music is in folk and it is not any different for music of the people of the North East.

Some of the tunes have in fact found their way into popular music. The most prominent example is the Bhatiali form or the boatman's music that Sachin Dev Barman wove into some of the biggest musical hits of Hindi cinema. Mahout or elephant keepers' music made **Protima Barua** Pandey a folk legend. In recent years singers like Ruben M have experimented with local instruments. Bhupen Hazarika's 'peoples' song' with timeless tunes and lyric is already acknowledged as one of the favourite genres of music called Bhupendra Sangeet. Manipur is a curious fusion of traditional music and hard rock. Nothing, not even the most turbulent of times have slowed down the beat on the Pung or the sensuous movement of the dances.

The simplest accompaniment of songs is the most primal: the clapping of hands and the stamping of feet -- the human body's most natural reaction to music: dancing. Almost all of the original folk music of the North-Eastern tribes is music made for dancing, whether in a circle or an individual expressing one's relation to its macrocosm, Nature. Songs and dances are common rituals in ceremonies of birth, marriage and other festivities. A good example of the fusion of dance and folk music is 'Bihu' dance of Assam or the Manipuri 'Thabal Chongba" and both celebrate love outside marriage.

Though there is an influence of the music of South-east Asian countries like Myanmar, Thailand and China in the far-lying corners, such as Arunachal and Sikkim, but also the generic Indian musical heritage brought by communities like the Vaishnavites, followers of spiritual figures like Srimanta Sanakardeva, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Manohar Sai. As the Christian missionaries arrived Gospel music and Choirs helped generations of young people to learn Western music. Today there is an attempt to fuse that to local lore and language and create an altogether new genre.

All genres of western music had seeped into the collective thought process from Rock'n Roll to the Blues. It is in the North East where Nagaland became the first state in the country to declare music as an industry. A group of young artists just got together in a cafe symbolically called the Dream Cafe and decided that it's time to shed the stereotypes. We will sing 'our' music and stop aping the West. In Shillong a few young men and women determined to change the way music was being made took to the road with a movement called Roots , a travelling musical band providing space to unknown artists in even lesser known places.

Music has bonded estranged communities, have ushered in hope and provided the self belief that 'our voice will be heard' over the sounds and cries of division and protest, the North-East is singing and its songs will be heard. For every story begins with a dance and a song.

**For invitations, register : thch.jmi@gmail.com**