NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY AND TUENSANG
THE
ART OF THE
NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF INDIA
Scenery in northern Siang
THE

ART OF THE

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF INDIA

Verrier Elwin

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY
SHILLONG
1959
A moment, and time will forget
Our failure and our name
But not the common thought
That linked us in a dream.

—Auden and Isherwood
(On the Frontier)
‘To my many good friends among the Chiefs and people, I have only one message. Guard the national soul of your race and never be tempted to despise your past. Therein, I believe, lies the sure hope that your sons and daughters will one day make their own original contribution to knowledge and progress.’

—R. S. Rattray

‘Our problem being to form the future, we can only form it on the materials of the past; we must use our heredity, instead of denying it.’

—T. S. Eliot

‘I believe that our vitality as a people is intimately connected with the expression of a sense of beauty. A sense of beauty is nothing but a sense of quality, and if as a people we have lost this sense of quality we are finished.’

—Herbert Read

‘Art is nothing more than the shadow of humanity.’

—Henry James
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author's grateful thanks are due to Shri Jairamdas Doulatram, former Governor of Assam, and to Shri S. Fazl Ali, the present Governor, for their interest and encouragement; to Shri and Shrimati K. L. Mehta and to Shri N. K. Rustomji who have been a constant source of inspiration to him, and to many officials of the North-East Frontier Agency and the new Naga-Hills-Tuensang-Area who have assisted him with information and facilitated his tours. He owes a special debt to Shri N. Sen Gupta for advice and criticism.

Among those who materially assisted in the preparation of this book are: Shri R. Bagchi, who painted many of the colour plates and the jacket and drew all the line-drawings; Shri Panna Pal who photographed the specimens which are all (except the Wancho warrior illustrated on page 152) in the author's collection; Shri Sundarlal Narmada who accompanied the author on many long tours in the interior; Shri S. Lahiri, stenographer; and Shri P. Banerji and Shri H. L. Syiemlieh, who so faithfully typed and retyped the text.
Preface

Jawaharlal Nehru has frequently stressed the importance of encouraging the art of the hill people of India. ‘I am anxious,’ he has said, ‘that they should advance, but I am even more anxious that they should not lose their artistry and joy in life and the culture that distinguishes them in many ways.’ And he has pointed out that all over the world the impact of modern, westernized, civilization has destroyed the creative impulse in pre-literate populations and has given little in its place.

I have written this book because I believe that this destructive influence can be checked. I will go further: I believe that by encouraging the arts of the tribal people, creating in them a pride in their own products, keeping before them their own finest patterns and designs, and by providing them with raw materials, it will be possible to inspire a renaissance of creative activity throughout the hill areas of India, especially in Assam where there is so much on which to build.

There is, of course, the danger that we who wish to help may do as much damage as the enemy we fight. We must approach even the simplest beginnings of art with humility, content to inspire and guide, to create cultural self-respect, to strengthen the ability to choose the best. Education in good taste, the most neglected of subjects in our schools and colleges, is vitally important for the people of both hills and plains. ‘The purpose of art,’ said Holman Hunt, ‘is in love of guileless beauty to lead men to distinguish between that which, being clean in spirit, is productive of virtue, and that which is flaunting and meretricious and productive of ruin to a nation.’

This book describes and illustrates certain aspects of the art of the north-east frontier of India. I have concentrated mainly on fabrics, wood-carving, and cane-work in so far as it affects dress and personal adornment. Pottery here is little developed and ironmongery is strictly utilitarian. I have touched
only incidentally on the art of tattooing, which would require a monograph to itself, and limitations of space have prevented me from illustrating the extensive work in basketry, mat-making and other products of cane and bamboo found in this area. Even on weaving I have had to leave out as much as I have put in.

As I have limited the subjects, so I have had to limit the tribes to be discussed. To fulfil the promise of the book’s title, I would have had to cover the rich traditions of the Naga Hills, the splendid textiles of the Manipur tribes, and the remarkable designs of the Lushais. But these are subjects which I have only lightly explored and I have confined myself, therefore, to that part of the frontier which I know best, to the Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap Divisions of the North-East Frontier Agency, and northern Tuensang, which until recently formed part of the same administration.

Much of the frontier was until Independence little explored and little understood. It was in truth ‘another world’ as the Mulla Darvish of Herat called it nearly three hundred years ago. But today its people have discovered what was always latent in their art and culture, their essential unity with the India that has ever been their home. Wonderful roads now link them with the plains; devoted officials are helping them to obtain more food, better health, a wider view of the world. And they are beginning to realize that they have a vital contribution to make to the rest of India. This book suggests one way in which that contribution can be made.

Now great changes are on the way. These changes will be for the good provided they are a natural evolution from the civilization of the past, and the instinctive love of beauty, good taste and zest for creation so characteristic of the hill people, is encouraged and extended.

Shillong
1st January 1958

Verrier Elwin
Contents

I Introduction ............................................... 1
II 'Another World' ........................................ 15
III Design and Symbol in Textiles ...................... 35
IV Pilgrimage and Pantomime ............................ 67
V The Country of the Weavers .......................... 99
VI The Warrior as Wood Carver ....................... 135
VII A Frontier of Hope .................................... 183
List of Illustrations

The name of the artist or photographer is given in brackets after the caption; all line-drawings are by R. Bagchi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLOUR PLATES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Border-designs on Singpho textiles (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taraon Mishmi woman’s shawl (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chang and Yimchungrr designs from Tuensang (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile designs from the Tuensang Cottage Industries Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designs used for Konyak skirts (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monpa masks from Tawang and Dirang-Dzong (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monpa paintings on wooden cups and bowls (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apa Tani priest’s shawl (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padam-Minyong skirts (B. Dohling)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s skirts from northern Siang (B. Dohling)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaman Mishmi textiles (R. Bagchi)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sherdukpen Ajilama dance (Hemadhar Thung)</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing of a Bori dance (Tallom Bori)</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrait of a Minyong singer (Taba Jam)</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crayon-drawing by Chinglum, a ten-year-old Taraon (Digaru)</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mishmi boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HALF-TONES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenery in northern Siang (author)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laju, a Nocte village, on the Patkoi Range (author)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A corner of the Bugun village Senchong (author)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagi Raja and his brother: reproduced from A Sketch of Assam</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(John Butler)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Konyak girl on her way to work (author)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Nocte girl of Senua village (author)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frontispiece
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Chang tomb at Tucansang (author)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaman Mishmis in a forest-clearing (author)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Its land is not like our land, its sky is not like our sky’ (author)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Noce of Tirap in full ceremonial dress (author)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Kaman Mishmi girl of the Khamlang Valley (author)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A girl weaving at Bomdo (author)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaman Mishmi boy on stilts (author)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dafla girls of Subansiri (author)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phom dancers at Longleng (author)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer at Mankhota (author)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallong boys dancing during the preparation of rice-beer before a</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wedding (author)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Naga Chief, photographed by Dr Simpson before 1862, reproduced</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from E. T. Dalton’s <em>Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Chen Chief of Mo-Chen village on the Patkoi Range (author)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho women engaged in tattooing a young girl (author)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanchos with the tattoo-marks allowed only to the head-hunter (author)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idu Mishmi coat (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khampti bags (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konyak sash (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strap of a Wancho bag woven in red and black on white (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherdukpen bag designs (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile designs popular in the west of Kameng (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-woven bag popular among Monpas and Sherdukpons (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho bags (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden images of the Lord Buddha carved by a Khampti craftsman (author)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay image of the Buddha in the Gelling Gompa (author)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Lama at Mankhota (author)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The clowns Arakacho and his wife embrace in a pantomime at Mankhota (author)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memba dancer representing a boar at Gelling (author)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden masks worn by Memba clowns at Gelling (author)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A masked dancer from Shyo village (author)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Monpa girl of Dirang-Dzong carrying a water-pot with its cane cover (author)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Hrusso hat (Panna Pal)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Khampti woman, photographed by Dr Simpson before 1862 and reproduced from E. T. Dalton’s <em>Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal</em></td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khampti dancer** (author) .......................... 81
**Khampti mask representing one of the animals which troubled the Lord Buddha during his temptation** (R. Bagchi) .......................... 82
**Khampti mask** (R. Bagchi) .......................... 83
**Khampti wood-carving** .............................. 85
**Hrusso girls dancing** (author) ........................ 86
**Hrusso youth with bow and arrow** (author) ........................ 87
**Sherdukpen masks** (author) .......................... 88
**The Yak Dance of the Sherdukpen** (author) .......................... 89
**Mask used in the Ajilama dance of the Sherdukpen** (author) .......................... 90
**Monpa masks representing animals and human beings** (Panna Pal) .......................... 91
**Masked dancers representing (above) man-eating birds in the Sherdukpen Jachunga-Chham Dance and (below) benevolent bird-spirits in a dance at Mankhota** (author) .......................... 92
**Phoging and Moging, two good spirits, dancing in a Mankhota pantomime** (author) .......................... 93
**Wooden masks used in the Deer-dance by various Buddhist groups** (author) .......................... 94
**Khampti wood-carvings of temple musicians** (Panna Pal) .......................... 95
**Apa Tanis returning home through their fields** (A. Dhar) .......................... 100
**An Apa Tani man with the characteristic cloak and cane hat** (author) .......................... 101
**Hill Miri ancient of northern Subansiri** (author) .......................... 102
**A Tagin priest of northern Subansiri** (author) .......................... 103
**Apa Tani boys playing the game of Three Hearth-Stones** (author) .......................... 104
**A Pailibo living among the northern mountains of Siang** (author) .......................... 112
**Scenery on the Upper Siang River** (author) .......................... 113
**Two figures erected in a Minyong village to drive away the demon of dysentery** (author) .......................... 114
**Gallong girls wearing traditional skirts** (author) .......................... 117
**An Adi girl of northern Siang wearing the beyop** (Sachin Roy) .......................... 118
**An Adi village headman of northern Siang** (author) .......................... 120
**A Minyong of Siang wearing a woollen coat in the Tibetan fashion** (author) .......................... 121
**Ashing girl wearing a dark blue shawl in Bori style** (author) .......................... 124
**Idu Mishmi Chief in full dress, reproduced from Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*** .......................... 128
**Idu Mishmi youth wearing the conventional black embroidered coat** (author) .......................... 129
**Kaman Mishmi with cross-bow** (author) .......................... 130
**An apron worn by Idu Mishmi shamans** (Panna Pal) .......................... 131
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taraon Mishmi girl beating a gong during a dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carvings in the Chief's house at Sangnyu (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phom warrior with special cowrie-belt and other decorations (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Konyak wooden head (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylized mithun head and death-mask design (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carving of monkeys, or possibly human beings searching for lice, in the morung at Chi (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pile of discarded grave-effigies in a Phom village (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Konyak lifts up his father's grave-effigy, which is no longer taboo (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carving on a pillar in a Konyak morung at Chi (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho grave-effigies, the faces heavily tattooed with the 'spectacle' design (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Konyak tomb (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After a dead body has decomposed, the Konyak aristocratic families remove the skull and place it in a stone urn (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Konyak grave-effigy (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Chang tomb (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konyak carvings in wood (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho wood-carving (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden figure of a warrior from Tirap (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phom morung-carving of a warrior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carving on a pillar in the morung at the Phom village Pongu (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konyak wooden figure (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho carving on a ladder in the morung at Mintong (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A monkey carved on a pillar of a Wancho morung at Lonkao (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seated figure preserved in a Wancho morung at Wakka (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho wooden heads (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho basket, decorated with carved heads and figure of a warrior (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bunch of small figures in white wood (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Chang dao-holder (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basket, decorated with red and orange hair (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Konyak figure of black wood (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden heads worn by Wanchos who have participated in a successful head-hunting raid (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho wooden heads with the tattoo marks strongly emphasized (Panna Pal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Horizontal border designs on black Idu Mishmi coats ..... 60 & 61
Kaman Mishmi designs woven and embroidered on bags, coats
and shawls .................................................. 62 & 63
Designs on the Sherdukpen shawls and sometimes on Hrusso bags ..... 64 & 65
Fish-pattern painted on Monpa bowls .......................... 72
Decorated holders for Jew's-harps in northern Siang .............. 75
A drawing of yaks by Ranimaza, a Monpa boy of eleven years .... 89
Hrusso combs decorated with poker-work designs ................ 96
Hrusso ear-plugs and bangles ................................ 96
Bamboo implements used by the Hrusso in weaving and decorated
in poker-work .................................................. 97
Konyak and Phom tobacco-tubes ................................. 98
The Apa Tani waist-band with the 'tail' hanging down behind 106
Cane hats of various styles common all over northern Siang ..... 107
The most characteristic of the Padam-Minyong ornaments ....... 123
A Wangcho grave-effigy of cane and bamboo .................... 140
A Phom grave-effigy .......................................... 141
Introduction

On Tuesday, June the 15th 1784, Dr Samuel Johnson was shown the three recently published volumes of Captain Cook's account of his voyages to the South Seas. The great man did not approve. 'Who,' he demanded, 'will read them through? A man had better work his way before the mast than read them through; they will be eaten by rats and mice before they are read through. There can be little entertainment in such books; one set of savages is like another.' To this Boswell protested: 'I do not think the people of Otaheite can be reckoned savages.'

Johnson: 'Don't cant in defence of savages.'
Boswell: 'They have the art of navigation.'
Johnson: 'A dog or a cat can swim.'
Boswell: 'They carve very ingeniously.'
Johnson: 'A cat can scratch, and a child with a nail can scratch.'

The word 'savage' has passed and with it the attitude of mind it expressed, yet although the primitive art of Africa, America and the South Seas is today admired and even fashionable, the tribal art of India has not hitherto attracted much attention, and some of that attention has been critical or even Johnsonian in its scorn. Thus Dunbar, in an otherwise appreciative paper on the Abors and Gallongs, speaks of 'the utter lack of an artistic sense in the tribes on this frontier': they could not even decorate their quivers and scabbards. He says again that the Adis' ideas of art 'are limited to elementary patterns on the loom and to the rough conventional designs of the smith in his clay and wax castings', which were generally imitations of imports from Tibet. Similarly Dalton says of the Subansiri tribes that 'there are no people on the face of the earth more ignorant of arts and manufactures.'
The early explorers of the frontier vied with one another in their use of uncomplimentary adjectives, and even today the common use of the expression 'backward tribes' who are to be 'uplifted' hardly suggests an attitude of respect.

Yet an attitude of neglect or scorn is as mistaken as one which casts a romantic glamour over all things tribal. For, as Raymond Firth says, 'one aim of a clear aesthetic judgement is to recognize the worth of traditions of art different from our own, to perceive in an apparent distortion of reality the expression of a valid and interesting idea, of a formal and forceful design.'

There is much beauty to be found in Indian tribal art, particularly in the art of the North-East Frontier, but to appreciate it requires sympathy, imagination and the ability to relate it to its human background. It is also necessary to understand the difficulties against which the artist has to struggle: lack of materials, the general psychological demoralization into which many of the people have fallen as a result of contact with the outside world, and the absence of official or private patronage and encouragement in the past.

On the North-East Frontier there are additional difficulties. Only the most primitive tools are available for wood-carving. In many areas the local clay is not suitable for pottery. The walls of houses are not plastered with mud and washed with cow-dung and red or white clay, and this means that there is none of the modelling on walls common in other parts of India and there are no wall-paintings, except in the Buddhist institutions of western Kameng, where the painting is on wood. Cotton is not extensively grown, for the people are hard put to it to provide themselves even with sufficient food, and although a number of natural dyes are known, their use is slowly being abandoned before the competition of coloured bazaar yarn and synthetic dyes, with the result that the old colours are inevitably changing.

Lack of materials and the uncertainty of frontier life combined to discourage the artist in the past. Even now the highly inflammable bamboo houses, thatched with grass or palm leaves, and huddled together on a hillside are subject to disastrous fires. In former days there was much burning of villages and houses in the course of kidnapping raids and inter-village feuds. Earthquake and flood still take their toll of buildings and all they contain. The graphic and plastic arts require a sense of security if they are
A corner of the Bugun village Senchong in western Kameng
to flourish, and we will never be able to estimate the artistic and cultural
impoverishment caused by the great earthquake of 1950. The climate too,
with its heavy rainfall, causes everything to decay. And there is nowhere to
keep anything. There are few cupboards or boxes in which to store one’s
more precious possessions, which have to be tied up in bamboo baskets. The
wood-smoke that fills every tribal home preserves wooden and bamboo
objects, but the thick dust settles on everything and quickly robs the most
beautiful cloth of its lustre.

In Tirap there is a further difficulty. It may be dangerous to make a striking
or beautiful thing. Publicity can shorten life. It is risky to carve well, for
people will ask who the artist was and such queries are unlucky. When a
pillar is carved in a morung (village-dormitory or guard-house), a dog must
be sacrificed and a period of taboo observed: the artist must restrict his diet
and observe a rule of chastity for a number of days. If he breaks these rules
he may fall sick; he may even die. A Konyak who made me a small wood-
carving had to sacrifice a pig to avert these dangers before he gave it to me.

There are other restrictions. In some Wancho groups only the wife and
daughters of a Chief can weave; among the Konyaks, Changs and others
there are strict rules governing the kind of dress that can be made or used
by certain people. The Sherdukpen, Hrusso and Monpa aristocracy, with its
strong sense of protocol, controls the use of fine and beautiful things. There
is a general tradition that a human figure can be carved in a morung only by
someone who has himself taken a head, and a tiger by someone who has
himself killed a tiger. With the passing of head-hunting and the extermin-
ation of wild life, the artist’s opportunities have naturally been restricted.

The production of cloth is also hampered by an elaborate system of taboos.
Their incidence varies considerably from place to place and there is room here
for only two examples, but these will suffice to indicate the kind of restrictions
that exist. For the Padams and Minyongs every festival involves a taboo on
weaving as well as on other activities. There is no weaving for five days after
the Ampi Dorung ceremonial hunt, for twenty days after the Aran Harvest
Festival, for ten days after the Sollung Festival which celebrates the sowing
and transplantation of paddy. If any special ceremony such as, for example,
the Mime Rego Ipak, is performed for a woman to avert certain kinds of
disease she must not weave or spin for six months and the other women in the household must not do so for ten days.

Even more rigorous are the taboos imposed by a death in the household. After a natural death the family must not weave for five days, but if anyone is killed by falling from a tree or is struck by lightning or if a pregnant woman dies in childbirth, the whole family is forbidden to spin or weave for a year. If anyone is killed by a snake or a wild animal, the taboo is less severe but lasts for a month. If a woman suffers an abortion she cannot weave for a whole year, her family must abstain for a month and the village for a day. Curiously, there is no ban on a woman weaving during her period.

There are similar but less stringent taboos among the Mishmis. Unlike the Adis, they forbid a woman to weave during her period, but the ordinary taboos do not last so long. Eleven days are observed after a man’s death, nine days after a woman’s; it is much the same when a child is born. Most sacrifices and festivals give a complete holiday from all kinds of work, including weaving and basketry, for a number of days, and among the Kamans there are special periods of taboo on weaving for any sacrifice offered to Mollo and Bronmai, the gods who introduced the art to the world.

Another tradition which is destructive of the traditional art throughout the entire area is the practice of burying the possessions of a dead man with his body or of hanging them on his tomb. In Tuensang and Tirap, and to some degree also in Siang, Lohit and elsewhere, the tombs have the appearance of miniature museums: decorated hats, colourful bits of cloth, ornaments, spears, guns and daos may be observed rotting in the wind and rain. For the deceased must have these things with him. In the Land of the Dead he will have to build a house, so he will need his dao; he will go head-hunting or to war, so he will need his gun; there will be festivals to attend, so he must have his best clothes. I have been told that if these things are not placed on the tomb, the ghost comes to the shaman and says: ‘I have no clothes. I shiver with cold; I have no gun, how can I hunt? I have no dao, how can I clear my path?’ And he threatens that, since his descendents will not help him, he will not help them and will spoil their crops.

The Idu Mishmis believe that when a man’s soul reaches the other world, the older ghosts rob him of his clothes, and one of the penalties of death is
Tagi Raja and his brother, Hrussos or Akas of the first half of the nineteenth century reproduced from A Sketch of Assam (1847) by John Butler, who himself painted the original picture.
that it sends you to a place where there are no weavers. There is, therefore, a special ceremony, the Iya, which is performed six months to a year after a death, at which many pieces of cloth are offered on the tomb: these clothes must be made by members of the household—not other relatives—who are thus kept busy preparing them. Many fine things are made but are never used or worn; they pass straight to the land of shadows and decay.

The result of this is that, although certain beads, charms, sacred bells and brass bowls are handed down as heirlooms in a family, it is very hard to find anything old; death destroys not only an individual, but a tradition.

This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult on the North-East Frontier to make any satisfactory collections of specimens for museum purposes. In a Wancho village I once saw a remarkable basket, decorated with wooden skulls and bear’s fur. But when I tried to buy it—at a very high price—the owner, an old and poor man, refused to sell. ‘In a few months,’ he said, ‘I shall be dead, and unless this bag hangs on my tomb, I shall be without credit in the other world.’

Another difficulty is that many of the people think it is dangerous to part with an object that has been used or worn. This may derive from a belief that the owner’s vital essence permeates an article he has used, and that if he parts with it, his soul may fall into the power of the buyer. In a Bori village in northern Siang, the priests declared that if any one sold me one of his personal possessions he would die. I once bought a carved comb from a woman in Tirap, but before she gave it to me, she carefully removed every little hair from it; if she had not done so, I was told, she would have always felt a little anxious. When J. H. Hutton visited the Tuensang hills in 1923, he found that nothing he and his party had used, not even the bamboo mats they borrowed for screens, could be touched again after they had gone.

The Adis believe that there is an aith or ‘soul’ in material objects, in the grain stored in the bins or in a precious ornament like the dudap (page 123). If anyone robs a granary and is caught, he has not only to pay a fine in compensation for what he has stolen, but has to provide the materials for a sacrifice which will persuade the aith to return to its proper home.

I once tried to buy a little bamboo holder for a Jew’s-harp from a Tangam woman, but she explained that she was pregnant and that if she parted with
A Konyak girl, wearing a grass skirt, on her way to work in the hill-clearings
anything used or worn by her, it would affect the 'soul' of her unborn child. A Shimong woman, a Miri or shaman of the Yang Sang Chu Valley, had a striking ear-ornament, which she would on no account part with, for some of the dirt from her neck, she said, had got onto it and with the dirt was her aith. If then she parted with the ornament, she might be separated from her 'soul' and this would offend her tutelary spirit.

Thirty years ago J. P. Mills wrote of trade between the Ao Naga weavers and the Tuensang tribes. 'Cloths of patterns specially admired by their trans-frontier neighbours, but no longer worn by the Aos, are made expressly for this trade, and on a fine day one may see the sitting-out platforms "dressed" with cloths to catch the eye of a passing Phom. An Ao usually wears cloths woven by his wife, and if he buys a decorated cloth he must be careful to brush it six times with a bunch of nettles before putting it on, while he utters a prayer that all ill luck that may be in it may depart. A man of the Mongsen group goes further. Besides brushing it with nettles he lays it on a dog before he wears it himself and prays that all misfortune attached to the cloth may pass to the dog and not to him. Ivory armlets, too, and crystal ear-ornaments are dangerous things to buy. The purchaser on his return home must sacrifice a fowl and pray that, since the ornaments have not been bought with stolen money but with wealth honestly come by, the wearer may live long to enjoy them. Aos scrape a shaving from a spear or pull a thread from a cloth before selling it.' Similarly, before putting on a new bead-necklace or collar of tushes, a Sema puts, or used to put, them on a dog, so that any evil in them may affect the dog and not the wearer. In Subansiri today, if an Apa Tani sells a piece of cloth to a Dafla he pulls out a thread before parting with it; if he sells ornaments to anyone, he carefully washes them first.

Yet another factor hostile to the development of art is a sense of inferiority in face of the commercial products of 'civilization'. This is sometimes so strong that people will hide their own products from an outsider's view, and I have known girls at a dance attired in entrancing dress and ornaments drape themselves completely with white bed-sheets from the shops in order to look 'modern'. Shimong girls wear a pretty knee-length skirt with the beyop ornament, as illustrated on page 118. But today they cover this with a dingy white skirt down to the ankles, concealing the bright colours and gleaming

A Nocte girl of Senua village in the Tirap Frontier Division, on her way to her husband's house for the first time
brass. Some Mishmi girls cover their own blouses with jackets of black mill-cloth, debasing the exquisitely-woven tribal garment into a kind of underwear. To the tribal mind it is the bazaar product which is the exotic, the fashionable, the unusual and people all too often take the beautifully-made traditional ornaments from their hair or ears and put cheap plastic hair-clips and ear-rings in their place.

A great deal of tribal art is associated with religious beliefs and practices and as these weaken the art weakens with them. Missionary influence has generally been highly destructive of folk art, whether it be dancing, song, carving or even weaving—for so many of these good things have been closely associated with ‘pagan’ ideas.

Yet in spite of this the hill people, who love colour and beauty, have succeeded, as the pictures in this book will show, in making many things that
Kaman Mishmis in a forest-clearing
are original, striking and, in their own way, beautiful. They have an excellent
taste in colour and in combining colours; some of them show remarkable skill
in devising patterns and, if the old records are to be believed, they have
developed many of today's designs during the past fifty years, and are still
creating new patterns, partly under the stimulus of external example but
largely as a result of their own natural zest for creation. The wood-carving
often reveals vitality and strength; the cane-work reaches a high standard of
technical perfection. In the art of personal adornment, even the remotest
tribes reveal a singular fertility of invention.

Today, as I show in my last Chapter, the Government of India is doing
all it can to encourage the traditional creativeness of the frontier people and
check the psychological factors and external influences that threaten it with
destruction. This book suggests that such an enterprise is abundantly worth
while and, despite every difficulty, may succeed.
Another World

When, nearly three hundred years ago, Mir Jumla invaded Assam, he was accompanied by two writers who have left their impressions of the strange and terrible country which finally succeeded in expelling them. One was Shihabuddin, also known as Talish, the other was 'that master of eloquence', Mulla Darvish of Herat, who composed an ode about his experiences. Neither writer is very flattering about Assam, though Talish praises the courage of the Ahoms and the splendour of their palaces. Mir Jumla's forces penetrated to the very borders of what is now the North-East Frontier Agency and Talish refers to the Daftas, who did not place their feet 'in the skirt of obedience' to the Raja of Assam and to the Miri-Mishmis, whose 'women surpass in beauty and grace the females of Assam'. Both writers, however, appear to have been impressed above all else by the 'otherness' of the country, and the Mulla says that it is 'another world'—

Its land is not like our land, its sky is not like our sky.
Its sky sends rain down without the originating cause of clouds;
On its ground the green grass sprouts up without any aid from the soil.
It stands outside the circle of the Earth and the bowels of the enveloping Sphere.
It has been separated from the world, like the letter diph.
The seasons all begin here at the time of their conclusion elsewhere.
Here there is heat in our winter and chill in our summer.
Its roads are frightful like the path leading to the nook of Death;
Fatal to life is its expanse like the unpeopled city of Destruction.
Its forests are full of violence like the hearts of the ignorant.
Its rivers are beyond limit and estimate like the minds of the wise.¹

These verses are, of course, no longer applicable to Assam proper, but they
may still be used to describe the frontier which, until India attained her independence, had indeed been separated from the world like the aliph, which cannot be joined to any letter that follows and to only a few of those that precede it. Its climate is contrary: its streams and rivers, beyond limit and estimate, divide tribe from tribe; although Government is now opening up communications, many of ‘its paths are frightful’ and hard to traverse: it is an area of danger, adventure, and enormous potentialities.

It is also an area of great beauty. William Robinson describes its scenery in the florid language of his day (1841):

‘Mountains beyond mountains, hurled together in wild confusion, seem to the spectator like the wrecks of a ruined world: and whilst the eye is gratified with the pleasing panorama, a series of hills innumerable is presented to view, retiring far away in fine perspective, till their blue conical summits are relieved by the proud pinnacles of the Himalayas towering their lofty magazines of tempests and snow midway up to the vertex of the sky, and exhibiting scenes calculated to animate the mind with the sublimest sentiments, and to awaken the most lofty recollections."

The snow-clad mountains all along the northern boundary, the river scenery of Siang, the pines and rhododendrons of Kameng, the austere grandeur of the Lohit Valley, the splendid uplands of the Patkoi, the gentle woods and fields of the Apa Tani plateau make the traveller feel as if ‘the spray of an inexhaustible fountain of beauty’ was blown into his face. The harshness of life on the one hand and the grandeur and loveliness of its setting on the other has had its effect on the character of the people. They are courageous in facing and overcoming difficulties and they are lovers of fine, strong and beautiful things.

The great tract of some 30,500 square miles under the North-East Frontier Agency administration (NEFA) may conveniently be divided into three main artistic and cultural provinces. The people of the first are Buddhist by religion and include the Sherdilkpens and Monpas of the western part of Kameng and, to some extent, the Bugun. Aka (Hrusso) and Dhammair groups who are in close contact with them and have come under their influence. With them we must classify the Tibetan-speaking Membas and Khambas living along the frontier from Mechuka through Tuting, Mankhota and Gelling to Wallong in

'It is land is not like our land, its sky is not like our sky'
A Nocte of Tirap in full ceremonial dress. Note especially the cone-belts and the decorative loin-cloth, which is brick-red in colour.
the Lohit Division. Although the artistic tradition of the Khamptis and Singphos has taken a different course, and they are geographically isolated from the border groups, it will be convenient to include them here, for they are Buddhist in religion and have certain points in common, such as the making of masks, which are unknown elsewhere in NEFA.

The second cultural area stretches from west to east, from Sepla in Kameng and through the greater part of the Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions. It is, as I will show later, populated by tribes of very varying traditions, yet united culturally in their attachment to weaving, the absence of wood-carving, and a stress on fine work in cane and bamboo.

The third cultural area is to the south-east. Here, in the Tirap Frontier Division, are the Noctes, who are Vaishnavite by religion, the Wanchos, a brave independent people, and the gentle, opium-loving Tangsas, all of whom have come under some influence from Burma. The Tangsa groups, in fact, still have many contacts across the border, intermarry with the Burmese tribes, and do their hair and dress in a vaguely Burmese manner. The Noctes and Wanchos were formerly head-hunters; they build morungs for their young men, and substantial houses for their Chiefs: their art expresses itself in wood-carving and personal decoration. Dalton said of them in 1872 that ‘in fantastic eccentricity of costume’ they took the lead of all the tribes. ‘Their love of decoration is only equalled by their antipathy to clothing. They study ornamentation and manage to produce a very picturesque effect. The materials chiefly used are shell, ivory, boar’s tusks, beads of agate and other pebbles, goat’s hair dyed scarlet and other colours, brass and glass.’

South of Tirap is Tuensang, where the Phoms and Konyaks also excel in an art of wood-carving connected with their old head-hunting tradition.

But although the three main cultural provinces and individual tribes have their special characteristics, they all have a great deal in common. Throughout, the unit of society is the patrilineal family and, while polygamy is fairly common, polyandry has been noted only very rarely. The people live in villages, though these vary from the great long-established Nocte and Monpa villages to the frequently shifted settlements of the Daflas and Tagins. Sometimes, as among the Daflas and Mishmis, villages may consist of only one or two houses, which are often very large and may contain up to sixty or seventy
persons. Generally, however, the hill villages have from two hundred to five hundred inhabitants and many of them are pleasantly sited on hill-tops with wonderful views of rivers, forests and mountains.

Local Government varies greatly. The Wanchos and Noctes are ruled by powerful Chiefs. The Sherdukpen and Hrusso are dominated by aristocratic families. The Dafa or Bangni villages, on the other hand, have hardly any traditional organization at all and sometimes there were wars between individual houses in which the neighbours took no part. The Apa Tanis are governed by a council of elders, a system which has reached its highest development among the Adis and Mishmis where the Kebang or Village Council has great authority. Today the Adi Councils are combining into larger units known as Bangos which control a number of villages.

The main occupation of the people is cultivation of the kind known in Assam as jhuming; they cut down the trees and shrubs of a hillside, set fire to them when dry, and sow the seed in the ashes. The Monpas, however, terrace their hill-sides and the Apa Tanis are unique in their system of irrigated fields. The Administration is now attempting to introduce wet rice cultivation (which has achieved considerable success in the area round Pasighat) and terracing on a wide scale. The people supplement their diet by hunting and fishing, at both of which they are expert, and by a large range of forest products. They rarely (except in the border areas) drink spirits, but all make rice-beer, a nourishing beverage which is almost a staple food. They keep pigs and fowls, sometimes goats and sheep, but their chief domestic treasure is the mithun, a standard of exchange, an essential offering at weddings, funerals and the greater feasts.

There are no guilds or castes of craftsman, but certain families take up blacksmithery or pottery, arts which are not practised by everyone.

Religion is of a type common throughout tribal India, that is to say, there is a very general belief in a Supreme God who is just, benevolent and good, the witness of truth. Beneath this mighty ruler of the unseen world there is a host of demons who prey upon mankind and to whose pacification most of the attention of the tribal priests and shamans is devoted. Such priests, who may be men or women, are of considerable authority and have the task not only of appeasing the demons and ghosts of the dead but also of deciding

---

*A Kamam Mishmi girl of the Khumlang Valley, with the characteristic rings round her neck, silver head-band, and silver pipe*
A girl weaving at Bomdo on the right bank of the Upper Siang River
through divination such matters as the allocation of fields for cultivation, the auspicious moment for sowing their seed or the discovery of stolen cattle and goods. Important aspects of tribal religion are the attention paid to the dead (for whom elaborate funerary ceremonies are performed), the observance of a series of festivals, and a complicated system of taboos.

Tribal religion is associated with a social ethic that unites the people in its discipline and undoubtedly fosters the characteristic tribal virtues of order, self-reliance, fidelity, generosity and hospitality, truthfulness and kindness.

Religion also lends its sanction to the origin of the arts. The Boris of Siang say that at the beginning of the world it was only Doini-Pollo, the Sun-Moon God, who knew how to make cloth. He taught the art to a female Wiyu or spirit and she, flattered by a rich sacrifice presented to her by Abu Tani, the ancestor of the tribe, came in a dream to his wife and showed her how to weave. At first the women used bark-fibre but in time they wearied of this and instead made yarn from the soft feathers of the kite. Later, when they started visiting Tibet for salt, they learnt the use of wool. The Hill Miris of Subansiri say that at first their women used to dress in leaves, but found them inconvenient, and began to make the belts of cane which are still their most characteristic adornment. Hrusso and Dhammai stories describe human beings as originally covered with hair. In time they lost this convenient covering and took to bark-cloth instead. The Taraon Mishmis recall that human beings at the beginning had neither clothes, houses nor fire, but lived like deer in the forest. They first discovered fire and then began to dress in leaves. Later, far away in the mountains they found a nettle from whose fibre they made yarn. Similarly, the Wanchos say that at the beginning men lived like birds in nests high up in the trees and it was only after they had learnt to make fire and build houses that they took to the use of cloth. The Moklum tradition is that at first their men wore only bamboo girdles and their women bamboo leaves, until God gave them cotton-seed and taught them to spin and weave. Ashing and Singpho tales attribute the invention of weaving to the spider, for it was by watching it make its web that women learnt the art. From the spider too men learnt to span their rivers with suspension bridges of cane.

The Kaman Mishmis of the Lohit Valley have a significant story about the origin of weaving.
Originally people did not wear clothes, for they did not know how to weave. The first weaver was a girl named Hambrumai, who was taught the art by the god Matai. She sat by the river and watched the waves and ripples on its surface and imitated them in her designs. She lay in the forest looking up at the patterns woven by the branches of trees, the leaves of the bamboo; she saw ferns and plants and flowers, and from these things learnt other designs. Her work was as beautiful as her face and many boys desired to marry her.

But one day Hairum, the Porcupine, saw her cloth and came to steal it from her cave. The entrance was too small for him, so he pushed the rock into the river and the girl was crushed beneath it. Her loom was broken to pieces and carried down by the stream to the plains and the people there found them and learnt to weave. The designs turned into butterflies, and in the markings on their wings you can still see today the patterns she made."

Another story about Hambrumai comes from the Khamlang Valley.

In the Khamlang River lived a fish called hambru: she had flowers on her body, and with her was a snake of three colours, red, white and blue—these colours are reflected in the clouds.

There was an orphan boy called Kowonsa, who was very fond of fishing, but he had to work so hard in the fields that he had little opportunity for it. But one day he set his traps in a stream saying, "If it is my destiny to get any fish, they will come to me of their own accord." The next morning he found two hambru fish, one large and one small, in his trap and knew that he was favoured by the gods.

Kowonsa put the small fish on the fire and roasted and ate it. But the big fish was so pretty that he hid her in a gourd and kept her in his house. The next day he went to work and when he returned he found his little hut filled with lovely cloth patterned with the scales of a fish and the markings of a snake. This went on for some time: he fed his fish every day, went out to work and when he returned he found more and more cloth in the house. One day he hid near by and presently saw the fish come out of the gourd and turn into a girl with long hair, carrying a loom on which she quickly wove many pieces of cloth.

Kowonsa took her as his wife and she taught all the women of that place how to weave. When they asked her how she herself had learnt the patterns,
she said. “When I was a fish I looked at the snake in the river and copied the marks on its body, and I followed its colours reflected in the clouds.”

Kowonsa put some of the cloth out in the sun and the wind blew it away to other villages and the people there also learnt to weave. The gods Bronmai and Mollo learnt the designs from Hambrumai and went about the world teaching everybody how to weave. After Hambrumai died, they took the sword from her loom and made it into a diamond pattern. This is why there are so many diamonds on the Mishmi cloth.

Similarly in a Sherdukpen tale, a girl falls in love with a snake who sometimes takes the form of a handsome youth. In his snake form he coils himself in her lap as she weaves: she copies the markings on her lover’s body and is soon making the most beautiful cloth that was ever seen.
For the Minyongs and Ashings the traditional inventor of implements is Ninur-Botte, who was the first ironsmith and maker of ornaments. The Shimongs call him Besi-Ada or Ningnu-Botte: he made the first beads and persuaded the woodpecker to cut holes in them. In a Singpho story the first craftsman is a man named Intupwa. He tried, unsuccessfully, to cut wood with sharp stones and went to search for iron. He first asked the trees where he
Phom dancers at Longleng in 1954
Dancer at Mankhota in the Yang Sang Chu Valley
could get it, but the trees replied, 'If we tell you, you will make a dao and cut us down.' Then he asked the grasses and they made the same reply. He asked the wild animals and they said, 'If we tell you, you will make iron-tipped arrows and kill us.' At last he asked the water, which sent him to a certain goddess who gave birth to a baby-girl, at first red as fire but later black as iron. Intupwa broke her to pieces and took the iron home. But he did not know how to work it until he learnt how to make a stone hammer by watching an elephant's feet crushing everything beneath them. He learnt how to make a pair of tongs when a crab caught him with its claws, and after that he began to make daos, knives and arrow-heads.
One of the chief inspirations for the other arts is the dance, itself the art in which the tribal people find supreme expression of their sense of order, rhythm and delight. To most of the frontier tribes, moreover, the dance is something more than recreation: it is a very serious business. The Monpas, Khambas and Sherdukpen perform their pantomimes, not for show, but at festivals to teach important moral lessons and to bring prosperity or avert disease. The Wanchos and Noctes dance to celebrate victory in war, to encourage the crops to grow and when they bring in the harvest, to give colour to a great feast, to bestow blessings at a wedding. The Mishmi priests dance at the time of sacrifice or funeral and for their festivals. The Adis, who have a strongly developed sense of the dance as recreation, also have their ritual dances at which the epics of their race are sung.

This naturally stimulates every form of artistic creation. The dancers put on their best skirts and coats, bring out their finest hats, decorate spears and daoos, paint fresh designs on shields, and cover themselves with ornaments, from precious traditional beads to flowers and strips of greenery. The wooden heads and figures popular in Tuensang and Tirap are brought out now, even if they have remained hidden for months, and masks are prepared and painted with fresh colours.

There is little religious ceremonial at weddings, but these too are occasions for colour and display. Carefully preserved cloth and ornaments are brought
out and worn: the Noctes, whose ordinary dress is undistinguished, make a good show at a wedding: so do some of the rather drab tribes of northern Subansiri. A Wancho girl on her wedding day (see page 10) is a masterpiece of decorative art.

All the tribes use hair—goat’s hair, dog’s hair and human hair—lavishly for decoration. Human hair is specially valued in Tirap, perhaps on account of its magical value in making the crops grow tall and long, and the Laju women, who shave their heads, say they do so to make themselves less attractive to the head-hunter. No one will ever part with a dao or basket adorned with human hair. The Adis decorate their hats with the fur of bears and other animals and the people of northern Subansiri cover the sheaths of their daos with monkey’s hair. The Semas and others in Tuensang attach a fringe of scarlet goat’s hair to the red sash worn on ceremonial occasions; human hair may be used for their tails of basket-work: and a circlet of bear’s fur is worn round the head with hornbill feathers according to the number of heads taken. Warriors wear gauntlets of cowries with a fringe of scarlet hair. All the Tuensang tribes decorate their hats with hair, and wooden figures often have bunches of hair hanging from them like bushy tails. The Khienmungans embroider their blue fabrics with red squares of dog’s hair.

Cowries are often used: the Akas use them on their sashes, the Boris and Ashings on their belts; the Phoms, Khienmungans and Changs have a broad
cowrie-belt, with a brass disc in front; the Konyaks work cowries into their textiles: aprons of cowries are made by the Sangtams, Semas and others; cowrie gauntlets are worn by warriors. Cowries are less used in Tirap, perhaps because they are not available, but may be found in the Wancho brass belt and the Nocte apron, one of the few colourful survivals from an earlier time: it is made of woven goat’s hair which is dyed an attractive brick-red with tassels hanging from it.

The people of this frontier have a wonderful instinct for ornamentation. The armlets of ivory or polished wood, the leggings of red cane, the strings of conch shells and beads, the ear-ornaments of red and black seeds, the splendid hats, the baskets adorned with wooden figures, monkeys’ skulls and tassels of shredded bamboo tied up with red and black bands, suggest a sense of grace and colour in a world that is everywhere turning to the conventional and drab.

Here is a richness and a variety, which reflect a real joy in living, and must not be allowed to die.
Hats used in Tirap and Tuensang. Reading from left to right:
(a) Konyak (b) Chang, Phom, Konyak and other tribes (c) Konyak, collected in 1947, now rare (d) Wancho (e) Sema (f) Wancho (g) Hat with brass buffalo-horn symbol, from photo taken by Hutton (1923) at Yonghong.
Design and Symbol in Textiles

Although there are a few tribes which have never had the art of weaving, and others which have lost it in face of bazaar competition, handlooms are widely distributed all over the frontier area. But there is a great difference from other parts of India, where much of the weaving is in the hands of men; here it is the exclusive monopoly of women. The looms too are simpler and smaller than their counterparts elsewhere: the women nearly all use the single-heddle tension or loin-loom of a pattern common in Indonesia, which has a warp of some six yards by eighteen inches. There is no reed: a wooden sword is used to beat up the weft: and the actual weaving is done with a bamboo-tube throw-shuttle. The Khamptis have a slightly larger loom, though of the same general pattern, and a few Assamese looms are now used in the administrative centres. The ordinary fly-shuttle loom is unsuitable for use in the hill villages, for it cannot be accommodated in the houses: it is not portable—an important consideration in a part of the world where the women like to take their looms out into the sunshine when the weather is fine or carry them to the fields to use when they have time: and it is not possible to preserve on it the texture or the more intricate designs of the loin-loom cloth.

The importance of weaving to the tribal mind is illustrated by the number of words there are for everything to do with it, even where the general vocabulary is small. Thus the Padams and Minyongs classify at least twelve different designs (gape pore) woven for the vertical stripe that bisects a girl's galle-skirt. The Mishmis too have a large number of words for their various patterns and for all the processes of weaving.
Cotton is grown on a small scale in certain areas, as in the neighbourhood of Pasighat, throughout northern Siang, and by the Daflas, but the bulk of the cotton yarn now used is imported from the plains. Wool comes from the north and from Tibet and is spun into yarn by the people themselves. Besides wool and cotton, some of the tribes use a bark-fibre extracted from the *Rhea nivosa* nettle and other plants. The hair of the goat, dog and even monkey is sometimes used by the remoter tribes.

The hill women are very interested in colour and insist on getting the exact shades they prefer, though dependence on outside markets has inevitably modified their colour-schemes in recent years.

A number of natural dyes, however, are known—black, yellow, dark blue, green, scarlet and madder, the dark blue being obtained from the *Strobilanthes fallacidifolius* plant and the madder from *Rubia sikkimensis*. They are generally fast and often give most attractive results.

Weaving designs in the hills are almost exclusively of an angular geometrical type, though they vary from a formal arrangement of lines and bands to elaborate patterns of diamonds and lozenges, enhanced by internal repetition, hachure and other decorations.

It has been suggested that the ‘primitive’ pre-occupation with geometric order may reflect the intricate, systematic structure of social and religious concepts among the tribes and it is perhaps significant that the highly disciplined Adis and Apa Tanis concentrate on simple straight lines, while the strongly individualistic Mishmis go in for great elaboration of pattern. It may also not be without significance that, with the gradual break-up of tribal authority and tradition, some of the designs are becoming a little fussy, their simplicity disturbed by the addition of pretty-prettv flowers, animals and other ornaments.

But even now simple and straightforward lines, stripes and bands are the most common motifs, the effect being gained by varying their size, colour and arrangement. Contrasts and combinations of colour are often made very expertly. On most skirts and shawls the bands are horizontal; on coats and certain skirts vertical bands are also included.

The Adis have a great variety of such patterns: there are arrangements of red and black stripes on a white ground: white and yellow stripes on a black
Idu Mishmi coat with designs woven in red, yellow, white and black on a black background
ground: alternate bands of red and black or of olive-green and brown; broad border-bands of brown with a central narrow stripe of black and white, the body of the cloth being black with brown, black and white stripes at three-inch intervals.

The traditional Gallong cloth is white with a broad rectangular design across the centre, which is divided into panels of thin black lines. The most popular Padam-Minyong skirt is crimson or yellow and is given variety by a vertical band which runs down the centre. This is an inch or so broad and accommodates a number of designs which are illustrated on pages 56 and 57.

The Adi bands, whether horizontal or vertical, are often enhanced by a sort of hatching—rows of coloured dots, frets and single lines of different colours. Tiny vertical bars of red and black serve as space-fillers in the horizontal bands or even the narrow stripes. Different shades are achieved by mixing threads of black with other colours, and by closer or looser weaves.

The ordinary Apa Tani cloth also gets its effect from a use of broad bands alternating with narrow lines, nearly always horizontal. On a general base of blue-green there may be, along the top and bottom borders, a series of bands varying from a quarter of an inch to nearly an inch in breadth, and these themselves have narrow red lines running through them. Within these borders, there are a large number of red lines woven to resemble frets, and down the centre are narrow bands of black, green and yellow with red threads. Another style of cloth is white with borders of blue mixed with red lines and a few vertical stripes of red, green and white.

Mishmi weaving is much more elaborate, though here too the straight line and band is in frequent use. In Tuensang the most characteristic shawls generally have an essential design of stripes and bands of contrasting blacks, reds and blues. The commonest Konyak skirt gains its aesthetic effect by a combination of a large number of narrow horizontal lines of red, black and white set at varying distances from each other, or by alternating red bands with groups of black, yellow and white lines.

These single or multiple line and band motifs are the simplest of all and naturally the easiest to weave. Sometimes they serve as borders for more
complicated designs: sometimes they form the entire pattern in their own right. In their simplicity and directness there is something very satisfying, and by the rhythm of frequent repetition they produce an effect not unlike that of the rhymed decasyllabic couplet in verse. This may not always reach the heights of the romantic lyric, but is a very serviceable means of conveying ideas.

Of other geometric patterns there is an almost inexhaustible variety. There are hardly any curvilinear designs in tribal weaving, although in the remarkable Apa Tani priest’s shawl, illustrated on page 109, there are genuine spirals, some of which are actually curved. In general, however, curves and wavy lines, which may represent rivers, are woven as zigzags, which are either true zigzags or formed by alternate upright and pendent triangles.
These zigzag designs are popular on the sashes used by Konyaks and Wanchos to carry their baskets, and are common on the Wancho bags. In both cases they are made in rather loud and gaudy colours. As border friezes they are found in the Idu Mishmi textiles and are prominently displayed on the Idu bags. Real zigzags, however, are hardly ever found in the repertory of Adi or Apa Tani patterns.

But there is a herring-bone design on the Apa Tani priest's shawl and this is also seen on Wancho bags, Chang loin-cloths and Mishmi coats. Chevron patterns are also found among the Idu Mishmis and occasionally on Wancho and Konyak textiles, but they are rare.

Although elsewhere zigzags have been taken as representing rivers, their popularity among the warlike Wanchos and Konyaks and the proud and aggressive Idus, who until recently were regarded as almost unapproachable by outsiders, suggests that they are a natural expression of an aggressive forceful temperament.

Lozenge or diamond patterns are found on Harappan pottery, either in horizontal rows and linked together or as unconnected pieces, when they may represent leaves. They are common throughout the hills, being found, though not prominently, on the Konyak sashes and Wancho bags and bead-ornaments. Enhanced in various ways they occur in the Sherdukpen and Monpa fabrics. They are an important, indeed a central, element in the vertical bands on Adi skirts and the border decorations of Adi coats. Although Apa Tani weaving is in the main simple and straightforward, there is an attractive men's coat, black in colour and decorated with an over-all pattern of white diamonds and orange stripes interconnected and enhanced in various ways.

But it is among the Mishmis and especially the Idu Mishmis, that diamond designs have been brought to the highest degree of elaboration. They are woven on shawls, skirts, coats and bags, diamond within diamond, diamonds plain and diamonds decorated, diamonds arranged in every possible combination. These designs, in which the diamonds huddle, as it were, within each other seem to symbolize the strongly introverted Mishmi temperament which draws within itself and is lacking in a social consciousness.

Triangles are, of course, closely associated with grid and diamond patterns, but they often occur by themselves. They are found rarely on the Wancho
bags, more frequently on the Konyak sashes. As part of a grid pattern they may be seen in the Wancho and Konyak wooden bands worn in the hair, and sometimes on Mishmi bags and coats. There is an Idu Mishmi border design of alternately inverted triangles, each with internal repetition. Rows of opposed triangles meeting at the tips and forming lozenges between them are a common feature of Adi and Mishmi coats; in inexpert hands these pairs of triangles get separated and look like hour-glasses or cane stools.

The cross is so popular among the Adis as a tattoo mark and as a decorative design on coats imported from Tibet that Father Krick (who visited them in 1851) supposed that they had once been converts to Christianity and had relapsed. Crosses of the saltire type are found on Idu bags and sometimes on their shawls and coats as well as on Chang shawls. On Taraon Mishmi bags and skirts a grid pattern is so coloured as to form crosses composed of five squares; rather similar crosses occur on Sherdukpen bags. Konyak and Sherdukpen cowrie patterns, which have the general appearance of a cross, probably represent flowers.

Square and grid patterns are not common, but they are found on Yimchungri, Chang and other Tuensang shawls, and the Tangsa and Khampti plaid is really a grid design. There are fret patterns on Monpa fabrics, and on the Sherdukpen, Khampti and Hrusso bags.

Zoomorphs are rarely woven on the frontier fabrics, though they are common enough in wood-carving. Monpa shawls and coats have a variety of stylized animals, cleverly suggested with a minimum of lines. There are birds of a geometrical type on the Khampti bags and fish on the Wancho sashes. It is probable that some designs on Phom and Konyak cloth represent the feathers or beaks of the Great Indian Hornbill.

Human figures are rarely woven. They appear seated on horses in the Monpa shawls, and are shown rather realistically on Wancho bags and sashes where the simple geometric designs are certainly associated with head-hunting.

The designs embroidered on the Sherdukpen bogre cloth and sometimes on Hrusso bags are illustrated on pages 64 and 65. The bogre cloth is worn over the shoulders and serves as a sort of knapsack. Its central motif is always a right-pointing swastika, round which are a number of subordinate patterns.
which vary considerably. The colours are red, blue, black and sometimes green and yellow on a white ground. Most of the weavers have forgotten the meaning of these symbols, but a few of the older women remember them; their interpretations probably vary from village to village.

Several of the designs on pages 64 and 65 were interpreted at Rupa as meaning flowers. (g) is one such flower; (k) is another; (i) represents the shrub which supplies the black juice used for painting beauty-marks on the faces of young girls. The lines projecting from the main design are said to be the thorns of the plant.

Design (e) is either a *mane* shrine or one of the silver ornaments which are popular in this area. (g) too is sometimes interpreted as a shrine with prayer-flags flying above it.

Design (f) symbolizes the eyes of the yak. Unfortunately nobody could give any reason why a yak’s eyes should have significance. One informant interpreted (k) not as a flower, but as the eyes of doves.

Design (h) is said to be a Chinese flag: (j) is a coiled piece of rope or string; (a) is a tortoise; (b) is a metal jug; (c) is a pair of tongs used to lift hot coals from a fire; (d) is the popular ‘Chinese fence’ design commonly used as the upper border of Sherdukpen or Hrusso bags. But while the Sherdukpons explain this as a fence dividing their country from China, the Hrusso say it represents the Jana flower. This flower is said to have been named after a great Tibetan Raja, so great that he had the power of talking to the Sun. He had an enormous palace open on all four sides, and could accommodate the Sun within it. Every day he was born at the rising of the Sun; by midday he grew into a youth; by evening he was old and went down with the Sun into darkness. The next morning he was born again. When he left the earth, the many-coloured Jana flower sprang up in his place.

Another way in which the Hrusso differ from the Sherdukpons is in their interpretation of page 65 (i). This, they say, is the Sun surrounded by its corona. The story behind this is that when the Sky and the Sun were first made it was very hot, so the god Chirmu made the clouds to give men shade. When sunshine is needed the clouds give the Sun food to please him and persuade him to shine brightly: this food is the corona represented by the horizontal lines extending from the central body of the design. When a little
Chang and Yimchungrr
designs from Tuensang
Textile designs from the Tuen-sang Cottage Industries centre
rain falls the Hrussos say it is the rice-beer given by the clouds to the Sun, but unhappily this is not represented.

The designs of the Kaman and Taraon Mishmis are of extraordinary variety: in a tour of the Khamlang Valley where every one of the five hundred inhabitants was clothed from head to foot in hand-woven cloth, I hardly ever saw a pattern exactly duplicated. Many of the people have now forgotten the meanings of the designs, but a few of the older men and women still had them in mind, though their interpretations sometimes varied from village to village.

For example, turning to the designs on pages 62 and 63, the vertical zigzag was explained, sometimes as the dabei-chungleyi, the bent stick used to clear and prepare the soil in the forest-clearings, sometimes as a flight of cranes. A row of alternately shaded squares was interpreted in one village as the sky interspersed with stars (an old woman once said: ‘A good weaver copies the patterns of the clouds’), in another as the markings on a snake—and in fact the design does resemble the markings on the banded krait—and in a third, more conventionally, as a series of thumb-prints. Simple triangles were sometimes regarded as legs set apart, as two bamboo leaves joined together, or more commonly as mountains, ‘which are broad at the bottom and narrow at the top’.

Other designs were interpreted as a frog, the human figure with head, a narrow waist and legs, the head of a dao, an eye, scales of fish, clouds trailed across the sky, a river and the rainbow. A row of chevrons signified the marks on the body of a snake, and the interesting pattern of rows of very small pink triangles with a white filling represented teeth visible when the lips are parted in a smile. I was told that two of the designs represented feet, though no one could say why: ‘it was a name given by the gods’.

The very common diamond design, traditionally initiated by divine invention, is sometimes related to the markings on the cobra, and the eye-design may possibly have evolved from the ‘spectacles’ on its hood.

Some of the zigzag, chevron and diamond textile patterns are also woven in cane on shields and baskets.

In Tuensang also colours and designs have their symbolic meaning. The small red squares on a Sangtam cloth are said to represent the ferment used
in making rice-beer. Sharply pointed triangles are arrows or hornbills. Circles of cowries stitched on a cloth symbolize human heads, though for the Changs they may also stand for the moon. The red dog's hair, so often used, like the red goat's hair on dao-handles or sashes, represents the fire which destroys an enemy's village; trefoil and quatrefoil groups of cowries represent the stars, for raids are undertaken at night by the light of the moon and stars. The red colour of the shawls is explained as standing for the blood of enemies: blue stands for the sky, black is the night.

The broad zig-zag pattern illustrated on page 46 represents the winding path by which a head-hunter went to attack an enemy village. The use of certain kinds of cloth and ornament is often adjusted to a family's social position and achievements in the fields of hospitality and war. Only an important Apa Tani priest may wear the special shawl illustrated on page 109. Unmarried Adi girls wear one type

*Konyak sash in red, green, blue and yellow*
of belt, married women wear another. Among some of the Adi groups and the Idu Mishmis there are special clothes for shamans, both men and women, which are used only on ceremonial occasions. The Sherdukpen and Hrusso aristocracy alone can wear the Tibetan knobbed hat, and in the past there were restrictions on the use of silk among the Monpas.

The Wanchos allow only members of the Chiefs’ families to wear a certain type of blue bead on the arms and legs, and have a special design for their head-bands. The girls and women of the Konyak aristocracy alone may let their hair grow long and wear it in a stock. Certain types of bag may only be carried by members of a head-hunter’s family.

In Tuensang, where in the past a man’s social position depended so largely on his success in head-hunting and in giving Feasts of Merit, this dress-protocol has great importance, but we must be content with one example.

*Strap of a Wancho bag woven in red and black on white*
in making rice-beer. Sharply pointed triangles are arrows or hornbills. Circles of cowries stitched on a cloth symbolize human heads, though for the Changs they may also stand for the moon. The red dog’s hair, so often used, like the red goat’s hair on dao-handles or sashes, represents the fire which destroys an enemy’s village: trefoil and quatrefoil groups of cowries represent the stars, for raids are undertaken at night by the light of the moon and stars. The red colour of the shawls is explained as standing for the blood of enemies: blue stands for the sky, black is the night.

The broad zig-zag pattern illustrated on page 46 represents the winding path by which a head-hunter went to attack an enemy village.

The use of certain kinds of cloth and ornament is often adjusted to a family’s social position and achievements in the fields of hospitality and war. Only an important Apa Tani priest may wear the special shawl illustrated on page 109. Unmarried Adi girls wear one type
of belt, married women wear another. Among some of the Adi groups and the Idu Mishmis there are special clothes for shamans, both men and women, which are used only on ceremonial occasions. The Sherdukpen and Hrusso aristocracy alone can wear the Tibetan knobbled hat, and in the past there were restrictions on the use of silk among the Monpas.

The Wanchos allow only members of the Chiefs' families to wear a certain type of blue bead on the arms and legs, and have a special design for their head-bands. The girls and women of the Konyak aristocracy alone may let their hair grow long and wear it in a stock. Certain types of bag may only be carried by members of a head-hunter's family.

In Tuensang, where in the past a man's social position depended so largely on his success in head-hunting and in giving Feasts of Merit, this dress-protocol has great importance, but we must be content with one example.

Strap of a Wanche bag woven in red and black on white
The Yungti Feast of the northern Sangtams entitles the donor to wear a fine cloth, patterned alternately with broad red and blue-black stripes and a broad patch of small red rectangles across the centre. The Anits Feast, which includes the sacrifice of a mithun, confers additional privileges—a black cloth with narrow red stripes, embroidered in red with symbols of mithun horns may be worn and two feathers of the Great Indian Hornbill may be put in the ceremonial head-dress. The wife of the donor may wear a skirt striped in red and blue, with a narrow strip of white across the middle, and a fringe to her body-cloth. Girl members of the household may wear necklaces of cornelian beads, conch shells and crystal ear-rings. Wooden models of wagtails, symbols of dancers, may be put on the roof. Finally, after giving the Tchar-tsu Feast, the donor may use the *tsungkotepsu* cloth, which is purchased from the Aos. This is a dark blue cloth with five broad red bands close together at the top and bottom, six narrow red bands in the middle and a white median band painted with a pattern in black which includes circles representing human heads. Among the Aos this cloth could only be worn by a head-hunter and was forbidden to certain clans; mithun heads were also represented on it and this meant that the wearer had given a feast."

There has not been much external influence on the frontier fabrics, but there has been some. In western Kameng, for example, the influence of Bhutan and Tibet is evident in many of the products of the Monpa looms. All along the frontier Tibetan dress and ornaments may be seen, some of them imitated locally from trans-frontier models, others imported. Monpa painting is largely Tibetan in subject and technique. Nearer the plains the influence of the Assamese bazaars is no less evident, especially in the popularity of the Assamese *endī* silk. Along the Patkoi Range, Burmese influence may be observed in the use of the *lungi*, the colour and design of certain shawls and a style of hair-dressing once common among the Khamptis and still surviving among the Tangsa groups.

Aeroplanes are now familiar objects all over the frontier and they appear in some recent Kaman Mishmi textiles. In one example on page 62 (c) they are still, as it were, strangers, an obvious addition to the original design, but in (a) on the same page they have been fully integrated with it.

In recent years there has been some Lushai influence (there are a number
of Lushai officials in the area) and the Gallongs in particular have adopted a number of rather debased Lushai designs, some of which are hardly up to standard. With the coming of bazaar cloth, though this has now been to some extent controlled, there has been a regrettable tendency to copy the designs of table-cloths, bed-sheets, towels and even the cheap striped carpets commonly used to wrap up bedding on a journey.

But, in the main, the fabrics are still following their own attractive path, and may one day have the same kind of influence on India as a whole that Navajo art now has in modern America.

_Sherdukpen bag-designs in red, black and yellow_
Textile designs popular in the west of the Kameng Frontier Division
Textile bag popular among the Moupas and Sherdukpen of western Kameng. The prevailing colours are red, white, black, yellow with a little green.
Wancho bags: the upper bag is embroidered in black and red, the lower in red, green, yellow, orange, black and white.
Specimens of the many varied designs on the vertical strip bisecting the characteristic Adi galle or woman’s skirt. They are done in red, black, yellow, white, green and sometimes blue.
Designs on Idu Mishmi coats
Designs on Idu Mishmi coats
Horizontal border designs on black Idu Mishmi coats
Horizontal border designs on black Idu Mishmi coats
Kaman Mishmi designs woven and embroidered on bags, coats and shawls: (a) and (c) represent aeroplanes; (b), and perhaps (g), is a ‘foot-design’; (d), (g) and (i) represent the human figure; (e) is a frog; (f) is the ‘smiling teeth’ pattern; (h) is the eye design with the scales of fish on either side; (j) is a digging-stick or a flight of cranes; (k) is the rainbow design; (l) stands for mountains; (m) is variously interpreted as finger-prints, the markings on a snake, or patterns of clouds.
Designs on the Sherdukpen bogre-shawls and sometimes on Hrusso bags.
Wooden images of the Lord Buddha carved by a Khampti craftsman, now in the Kherem temple in the Lohit Division
Pilgrimage and Pantomime

All along the northern frontier are settlements of Buddhist tribesmen among the great snow-covered hills. There are the Monpas and Sherdukpons of western Kameng, the Khambas and Membas of remotest Subansiri and Siang, and the Membas, Zakhrings and Munyols to the extreme north and east of Lohit. Nearer at hand are the Khamptis and Singphos who have now settled in the foot-hills of Tirap and the riverain area of Tezu and Namsai.

To go on pilgrimage to Tawang, the great lamascrv of the west, lying in an angle between Bhutan and Tibet, is a wonderful experience. There is first the beauty of the countryside—the distant mountains white with snow, the nearer hills dressed in pine, oak and fir: the smell of the pines: the waterfalls and streams; the banks carpeted with wild strawberries: the great displays of rhododendrons and a score of other multi-coloured blossoms. The journey over the Se-La Pass from Sengedzong to Jang is unforgettable: haunted, mysterious, remote, the great Pass gives the authentic thrill—distance and height are forgotten in wonder. And as you descend, there are the flowers. If there is a Paradise in NEFA, this is it, this is it, this is it.

And then the people. Quiet, gentle, friendly, polite to a fault, industrious, good to animals, good to children. you see in them the influence of the compassionate Lord Buddha on the ordinary man. They may have little theology: they have a great deal of religion. They are artistic too, even if their art is sometimes restricted by poverty to the love and decoration of flowers. But they nearly all have pretty things—a coloured sash, a decorated hat, a silver sword, and little cups exquisitely painted of wood or china. They have a real
dignity: they are people who like to do things properly. They believe in protocol. Precedence, a certain gravity and order, courtesy, the ceremonial of daily life mean a lot to them.

The villages round Tawang and Dirang-Dzong are inhabited by Monpas: to the south are the Sherdukpons, and to the east three small groups—the Hrussos (Akas), Buguns (Khowas) and Dhammais (Mijis)—who are to some extent under their cultural influence. The Monpas have traditions associating them commercially with Tibet and Bhutan as well as with Kalimpong. They are good cultivators, working on irrigated terraces, use oak-leaf and animal manure and maintain herds of sheep and yaks. They keep large numbers of ponies and Tawang itself, the spiritual heart of the area, means a place ‘blessed with ponies’. They build substantial, well-planned houses, and have erected many gompas (temples), kakalings (village gates), mane-shrines and small buildings for prayer-wheels or the grindstones which are worked by mountain streams. The houses of private persons are sometimes decorated with carvings, and nearly all the public buildings are elaborately painted with conventional Buddhist designs and themes in the rather strong and gaudy colours fashionable in the area.

Monpa dress is of the typical Kalimpong type, but the women make a charming cloth, which is used as a shawl, sash or coat, of a maroon colours decorated with stylized figures of men and animals. Bhutanese influence is also evident, and a certain amount of cloth is imported from Bhutan and Tibet while brocades and other silks from Banaras are used for women’s caps and aprons and in hats and shirtings for men. They also make beautiful carpets.

Monpa women weave in wool, cotton and bark-fibre. They shear their sheep
three times a year and do the washing and combing as well as the spinning and weaving of the yarn themselves. Both Monpas and Sherdukpen extract fibre from the *Rhea nivea* and other plants, and obtain cotton yarn from the plains. They have their own dyes which give them black and various shades of red and yellow. Their main products are sashes, shawls, the *bugres* used as a sort of knapsack, a wide variety of bags, coats and tapes for tying round hats or securing boots.

The Sherdukpen are a small community of some twelve hundred individuals, organized under hereditary Rajas, with a sharply-defined class system. They are indefatigable traders and have many links with the Assam plains, migrating to the lower country every cold weather.

The Sherdukpen aristocrats have an elaborate ceremonial dress for special occasions, but most of the menfolk are content with a long coat or piece of silk or cotton which they wrap round themselves from shoulder to knee. Some wear the popular ornamental hat common in Kalimpong, but most have a cap of yak's hair decorated with a smart cockade. They tie round the waist a piece of the maroon Monpa cloth and carry decorated bags. Women also wear shawls and coats of silk or cotton, and both sexes use long trousers to keep off the dim-dam insects, whose irritating bite is one of the few disadvantages of this delightful region.

Besides weaving, the Sherdukpen and Monpas do fine work in cane and bamboo, making baskets and even bottles of cane (lined with rubber) for water and liquor. They do a little work in silver. Both tribes are in their way good carpenters and produce doors, windows, boxes and wooden saddles. But their best work in wood is the manufacture of bowls, cups, plates and
saucers, which are often beautifully done and are painted with a number of designs.

Another craft known to the Monpas is paper-making, for which they obtain the pulp from what is known locally as the *sukso* or ‘paper-tree’. There are only a few families of potters, but pottery is now being revived in the Cottage Industries Centre at Bomdila.

An important stimulus to artistic creation is found in the Sherdukpen, Khamba and Monpa dances or pantomimes. These require ornate dresses and ornaments and a large number of masks, some of which are so natural that they appear almost like real faces, while others represent birds and animals.
and yet others are of what Maraini calls the 'protective horror' type—ogres, men with twisted mouths, women with goitre—to drive away the spirits of evil.

At Tawang the most striking of the pantomimes is the Thutotdam, when dancers, in masks representing skulls and in costumes designed as skeletons, show how the soul after death is received in the other world. This, and many other dances are performed at the Torgyap Festival, which aims at driving away evil spirits and ensuring prosperity, good weather and every material and spiritual blessing. Some of the dances serve as a sort of rehearsal for the soul's entry into the land of the dead, and the masks represent the denizens of that world: by seeing them now it will be easier to recognize them later on.
The Torgyap mummers include warriors, clowns, gods and goddesses, birds and animals. The Chhiogyal Dance features the King and Queen of Death, each of whom wears a mask with three eyes. The Arpos Dance requires some twenty-five warriors in helmets carrying swords and shields, and shows how the ancestors of the Monpas conquered their enemies. The festival concludes with the Gallong-Chham in which ten or twelve dancers appear in splendid dress and headgear. There are similar dances at the important Loser Festival, which includes many forms of popular entertainment, and Yak, Lion and Peacock Dances among others. For all these appropriate masks have to be made.'

Perhaps the most important of the Sherdukpen pantomimes is the Yak Dance, in which a large dummy animal, the body of black cloth, the head of wood, is carried about by two men concealed within it. On its back sits the figure of a goddess with upraised arms. Three masked men representing an ancient hero named Apapek and his sons dance round the yak and tell the romantic story of its origin. Another popular dance is the Ajilama, which has two figures masked as demons with flowing hair who dance with a boy dressed as a Raja and two others dressed as Ranis.

A number of other dances are intended to teach certain moral lessons. The Dance of the Cow, for example, when a man masked like a cow chases Apapek and his two sons, teaches that if anyone kills a cow it will wait for him in the other world and torment his ghost when it arrives there. Similarly, in the Horse Dance a man with a finely carved and brightly painted horse’s head dances with the three mummers and attacks them. This teaches that if anyone

---

*Fish-pattern, usually painted in red on Monpa bowls*
Monpa paintings on wooden cups and bowls
beats or overloads his horse, his ghost will be troubled by a horse sent by the God of Death.

There are other dances in which mummers, wearing masks of tigers, pigs, dogs, monkeys and cats, teach lessons of compassion towards these animals. A vigorous Deer Dance performed by a man wearing a great deer’s head with spreading antlers reminds the audience to show mercy to deer. And the war against evil is symbolized in a long story, about two cannibalistic birds who preyed on mankind, which is mimed in the Jachunga-Chham Bird Dance: here the dancers appear with brilliantly coloured bird’s heads on their shoulders and gay cloth covering their bodies.

The masks are made of single blocks of wood hollowed out inside: holes are usually but not always made for eyes and mouths; most masks are painted, but the older ones are generally found dark and discoloured. The paints are brought from Tibet or the Assam plains. Women never wear the masks, which are used only by men and boys and, in Tawang, by the Lamas themselves.

A special mask for the Ajilama dance is made of a sort of felt and decorated with bits of coloured cloth and goat’s hair.

The Lamas of the Yang Sang Chu Valley in northern Siang have similar dances which they perform every year at the week-long Festival of Drubachuk to ensure prosperity, happiness and health. They too have

Decorated bamboo-holders for Jew’s-harps, made by Membas and Tangams in northern Siang. Average length: 2½” to 3½”
Deer, Bird and Pig dances, for which there are striking masks and gorgeous costumes. Other pantomimes represent kings and queens, demons, and clowns. The highly entertaining Arakacho-Chham originated, it is said, when the Lord Buddha saw how gloomy people were: he sent the clown Arakacho and his wife to cheer them up and they began to laugh. Similar dances are performed by the Membas of Gelling and elsewhere.

Between the main Buddhist area and the Bangnis of the east live three small tribes—the Akas (of which the most important section is called Hrusso), the Buguns and the Dhammais. The Dhammais, who are the northernmost of the three groups, intermarry with the Akas and both they and the Buguns resemble them in many ways. Neither Dhammais nor Buguns have much in the way of an artistic record. They have little or no weaving and buy their cloth from the Sherdukpen and Monpas or from the plains and even Kalimpong. Their only craft is in bamboo and cane, though the Buguns make a few masks in imitation of the Sherdukpen. They are not Buddhists but, like the Hrussos, have been influenced by the religion of the northern tribes, their neighbours.

It is only the Akas who have played some part in history. Under the leadership of Tagi Raja (whose picture in ceremonial dress will be found on page 7) they made many raids on the plains in the thirties of the last century and
A masked dancer from Shyo village (Tawang)
A Monpa girl of Dirang-Dzong carrying a water pot with its cane cover. She is wearing the very popular maroon-coloured coat with decorations in black, white, green and yellow.
it was not in fact until about 1888 that the tribe finally settled down to the life of peaceful cultivation that it now enjoys.

Before this happened there was a curious incident not unconnected with the subject of this book. In 1866 there was a proposal for a great Ethnological Congress in Calcutta for which typical examples of the races of India would be collected for scientific study. The officials in charge of the tribal areas, however, represented that this would be difficult, if not dangerous. The people might suffer in health from a change of climate and the Commissioner of Assam declared that twenty 'typical specimens' of the hill tribes of his Province could not be conveyed to Calcutta and back at any time of the year without casualties that the greatest enthusiast for anthropological research would shrink from encountering. He added: 'If specimens of the more independent tribes fell sick and died in Calcutta or on the journey, it might lead to inconvenient political complications.' It might even, we would have expected him to add, have involved inconvenient complications for the 'specimens' who died and for their families.

The proposal was therefore dropped for the time being, but in 1883 the organizers of another Calcutta Exhibition took the matter up again and decided to try to obtain specimens of agricultural implements, dress, ornaments and weapons from various tribes, among them the Akas, and to persuade some

A Hrussa (Aka) hat. The cockade with spikes projecting is a privileged decoration for a hunter who has killed a tiger.
individuals to come down to be modelled. The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang sent an official into the hills for this purpose. But as this emissary unwisely declared that he had come to take down to Calcutta a Raja and Rani with all their ornaments, for which he was ready to pay, he excited violent opposition. The Akas declared that, when they had given ornaments on former occasions, they had only been partly paid and that they were certainly not going to send a Raja and Rani as specimens for an Exhibition. They imprisoned the official, who died in captivity, and a punitive expedition had to be sent to pacify the country. From Lohit, however, a Mishmi Chief was persuaded actually to go to Calcutta but he died immediately on his return. It was decided that a 'sarkari' head must be buried with the body of this enterprising traveller to propitiate his ghost and one was immediately obtained in the foot-hills: a blockade and heavy fine was imposed as punishment on the offending villagers.

Today the Aka-Hrussos are a friendly industrious people, keen traders and good cultivators. The old style of dress and ornament, which presumably was to have been shown at the Calcutta Exhibition, was described by the missionary Hesselmeyer, who wrote in 1868 that the men wore a 'profusion of silk
cloth' round their bodies and as a head-dress 'a kind of ring-cap or crown made of cane, three inches high with one or two tall feathers in front. However the felt-caps of the Bhutias are as commonly met with, while those who claim the rank of Raja sport rings or crowns such as those alluded to, only made of thin wood instead of cane, and covered with embossed silver. Tagi Raja himself, however, never appears in the plains without his Tibetan hat of japanned wood of a bright yellow with a glass-knob on top, and a blue silk damask robe of state, of Chinese manufacture, but rather faded. All are fond of beads, and they wear them in profusion. Thus dressed up, they appear on state occasions only, the long sword at their side, and one or two minor weapons for cutting besides."

Much later, Kennedy, who accompanied the Aka Promenade as Medical Officer in 1913, says of the Hrusso woman's dress that it consists of 'a cloth wound round the body similar to that worn by a man, except that it reaches almost to the ankles and is often of Assamese silk. She wears a jacket of Assamese silk, rather longer than a man's jacket. Her hair is invariably tied at the back of the head. Round her head, a well-to-do woman wears a very

*Khampti dancer wearing traditional hat and coat; the shield is of closely-woven bamboo*
striking and pretty fillet of silver chain work. In her ears are large vase-shaped silver earrings, whilst innumerable necklaces of coloured beads encircle her neck. As a rule the women wear gaiters just like those worn by the men. It may not be out of place to mention that all their silver ornaments are made either in Assam or the neighbouring parts of Tawang."

Photographs taken at the time suggest that there has not been any very great change in the dress and appearance of the Hrussos during the last forty-five years. Their culture is a mixed one: they have borrowed the Kalimpong hat and the attractive maroon coat, decorated with human and animal designs, from the Monpas; they have copied the bogre sack and ornamental bag from the Sherdukpons; some of them wear a fibre knapsack similar to that used by the Bangnis; silk cloth from Assam is always popular. While the traditional style of headgear for the aristocracy is the Tibetan gilt hat worn long ago by Tagi Raja, ordinary people wear a tall hat of bamboo bark, decorated with a narrow band of hand-woven cloth and sometimes with feathers, leaves and flowers. With increasing prosperity the women are now adorning themselves with more and more silver ornaments of the Tibetan type, and are wearing more, not less, hand-woven cloth. In general appearance the Buguns closely resemble the Hrussos.

An industry which deserves encouragement is the very fine poker-work on slips of bamboo which are used as ‘swords’ in weaving and sometimes to
make sheaths for knives. Pipes, combs, bangles and ear-plugs are also made and decorated in the same way. They are illustrated on pages 96 to 97, and reveal some degree of technical achievement and a remarkable sense of pattern. This technique may be seen also in the attractive little bamboo holders for Jew’s harps made by the Membas and Tangams of northern Siang (page 75).

The Khamptis, who trace their origin from the Shans, probably migrated some two hundred years ago from Bor-Khampti, near the source of the Irrawady, to their present home in the foot-hills of Lohit and Tirap. Although geographically far removed from the other Buddhist tribes, they may be included in the same artistic province, for their culture is largely dominated by the Buddhist religion. They are of progressive and active temperament, speak a language of the Thai family, and number about five thousand.

Dalton described the appearance of the Khamptis as it was in the sixties of the last century. The dress of the men, he says, was simple and neat, for they commonly wore tight-fitting jackets of blue cotton cloth with white muslin turbans and round the waist a cotton or silk cloth of a chequered pattern, very much, apparently, as they do today. The upper classes wore the Burmese patso, a piece of parti-coloured silk. The women also gave ‘an impression of neatness’. They wore their hair drawn up from the back and sides in one massive roll which rose four or five inches above the head. ‘This was encircled by an embroidered band, the fringed and tasseled ends of which
hung down behind.' The lower garment, generally of dark-coloured cotton cloth, was folded over the breasts under the arms and reached to the feet, a fashion common to the Shans and Manipuris which was widely adopted by the Assamese women of the plains. The Khampti women also wore a coloured silk scarf round the waist and a long-sleeved jacket. Their chief ornaments at this time were 'cylindrically shaped pieces of bright amber inserted in the lobes of the ears and coral and other bead necklaces.'

Of the girl whose picture is reproduced on page 80, Dalton says that she is a very typical representation of a young Khampti woman. 'The elevation of the hair on the crown of the head indicates that she is married, and the style is recommended as dignified and becoming. Unmarried girls wear it in a roll low down on the occiput. They are exceedingly industrious. spin, weave, dye, and embroider, and can themselves make up all that they wear. The jacket is ordinarily of cotton dyed blue: the petticoat of the same material and round the waist a coloured silk scarf as a sash. But the dress of the lady in the illustration is of richer material—black velvet bodice and silk skirt. The ear ornaments are of amber.'

Khampti women have retained their skill in weaving and embroidery. They still make elaborately worked bags, as well as embroidered bands for the hair, finely woven belts and the plaid cloth of an almost tartan design commonly worn by men.

Some of the other arts, however, have lost their hold. Dalton describes how 'the priests in their hours of relaxation amuse themselves by carving in wood, bone or ivory, at which they are very expert. In making ivory handles of weapons they evince great skill, taste, and fecundity of invention, carving in high relief twisted snakes, dragons, and other monsters with a creditable unity and gracefulness of design.

'It is customary for the chiefs also to employ themselves in useful and ornamental arts. They work in gold. silver, and iron, forge their own weapons and make their wives' jewels. They also manufacture embossed shields of buffalo or rhinoceros hide, gilding and lacquering them with skill and taste.'

Wood-carving and ivory-work have persisted to this day but deserve more active encouragement. The Khamptis still make embossed shields and are fond of masks, mainly of the horror type, of coloured cloth stretched on
bamboo frames, for use in ceremonial dances, which illustrate the Temptation of the Lord Buddha and other themes. Their finest work, however, is in their carvings of images of the Lord Buddha. Some of these, hidden in small temples in out of the way villages, are of singular grace and beauty.

The Singphos are another small Buddhist tribe, living in the foot-hills of the Lohit and Tirap Divisions. Their art is expressed mainly in weaving. Dalton describes their appearance as it was a century ago:

'The men tie the hair in a large knot on the crown of the head, and wear a jacket of coloured cotton and chequered undergarment, of the same material or of silk, or the Burmese patso. The respectable chiefs assume the Shan or Burmese style of dress, and occasionally short smart jackets of China velvet, with gilt or amber buttons. They also wrap themselves in plaids of thick cotton much in the fashion of Scotch Highlanders.

'The women's dress consists of one piece of coloured cotton cloth, often in large broad horizontal bands of red and blue fastened round the waist, a jacket and a scarf. The married women wear their hair, which is abundant, in a large broad knot on the crown of the head, fastened with silver bodkins with chains and tassels. Maidens wear their hair gathered in a roll resting on the back of the neck and similarly secured. They are fond of a particular enamelled bead called deo-mani, and all wear as ornaments bright pieces of amber inserted in the holes in the lobe of the ear. The men tattoo their limbs slightly, and all married women are tattooed on both legs from the ankle to the knee in broad parallel bands.'

The Singphos today have a little wood-carving, and they weave well. Some of their border-designs are illustrated on page 41.
Hrusso (Aka) girls dancing
Sherdukpen masks, worn by dancers in the Yak Dance. They are of dark-coloured wood.

(Left) A Sherdukpen mask representing an old woman.  
(Right) A very old Sherdukpen mask from Rupa.
The Yak Dance of the Sherdukpen, and (below) a drawing of yaks by Ramimaza, a Monpa boy of eleven years
Mask, made of felt and the hair of mountain goats, used in the Ajilama dance of the Sherdukpen.
Monpa masks, made of wood and brightly coloured with bazaar paints, representing animals and human beings. The mask of the woman suffering from goitre, which is endemic in this area, is of particular interest.
Phoging and Moging, two good spirits who were sent to protect mankind against a cannibal demon, dancing in a Mankhota pantomime to celebrate their victory over evil.

(Opposite page) Masked dancers representing (above) man-eating birds in the Sherdukpen Jachunga-Chham Dance, and (below) benevolent bird-spirits destroying the snakes hostile to man in a dance at Mankhota.
Wooden masks used in the Deer-dance by various Buddhist groups. Top left is worn by the Sherdukpons, bottom right by the Monpas of Dirang-Dzong, and top right by the Lamas of the Yang Sang Chu Valley.
Khampti wood-carvings of temple musicians, painted brick-red, blue, green and yellow
Hrusso (Aka) combs, made of bamboo and decorated with poker-work designs. They are from 3" to 4" long.

Hrusso ear-plugs and bangle, made of bamboo and decorated with poker-work designs.

(Opposite page) Bamboo implements used by the Hrussos in weaving and decorated in poker-work with designs suitable for use in textiles. Length: 11½"
Konyak and Phom tobacco-tubes, made of bamboo and decorated with various designs by a sort of poker-work. Height varies from 2½" to 3½".
The Country of the Weavers

The vast tract of mountainous country which stretches east from Sepla in Kameng across the greater part of the Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Divisions, may be described as the Central Cultural Area of the North-East Frontier, or, not inaptly, as the Country of the Weavers. Naturally in so large a field, throughout which in the past there has been little inter-communication, there are many cultural divergences in detail, yet even such widely separated groups as the Bangnis of Kameng and the Kamans of Lohit resemble each other more than they do the Buddhist tribes or the Wanchos of Tirap.

Moreover, the tribal groups gradually shade off one into the other. The Bangnis of Kameng are clearly of the same stock as the Daflas of Subansiri and also, probably, as the Apa Tanis and the so-called Hill Miris. The tribes of north-east Subansiri have many relations with the Boris, Bokars, Pailibos, Shimongs and other northern tribes of Siang. The Padams are to be found from Damroh in Siang to Dambuk and Mekka in Lohit, and they themselves appear to be allied to the Idu Mishmis, whom they resemble to some extent in the way they do their hair and in certain aspects of their dress.

In religion, the people of Siang and Subansiri are united in a common devotion to a Sun-Moon God, and they all build elaborate altars with bamboos, shredding the ends to make tufts and tassels. The Bobo swinging game is common to both, under the same name. Their languages and dialects are closely allied.

One of the most striking characteristics of the entire central area is the absence of wood-carving. No masks are made: the Adis do not decorate their
Apa Tanis returning home through their fields
dormitories, which play so large a part in their lives, in any way: few of them practise even the simple poker-work on bamboo like the tribes on either side of them. Indeed, they have in the past done very little work in wood at all—wood, says Dunbar, ‘although their country is almost invisible for the trees, they will have none of’—and the chief defect of their otherwise attractive houses is that they seem to have no idea how to make a floor. You may
sometimes find rough doors and walls of undressed planks, but there is none of the elaborate wood-work of the other areas. The creative instinct of the people here is expressed almost entirely in weaving yarn, cane and bamboo.

The thickly-wooded and formidable mountains of Subansiri are peopled by tribes which, on the whole, have contributed little to the artistic life of the frontier. The Daflas were in the past a turbulent and unruly people, and the men’s method of dressing the hair, in a knot on the front of the forehead, gives them even today a proud and independent appearance. They, the Apa Tanis and the Hill Miris, live nowadays in close economic and cultural association: the Daflas grow the cotton which the Apa Tanis weave into cloth (indeed, at least in the past, it was a common practice for Apa Tani girls to stay in Dafla houses for a time to do their weaving for them), and both Daflas and Hill Miris buy this cloth whenever it is available. With an increase in population, however, and an easier access to the plains, many Daflas and Hill Miris have taken to using the inelegant and ugly black marlin, which has almost usurped the home-made cloth of dark-blue, orange or red which was formerly popular. The Daflas still, however, make a certain amount of cloth from bark-fibre.

Dafla men wear round the waist carefully woven bands of cane which are an inheritance from the days of war, when they were some sort of protection for the vital parts. In 1897, some of the Dafla Chiefs are reported as wearing ‘a cylinder of thin silver round their heads’, and they still have a cane-band round the legs just below the knee. Both sexes pierce the ears and
Apa Tani boys playing the game of Three Hearth-Stones or Lanko-bating
wear bamboo or brass ear-rings. On festivals the women wear a head-band of small metal buttons, and little bell-like ear-rings. Some still use the hookhe belt, a leather band to which are attached a number of brass bosses about three inches in diameter, which may compare with the Adi beyop.

The Apa Tanis on their wonderful plateau, where they have brought cultivation on irrigated fields to a high degree of efficiency, are still largely self-sufficient in cloth, which they weave in attractive pastel shades of yellow, green and red obtained from natural dyes. When H. M. Crowe visited them in 1890 he found them wearing 'dark blue cloths of the same shape and size as those worn by the Daflas, but striped yellow and red.' Furuer-Haimendorf speaks of their highly developed aesthetic sense, and says that 'they show excellent taste in the colour combinations and patterns of their textiles. Their clear strong dyes and their use of bright borders on white cloths, and their clever multi-coloured embroideries produce beautiful effects. The restraint in the choice of ornaments, which in both men and women are strictly limited to a few accepted types, seems also expressive of a developed aesthetic tradition which stands in great contrast to the Daflas' habit of loading themselves with a variety of miscellaneous and flashy finery.'

Formerly the Apa Tanis obtained some of their wool through the purchase of Bhutia blankets. They unravelled the yarn, dyed it in their own colours, and used it to make ceremonial shawls and coats and to embroider cotton cloth.¹

The Apa Tanis also are fond of a mixed silk-cotton cloth from the plains, which they wear under the rather coarse and heavy cotton fabrics woven at home, but in the past ordinary mill-cloth was regarded as unfashionable and was rarely worn by people of good families. Most of the beads and pins, and the brass ornaments of the women, however, are now obtained from the plains. It is curious that, as long ago as 1944, Furuer-Haimendorf found the large transparent or dark blue beads, probably of Tibetan or Chinese origin, going out of fashion, and small blue glass beads preferred.¹ Already by this time cheap bracelets of white metal had ousted the wrought-iron bracelets made by the Apa Tani blacksmiths.

The appearance of the Apa Tanis is not unlike that of the Daflas. Apa Tani men too dress the hair in a knot on the forehead and fasten it in place
with a pin. They wear the same kind of hat. The most distinctive feature of their attire is the famous Apa Tani ‘tail’, a special belt made of strands of spliced cane which fits round the body and hangs down behind. They colour it a bright red by boiling in rubia dye, and in the past were very proud of it. Dalton, who saw it in 1845, wrote of it as a ‘bushy tail’ but there is nothing bushy about it now. Other older writers suggested that it served the purpose of a portable cane chair.

Apa Tani women differ from the Daflas in coiling their hair on the top of the head, in the use of large nose-plugs in both nostrils, by elaborate tattoo marks on face and body, and by a more moderate use of ornaments, except for the very large rings in their ears.

The Apa Tanis are essentially agriculturalists, yet the strong vital life of their crowded villages has encouraged artistic production and good taste. The houses are pleasing to look at: their shrines are carefully built: the fabrics are charming: the cane-work is good. There is also an old tradition of pottery, and fifteen years ago Furer-Haimendorf found Apa Tani boys making attractive clay models of mithuns and other animals which, he says, ‘evinced a striking ability to concentrate on essentials and were truly pieces of art.’

Closely allied to the Apa Tanis and Daflas by ties of culture, religion and commerce are the so-called Hill Miris, a name given to a number of scattered clans and village groups. But this name is not their’s and they have in fact little sense of any tribal solidarity. But they resemble each other in the architecture of their houses, their appearance, their funerary ceremonies and eschatological traditions, their mythology and their language. None of these tribes has a communal dormitory. Their dress, as it was over a hundred years ago, and it has not greatly changed, has been well described by Dalton.
Cane hats of various styles. (a), (b) and (d) are common all over northern Siang and are used by the Boris, Bokars, Minyongs among others. (c) is Idu Mishmi. (e) is worn by Gallongs, particularly on ritual occasions. (f) is Hill Miri, but very similar hats are worn by the Daflas and Apa Tanis.
The costume of the ladies is elaborate and peculiar. A short petticoat extending from the loins to the knee is secured to a broad belt of leather, which is ornamented with brass bosses. Outside this they wear a singular crinoline of cane-work, about a foot in breadth. The upper garment consists of a band of plaited cane-work girdling the body close under the arms, and from this in front a fragment of cloth depends and covers the breasts. This is their travelling and working dress, but at other times they wrap themselves in a large cloth of *eri* silk of Assamese manufacture, doubled over the shoulders and pinned in front like a shawl.

They have bracelets of silver or copper, and anklets of finely plaited cane or bamboo. Their hair is adjusted with neatness, parted in the centre and hanging down their backs in two carefully plaited tails. In their ears they wear the most fantastic ornaments of silver which it would be difficult to describe. A simple spiral screw of this metal, winding snake-like round the extended lobe of the ear, is not uncommon amongst unmarried girls, but this is only an adjunct of the complicated ear ornaments worn by married ladies. They wear round their necks an enormous quantity of large turquoise-like beads made apparently of fine porcelain, and beads of agate, cornelian, and onyx, as well as ordinary glass beads of all colours.

The men gather the hair to the front, where it protrudes out from the forehead in a large knob secured by a bodkin. Round the head a band of small brass or copper knobs linked together is tightly bound. Chiefs wear ornaments in their ears of silver, shaped like a wine-glass, and quite as large. A cap of cane or bamboo-work with a peak behind is worn when travelling, and over this a piece cut out of a tiger or leopard skin, including the tail, which has a droll appearance, hanging down the backs. Their nether garment is a scarf between their legs fastened to a girdle of cane-work, and their upper robe, a cloth wrapped round the body and pinned so as to resemble the Abors' sleeveless coat. As a cloak and covering for their knapsack, they wear over the shoulders a half cape, made of the black fibres of a palm-tree, which at a distance looks like a bear-skin.}

The Hill Miris, like the Tagins who live to the north of them, have no tradition of weaving, and like them they seldom dance or sing. They buy almost all their cloth from the Assam plains or from Tibet, though they are
Apa Tani priest’s shawl worn on ceremonial occasions
Padam-Minyong skirts (galle) from Siang
now, as a result of official encouragement, taking to weaving with enthusiasm. They make, of course, their own fibre rain-coats, hats and plaited belts, gauntlets of bear-skin and all manner of things in cane and leather. Their craftsmanship is of high quality: the strands of cane or bamboo are fine and regular and the weaving delicate and even. It is, in fact, curious that a people so quick and expert with their hands in working the comparatively stiff and awkward cane should not have gone on to work in wool and cotton.

Throughout the northern area there has been for generations a steady flow of goods from Tibet, goods which are often durable and aesthetically satisfying. Furer-Haimendorf speaks of the articles of Tibetan origin popular among the Hill Miris of his day: ‘necklaces of large beads made from conch-shell, white stone, blue porcelain and yellow stone; discs of bell-metal strung into women’s belts; Tibetan swords and large tufts of yak’s hair that form part of the fantastic head-dresses.” Sacred bells are still greatly treasured, as is the warm Tibetan cloth, formerly very cheap, which is often dyed a brick-red, and is greatly in demand among the Tagins of the north, though its price has risen greatly.

The small tribe of Sulungs, which lives in scattered groups throughout eastern Kameng and Subansiri, produces good workers in iron and brass who make ornaments, pipes and imitation sacred bells, but their products lack the prestige value of the imports from Tibet.

The Abors of Siang, whom we now call Adis or hillmen, are made up of a number of allied tribal groups, of whom the most important are the Minyongs, Padams and Gallongs. In the far north are several small tribes of great human and cultural interest—the Bokars, Ramos, Pailibos, Boris, Tangams, Shimongs, Ashings and others. They live in rather big houses grouped in large villages, are comparatively prosperous and have a strong community sense. The social life of the Minyong and Padam villages centres round the men’s dormitory, where the Kebang or local assembly often meets, for the Adis are strongly democratic and are governed by popular councils. They are a lively people, with a strong zest for life which they express in an enthusiastic devotion to singing and dancing. They have an elaborate mythology and many Adis can trace their genealogies back to the beginning of the world.
Adi art is almost entirely confined to the decoration of their own persons, that is to say it is expressed in the weaving of fabrics, the making of hats and the forging of ornaments.

The Adis have an extraordinary interest in cloth: when you are on tour they love to feel the texture of your clothes and note their patterns. They are very sensitive to fashions and quickly adopt new ones, not always of the best. On the other hand, they are equally sensitive to guidance, for their natural taste, especially their taste in colour, is excellent. We are fortunate in having a number of accounts of their dress and ornaments, going back over a hundred years, of which it will be of interest to give a summary.

The first visitor to the Adi country was R. Wilcox in the eighteen-twenties, but he did not think of much of his hosts and has little to say of their appearance except that they wore very inadequate loin-cloths, and that all the wealthy men had cloaks of Tibetan woollens; 'indeed scarce a man is seen amongst them without some article of the manufacture of Tibet.' He also noted the large necklaces of blue beads which looked 'exactly like turquoises, and had the same hue of greenish blue,' though a close examination discovered in them minute bubbles, marking the agency of fire.' More observant was the intrepid Father Krick who was later to be murdered by the Mishmis high in the Lohit hills. He visited Membu,
Scenery on the Upper Siang River
some miles beyond Pasighat, in 1853, and describes the Adi dress as naturally 'not devoid of interest for a Frenchman.' He notes the loin-cloth, a long loose mantle open in front and sprinkled all over with designs of shining colours such as stars, a cuirass painted black and, according to him, but surely mistakenly, 'made of camel's hair', and a 'steel' helmet painted black with a tuft of bear's or goat's hair on top: 'two boar-tusks cross each other in front, like the two guns on the shako of an artilleryman.' This steel helmet, he says, was imported from Tibet, but on his arrival in Membu he himself was at once dressed up in a locally-made 'reed helmet of monstrous size, crowned with a red painted tuft of goat's hair' as a token that his visit was acceptable.

The women, he goes on to say, 'wear heavy yellow necklaces, iron or copper bracelets; but the most peculiar article of their ornamental apparel is their ear-rings—these are long spirals of wire about two inches thick, sufficiently heavy to tear the ears, and stretch them out of shape, so that the ornaments dangle on the shoulders. The men wear but one kind of necklace: it is composed of blue stones strung together, of unusually neat cut. This article is highly valued, and transmitted from father to son, as they pretend to have received it directly from God. Some stick into their ears silver or wooden bamboo tubes.'

Two years later Dalton visited the same village, and his account is fuller and more sympathetic.

'The dress of the men consists primarily of a loin-cloth made of the bark of the udal tree. It answers the double purpose of a carpet to sit upon and of a covering. It is tied round the loins, and hangs down behind in loose strips about fifteen inches long, like a white bushy tail. It serves also as a pillow by night. When fully dressed the modern Abor is an imposing figure. Coloured coats without sleeves, of their own manufacture, or of the manufacture of their neighbours, the Chulikattas (Idu Mishmis), are commonly worn. Some wear long Tibetan cloaks, and they weave a cloth from their own cotton with a long fleecy nap like that of a carpet, which they make into warm jackets. On state occasions they wear helmets of a very striking appearance. The foundation is a strong skull-cap of cane: it is adorned with pieces of bear skin, yak tails dyed red, boar's tusks, and, above all, the huge beak of the buceros.

Much of the cane and bamboo work is devoted to the making of shrines and images. These are two figures erected in a Minyong village to drive away the Wiyu (demon) of dysentery
The dress of the females as ordinarily seen consists of two cloths, blue and red in broad stripes. One round the loins forms a petticoat just reaching to the knees: it is retained in its position by a girdle of cane work: the other is folded round the bosom, but this is often dispensed with, and the exposure of the person above the waist is evidently considered no indecency. Their necks are profusely decorated with strings of beads reaching to the waist, and the lobes of the ears are, as usual with the hill races, enormously distended for decorative purposes. Round the ankles, so as to set off to the best advantage the fine swell of the bare leg, broad bands of very finely plaited cane-work are tightly laced, and some of the belles, most particular about their personal appearance, wear these anklets of a light blue tinge."

It will be interesting to compare with this earlier account, as well as with the fashions of the present day, Dunbar's description of Adi dress as it was at about the beginning of the First World War. The southern Minyongs and Pasis, he tells us, wore coats of a blue colour with designs in white, blue and red: another Minyong style was reddish brown with thin yellow bands. Some of the southern Gallongs wore rather longer coats made of whitish wool with a red tab on the collar: the northern Gallongs purchased white woollen coats from the Boris. The Bomdo-Janbos (Ashings) wore short dark-blue coats. There was, of course, no uniformity any more than there is today: a wide variety of colour and pattern was to be observed. Dunbar goes on to say that:

'The Minyong and southern Gallong cloths are usually red with blue lines running through the material. Amongst the Pasials yellow and black, white and red or red and green are not infrequent combinations of colour. But in modern local products of the Bylek Pasi-Minyong group it is unsafe to consider any variation from the usages of other localities as indigenous and true Abor. since the influence of the plains is very marked and is growing stronger. The coloured cottons used in weaving by these southern communities are frequently bought from Marwari traders. These coloured cotton cloths are woven in narrow strips about a foot wide. Two pieces of similar design are sewn together so as to bring the pattern into horizontal lines when worn as a skirt, or upper garment. The usual length for a skirt of two of these pieces is about 3' 6" by 2'. The cloths are further ornamented by a band

Gallong girls wearing the traditional skirt of white hand-woven cloth decorated with a geometric pattern in black

116
An Adi girl of northern Siang wearing the beyop
of needle-work, sewn across the cloths and at right angles to the woven pattern. In a rather striking yellow and black cloth seen in Balek the band of needle-work was an inch broad in a diamond design of red, black and white, making a good imitation of the markings on a snake’s skin, although of course differing entirely in colour from any known reptile, save possibly a chameleon on a tartan rug.

The plain white cloths are still made of local cotton even in Balek. They are ornamented with a band of really artistic needle-work in various colours, generally red and blue, along the short edges. These cloths are used as shawls, or for carrying children, or sometimes grain, but the ordinary upper garment is a second coloured cloth wound round the body so as to cover the breasts. Loin-cloths for the men are made either of material similar to the plain white cloth, or of vegetable fibre.

Today the Adi weavers are producing a great variety of fabrics, mostly of pure cotton yarn, but sometimes of wool and cotton mixed, and in the far north of goat’s hair. The most popular Minyong and Padam skirt is a lovely red with a number of horizontal yellow stripes and a vertical band of an elaborate and frequently varied pattern of lines, dots and triangles in orange, black and green. Also popular is a yellow shawl with a few very thin green and red stripes and a similar vertical band of triangles in pink, green and white. But there are a great many other styles: colours vary and the placing of the stripes and bands creates much diversity of fashion.

The most common coat for men is black, probably in imitation of the Idu Mishmi coat, with simple designs of lines and triangles, but red and green coats are also made. Beyond Damroh, there are white coats bordered in black and with a small band of red and black triangles. In the north the Ashings, Boris, Bokars, Pailibos, Ramos and other isolated groups wear a black or dark-blue woollen coat and a slip of cloth made of coarse wool or goat’s hair, through which the head is passed and which hangs down to the knees before and behind. The women have a short skirt, usually dark red or white in colour, a dark blue jacket and a dark blue, red or white cloak which is hung over the shoulders by a string passed across the head: it may be decorated with cowries and little bunches of bear’s teeth. The cloth made by the northern weavers is warm, well adapted to the hard and hostile climate: it
can stand up to the rain: its dark colours do not show the dirt.

The Gallongs, among whom the art of weaving had greatly declined and is only now being revived, have a beautiful traditional skirt - white with a black geometrical design - and are also experimenting in many different arrangements of coloured stripes and bands, all horizontal.

The Miris round Pasighat, who are an offshoot of the Minyongs, do some excellent weaving with cotton of a very fine count: their cloth is often of a red, yellow, or green plaid design with striking triangles and chevrons on broad vertical bands, which seem to be a development of the common Minyong pattern.

The best Adi cane-work is seen in the making of a variety of hats. The typical Adi hat was formerly a sort of crash helmet for use in war and this has meant that on the whole it is rather too heavy for the days of peace. Experiments are now being made to make the hat lighter while preserving its general shape. 'When divested of its trappings,' says Dunbar, 'it can best be described as an almost brimless and distinctly oval bowler. Made of successive rings of thin cane it is built up and bound together with strips of fine cane woven vertically and so closely as to entirely cover the ring foundation. The basketry is so fine that some of the helmets will hold water, and they are all so strongly made as to be sword-proof.'

At ordinary times, the hats are worn as they are, but for dances and special occasions, they are still decorated very much in the manner described by Krick and Dalton long ago. They are often magnificent with the tusks of boars, the feathers and beaks of the Great Indian Hornbill, serow horns, tufts
of goat's hair dyed red and stiff palm-fibres coloured black. In his ceremonial hat the Adi expresses his sense of colour and design.

In Dunbar's day, the villages Komsing and Riu, on the banks of the Siang and Kaking were 'centres of a brisk pottery trade'. The Gallong women worked in a grey and the Minyongs in a red clay, kneading and beating it out with stone and stick: even today none of the frontier potters know the use of the wheel.

There was also at that time in Komsing a flourishing blacksmith industry which produced small knives, daos, swords, spears and arrow-heads, metal pipes, charms, brass bracelets, girdle discs and beyop plates. The finest sword and bracelet work, however, was done in villages along the Siyom and the middle reaches of the Siang river, but the greatly treasured bronze bowls (dankis) and the sacred bells have always been imported from Tibet. 'The best examples of bracelet work,' says Dunbar, 'are very deeply and clearly cut: the design distantly resembles arabesque, but is far more like some of the geometric patterns of Aurignacian age found in the Hautes-Pyrenees. Raw metal is not worked, but in making castings with wax and clay moulds and in working up iron rods, obtained from Assam, into weapons, the local smiths show some skill.' The custom was that anyone who wanted, for example, a pipe or charm took his own metal and even his own wax to the smith and had the thing made according to his own design.

The most interesting product of the Adi metal-workers is the beyop disc. This 'singular ornament' was first described by Dalton:

'All females with pretensions to youth wear suspended in front from a string round the loins a row of from three to a dozen shell-shaped embossed plates of bell-metal from about six to three inches in diameter. the largest in the middle, the others gradually diminishing in size as they approach the hips. These plates rattle and chink as they move, like prisoners' chains. Very young girls, except for warmth, wear nothing but these appendages, but the smallest of the sex is never seen without them. and even adult females are often seen with no other covering.'

Karko was formerly well known for its manufacture of these ornaments, which were made by melting the metal and making it into a long string or wire which was coiled round into a flat disc. The molten metal was then
poured over it and the surface finished. Dunbar suggests that the Wheel of Life design on the beyops is the same as that commonly found on the danki bowls imported from Tibet.

The beyop originated, according to one tradition, when a Wiyu-spirit fell in love with a human girl: every time he visited her, he gave her a bronze disc, and she made a girdle, which she wore until her child was born. This is why the beyop-girdle is still discarded when a woman has her first child. Another story describes how a naked girl, troubled by the importunities of spirits, men and animals, persuaded Ningnu-Botte to make a beyop for her protection. The Shimongs of the left bank of the Upper Siang say that at the very beginning of the world, the Sun and Moon, who were then sisters, both wore galle-skirts of flaming red and yellow. Their enemy, the Frog, stole and burnt them and the sisters hid themselves for shame. The whole world was dark until the craftsman Bisi-Ada made two beyops to cover their nakedness, whereon the Sun came into the sky and it was day. But the Moon was still shy, even with her disc, and would only appear at night.

When girls are very young they only wear one or two of these discs, but gradually increase the number. Married women who have had children often wear waist-bands studded with brass bosses of no artistic merit. The
beyop-girdles are nowadays covered by a skirt, but the great majority of Adi girls still wear them.

The Mishmis of Lohit are divided into three main sections—the Idus or Chulikattas (as the plains people call them on account of their cropped hair), the Taraons (Digaru) who wear their hair long and the Kamans (Mijus) who are distinguished from the Taraons only by difference of dialect. As in the rest of the central cultural area, Mishmi art is entirely confined to weaving and work in cane and bamboo. The weaving, however, is exceptionally fine: the best shawls made by the Taraon and Kaman women are of exquisite quality and they also make bags, coats, belts and loin-cloths. The Idus too are excellent weavers and one of their best products is the black war-coat ornamented with a white pattern which is illustrated on page 129. This is woven with a mixture of cotton, bark-fibre and human hair and is said to be strong enough to turn aside a hostile arrow. The ordinary black coats, with an amazing variety of designs (illustrated on pages 58 to 61), find a ready market among the Adis of Siang, especially in the north-eastern valleys, to which large quantities are exported. The Idus also make attractive bags. The dress of the women is less colourful, as they prefer black blouses and skirts, except when they purchase gaudy pieces of cloth from the bazaar. Though the Idu men have retained their own home-woven dress, the majority of the women, even those in the remote Dibang Valley have adopted the black markiin which casts so dark a shadow on the looms of the north-east frontier.

The first person to describe Mishmi dress was Wilcox who in 1832 speaks of a Taraon jacket 'fashioned with little art', which was made of a 'straight
Women's skirts (galle) from northern Siang
Kaman Mishmi textiles:
(above) decorated bags
(below) a woman's blouse
piece of blue and red striped cloth, doubled in the middle, the two sides sewn together like a sack, leaving space in the exit of the arm at the top, while a slit in the middle formed in the weaving admitted in like manner the passage of the head. The Taraon men also wore a broad belt with plates of brass in front and on the back. The Chiefs wore long cloaks of Tibetan wool and handsome jackets dyed red, striped with many colours and sometimes ornamented with white spots. Wilcox notes, what would be true even today, that the head-dress was 'not remarkable' but was normally simply a 'hemispherically shaped cap of split cane.' It is curious that at this time the wives of Chiefs wore 'petticoats' bought from the plains, for today most of the women make their own dress. The Kaman or Taraon women near the Brahmakund, however, were 'very scantily clothed. A coarse thick petticoat of blue cotton, woven by themselves, is their common dress; it reaches to the knee, and has merely a slit in it to admit the head through.' The Taraon women still wear the plate of silver 'as thin as paper' across the forehead, which is most becoming, and the large cylinders of thin plate silver which Wilcox noticed in their ears.

Rowlatt's report of 1845 does not greatly add to this account, though he mentions an oval-shaped basket covered with the long fibres of the sinwa tree and ornamented with the tail of a Lama cow, and says that the women wore a bodice which barely served to cover the breasts and a skirt that reached from the waist as far as the knee. Rowlatt adds that the clothes worn by the Mishmis were made by themselves and consisted of cotton which was cultivated by them for the purpose and a few woollen articles made from the fleece of the Lama sheep. In appearance they seemed to possess great durability both as to colour and material. 'In all other branches of manufacture,' he says, 'the people seem to be very deficient and with the exception of spear-heads and a few articles of this description are capable of producing no kind of utensils that might prove of use to them in ordinary life.' Many of their cooking vessels, he adds, were made of stone.

The most elaborate account of Mishmi dress is by Dalton who describes the fashions of the Taraons as follows:

'The dress of a Mishmi is, first, a strip of cloth bound round the loins and passing between the legs and fastened in front: a coat without sleeves, like
a herald's tabard, reaching from the neck to the knee—this is made of one piece of blue and red or brown striped cloth doubled in the middle, the two sides sewn together like a sack, leaving space for the exit of the arms, and a slit in the middle, formed in the weaving, for the passage of the head;—two pouches covered with fur attached to leather shoulderbelts, with large brass plates before and behind, like cymbals; a knapsack ingeniously contrived to fit the back, covered with the long black fibres of the great sago palm of these hills, and further decorated with the tail of a Tibetan cow; a long straight Tibetan sword; several knives and daggers, and a very neat light spear.
of well-tempered, finely wrought iron attached to a long thin polished shaft.

The head-dress is sometimes a fur cap, sometimes a wicker helmet.

The women wear a coloured cloth fastened loosely round the waist, which reaches to the knees, and a very scanty bodice which supports without entirely covering the breasts. They wear a profusion of beads, not only of common glass but of cornelian agate and some of porcelain. On their heads they wear a bandeau of a very thin silver plate, broad over the forehead and tapering to about half an inch in breadth over the ears, thence continued round the back of the head by a chain of small shells.

Both men and women wear the hair long, turned up all round and gathered in a knot on the brow secured by a bodkin. They are thus distinguished from their neighbours, the Chulikattas or crop-haired Mishmis.

'Small girls go naked about the villages, but wear a little billet of wood suspended from a string round the loins, which hangs in front and serves as a sort of covering, especially when they are seated in their favourite position in the porch on the edge of the raised floor of the house. They look as if they were ticketted for sale.'

Dalton also gives the following account of the Idus:—

'They were probably the first people on this side of the Himalayas to discover the valuable properties of the *Rhea nivica*, and many others of the nettle tribe: with the fibre of one of these nettles they weave a cloth so strong and stiff that, made into jackets, it is used by themselves and by the Abors as a sort of armour. They supply themselves and the Abors with clothing, and their textile fabrics of all kinds always sold well at the Saikwah market. It
was very interesting to watch the barter that took place there between these suspicious, excitable savages and the cool, wily traders of the plains.

'The costume, with the exception of the head-dress, is very similar to that of the Tains, but the jackets worn by the women are larger and are sometimes tastefully embroidered. This garment is generally worn open, exposing an ample bust heaving under the ponderous weight of agate and glass beads. Their favourite weapons are straight Tibetan swords, daggers, bows and cross-bows, and they are the only tribe who always carry poisoned arrows. They have neatly-made oblong shields of buffalo hide.'

Much later G. W. Beresford makes the point that while the Idus wore a kind of cane-helmet, most of the Taraons wore caps made from the skins of martens and hill foxes. He also mentions a species of waistcoat or sleeveless jacket made from the skin of the takin, which is of a reddish brown colour.

The ceremonial dress of the Idu Mishmi priests has always been more elaborate and a special apron illustrated on page 131, is worn, as well as decorative belts and necklaces. J. F. Needham describes the 'fantastic articles of dress' used at the end of the last century and in particular a huge priestly necklace 'consisting of tiger, pig and monkey’s teeth and claws, together with a headband of plaited cane, studded with cowries and with coloured feathers woven at the sides' which he had found in an Idu village. Something of the kind is still worn, and beautiful fans are made from bird’s feathers for ritual use.

On the whole, the Taraons and Kamans prefer a coloured cloth, especially of maroon, which they now-a-days elaborate by inserting a silver thread. They also like a little mixture of yellows, reds and greens. The Idus, on the other hand, as I have said, prefer to weave in black with patterns done either in white or yellow. It is curious that the unusually good taste and obviously developed aesthetic sense of the Mishmis should not have led them to do any serious carving in wood or work in pottery, and has not inspired them to any but the most elementary dance and song.

But in weaving they have made great advances and the art is vigorously alive today. Photographs taken by Dr Simpson nearly a hundred years ago, and reproduced by Dalton in the great book from which I have frequently quoted, as well as the reports of early visitors to the Mishmi country, suggest that there has been a remarkable elaboration of designs during the past cen-
tury. This does not seem to have been caused by external influence, but to be due rather to the natural genius of the people which is still evolving new and intricate variations of colour and pattern.

Taraon (Digaru) Mishmi girl beating a gong during a dance
Carvings in the Chief's house at Sangnyu as described at page 141. They have suffered some damage since Dr Hutton first saw them in 1923.
Some of the finest wood-carving in the entire frontier area is to be found among the Wanchos, Konyaks and Phoms, tribes living close to the Burma border who until recently were engaged in constant inter-village feuds.

This wood-carving may be considered under three main heads—connected respectively with head-hunting, the decoration of the morungs or men’s communal houses, and the funerary images erected for warriors and other important persons.

In the past head-hunting was of fundamental cultural and religious importance and though it has now almost entirely stopped, substitutes have been devised and even so long ago as the second decade of this century the Angamis, for example, as Hutton notes, used to assume the distinctive marks of a successful warrior on the fictitious grounds of having thrust a spear into a corpse or even of having gone as a porter on an expedition at which an enemy was killed. Hutton also records that at this period Semas, Rengmas and Lhotas used to ‘cut off the tail, or some of the hair of the tail, of a neighbour’s mithun or cow, and to follow up this feat of chastened valour with the genna (taboo) performed for the taking of a head.’ The Wanchos still have the custom of preparing a wooden dummy, which is hidden in the fields of some hereditary enemy: the young men hunt and ‘kill’ it, and after they have returned in triumph, they can be tattooed as an essential preliminary to marriage. Sometimes, it is considered sufficient to take a small quantity of grass or shrubs from an enemy’s field. The grass here clearly symbolizing the victim’s hair.
With the passing of actual head-hunting, therefore, it is not inevitable that this art will disappear. But it is bound to be weakened, for head-hunting was the inspiration, not only of the wooden or brass heads worn by warriors, but also of carvings on drinking-mugs and pipes, of head-hunting scenes on the pillars of morungs, and of human figures to be attached to a basket or kept as a trophy in the house. Special designs were also woven on shawls or bags, and among the Wancho specimens shown here are some of bags (page 55) with conventional human figures which recall triumphs in war.

In carvings of the human figure, chief attention is paid to the head, a natural result of the traditional belief in its importance, which is usually out of all proportion to the rest of the body. Little care is given to the back, and the small heads are usually flat behind, probably to allow them to rest comfortably on the wearer’s chest.

The features are carved in low relief and are fairly realistic. Noses are usually broad, though on the tobacco pipes they are sharp and protruding;

![Phom warrior with special cowrie-belt and other decorations typical of his own and neighbouring tribes](image)
nostrils are only rarely made. The mouth is shown as a slit, with vertical ridges for teeth where the lips should be; the tongue is never seen. The eyes may be simply small circles with dots or beads serving as pupils, but more often they are very large ovals, and the eyebrows are sometimes painted on. The ears are either conventional rectangles, or are carefully shaped and hollowed out, with holes for ornaments or tufts of hair and for the string by which the head or figure is suspended.

The tops of the heads are rounded and usually have some indication of the hair-cut. Tattoo marks are carefully represented, and most figures are dressed up with little bits of cloth and even ornaments, and with tufts of hair or beads in the ears. The mortuary figures are completely equipped with hats, baskets and daos.

Although a few of the faces, especially those from Tirap (where I have seen them both jovial and savage in expression), are vigorously alive, the carving of the majority is static and restrained: some of them resemble death-masks.
in the placidity of their features. They are generally coloured black or red, and the older models acquire a fine polish in the course of time.

A second important source of inspiration is the need of decorating the morungs for purposes of prestige and magic. The morung varies in function from tribe to tribe. Among some of the Changs, Yimchungers and Sangtams, for example, it is not used for residential purposes, but mainly to house the great log-drum or xylophone which is beaten to summon to war, festival, for a dirge and, in former days, to display the skulls of enemies. The Semas do not build morungs at all. On the other hand, for the Phoms, Konyaks, Wanchos and Noctes, the morung is the centre of male social life, and all the young warriors sleep there at night. It is usually built on the edge of a steep slope with a platform commanding a view of one of the approaches to the village; at the other end there is often an open space which serves as a dancing-ground or meeting-place. On a menhir standing before the main morung of a village (for there are generally more than one), the heads of victims used to be exposed.

There is no single pattern of architecture for these buildings, but they are nearly always large and imposing with a great porch, above which rises a sloping roof; there is usually a large open hall and an inner room with a number of small cubicles where the young men sleep. But there is so much variety that it is impossible to generalize. Some morungs are like ordinary houses, with no open porch: some only have one room: others have several. Where the Chief’s house is large and important, the morungs tend to be rather smaller, though the Chief’s own morung is more imposing than the rest.
All, however, agree in providing a centre and inspiration for wood-carving. The main pillars of the roof and the great horizontal beam running across the front of the building are carved with a fantastic variety of designs, and there may be other carvings of mithun heads and hornbill tails on the xylophones. A Konyak once told me that they carved tigers in the morungs so that the boys would be ferocious, elephants to make them strong and hornbills to make them fertile.

Common among the carvings are warriors with their guns, tigers (sometimes two-headed or with tusks or horns), elephants, monkeys, dogs, dancing couples, tigers (or frogs) eating the moon, and warriors. As a general rule, hornbill designs may only be made in the Chief’s morungs.

At Sakchi, a Phom village, I saw in 1954 a carving of two dogs chasing a tiger; at Pongu there was a tall warrior leading a boy by the hand (page 153) —I was told that this commemorated an incident when a boy was captured and, after being led through the village, decapitated. At Youngphong there was, on the central pillar, the carving of a warrior eight feet tall, with his characteristic tattoo on the chest, fully decorated with armlets, leglets, a monkey’s head round his neck, and boar’s tusks; approaching him from above was a splendid tiger (page 153).

At Chi, in one morung there was a carving of a woman doing another’s hair, which was at least 35 years old, for Hutton saw it in 1923.
In the Konyak morungs there are a number of erotic motifs: representations of men and women and even of dogs engaged in intercourse: at Chi there was a fine carving of a man and woman lying together, with the man’s hand on the woman’s breast; many carvings of warriors show them in a state of virility—at Yatung I saw a representation of a tiger with open mouth approach a man who, with legs apart, was pointing his organ at the animal as if it was a gun: another hunter fired a gun over his head, and a monkey was pulling the tiger’s tail. Many carvings are concerned with some sort of embrace: two tigers embrace with their paws: dancing couples place their hands on each other’s thighs.

The morung carvings are usually in high, sometimes in very high, relief and, since they are carved on great pillars and beams, are large, even life-size. Sometimes human figures are prepared separately and attached to the pillars, but more often such figures are carved, almost completely in the round, on the actual wood of the beam or pillar. These people are accustomed to do things on a large scale and to work in massive pieces of wood which they cut away ruthlessly to achieve the desired shape.

Throughout the Wancho and Nocte areas of Tirap, the morungs are, on the whole, overshadowed by the enormous houses of the Chiefs. By contrast the morungs are often small, dark and dirty. But this is not always so: at Mintong, for example, there is a remarkable ladder topped by a two-headed figure in a roomy building (page 154) and a carving of a snake curled round a head. At Lonkao there is a magnificent morung, and its carvings include monkeys hanging from a branch by their paws.

A similar emphasis is also found in many Konyak villages, especially of the Thendu group, and Hutton describes a magnificent piece of carving he saw in the Chief’s house at Sangnyu in 1923: it is still standing, though
somewhat damaged and is illustrated on page 134. This was done on a single piece of wood about 20 feet long and 12 feet high, and must have been at least 6 feet thick. 'The thickness,' says Hutton, 'was cut away, leaving all sorts of carving in relief, some in high relief, other parts standing on projecting ledges and cut entirely out away from the background, but all done in the same piece of wood.

'There were two big tigers, one broken, the other very well and realistically carved, a couple of warriors, and a mother suckling her child, but broken. A man and a woman performing the sexual act: a cock crowing, excellently carved: a big snake: a double rainbow: huluks, very natural: human heads: other less striking things, and a joppa (basket) standing absolutely clear of the main block and carved completely and hollowed inside as a receptacle for odds and ends with a detached lid. There was also a long gadi (throne), the size of a bed, with a foot-rest along one side, like a shelf, all carved in one piece of wood, on which the Ang (Chief) alone may sit, and two smaller thrones of the same pattern but portable—also in one piece of wood each. The Ang's particular sitting-place was carved with the pattern of a pair of feet like the Manipur stones at Kohima and elsewhere. All this carving was ascribed to a more or less mythical ancestor and must be excessively old, though all but one of the 'thrones' are as good as the day they were made.'

A third type of sculpture is associated with funerary procedures. Some of the tribes of this region bury their dead; others place the corpse in a sort of coffin and expose it on a platform outside the village; others, like the
Khienmungans, practise a form of desiccation. But whatever the method of disposal, great attention is paid to the tomb which, as I have noted earlier, is loaded with the possessions of the deceased and becomes, in fact, a desirable little museum. Formerly the Angams made wooden effigies for their dead, and the Wanchos, Konyaks and Phoms still do so.

Sometimes these images, which are roughly carved from single bits of wood, but always carefully dressed up and given their appropriate tattoo marks, are made in pairs and placed in front of the tomb; sometimes several figures, forming a family group, are set up in a small shed: if the dead man was a famous warrior, there may be a row of small figures beside his own more imposing image to suggest the number of heads he has taken, and this may also be signified by a row of heads carved on a single piece of wood. Where the images are made in pairs, the figure on the left represents the dead man himself, that on the right is his shadow, 'for the shadow goes with a man'.

Some of these effigies are provided with horns on either side of the head, and Hutton says that it was the practice for the skull to be placed between them 'in order that the soul might pass into the wooden figure'. the skull being removed later and given its final resting-place either in a special pit lined with stones or in a sand-stone urn carved with figures of men and animals (page 147).

Hutton says that these figures were 'definitely stated to be provided for the habitation of the soul of the deceased whom they represented'; and although I was on many occasions told that the images were simply intended to please and flatter the ghost, there are indications that there is some association between the figures and the soul, and after the proper rites have been performed, the image ceases to be 'live' and can be thrown away, allowed to fall to the ground and decay or be collected in a pile beneath a tree (above).
Once the images have lost their vitality, they are no longer taboo, and in a Konyak village a man actually offered to be photographed standing with his father’s image, which he picked up from a corner where it had been thrown (photograph along side).

This mortuary art is generally crude, as if the artist was looking over his shoulder for fear of the ghost and was in a hurry to finish his work and get away. Only occasionally is there any attempt to carve the entire figure: generally a post roughly fashioned into a head at one end is considered adequate.

In some cases, the images are not made of wood, but of basket-work, and placed in an open-thatch hut. These images have a peculiar horror: you can see through them: the bamboos look like ribs and bones: they are genuine ghosts.

All over the frontier the beak and feathers of the Great Indian Hornbill (*Dichoceros Bicornis*) is regarded with reverence for its magical powers or as a symbol of courage and splendour. Among most of the Nagas the wearing of a hornbill feather is the prerogative of a man who has taken a head, one feather being allowed for each head taken: it is strictly taboo for anyone else to wear it, though an Ao woman used to be allowed to wear one such feather on special occasions for every mithun sacrificed by her husband: in the traditions of this tribe the hornbill is the king of the birds. Representations of hornbill feathers are normally only permitted in the houses or morungs of the Chiefs. Similarly, the great seats or thrones used by the Konyak Chiefs are often carved with hornbill beaks and
the coffin of a member of a Chief's family, as shown on page 147, is carved with a hornbill beak at the end.

The hornbill is also venerated in Siang, where Gallongs wear the beak in a special hat used for ceremonial dances (page 29). The beaks are also strung up outside a house to keep away evil spirits. Hutton points out how appropriate this bird is for the honour given it. 'It is the largest bird in the country, of magnificent appearance, and makes a great impression soaring slowly overhead with very loudly whirling wings, audible at a distance and height at which the bird itself is barely visible.'

While the hornbill is the symbol of valour, the mithun or buffalo is the symbol of wealth, and some representation of these great animals or their horns appears as a decorative motif in many different forms. In the Phom country immense bamboo horns, fifty feet or more in length, are erected on a hillside in honour of a dead warrior who had taken many heads. A similar representation of mithun horns is sometimes placed above the shrine housing an effigy for the dead or on the xylophones. The field-huts of prosperous farmers are likewise built in a pattern which is suggestive of either buffalo or mithun horns, which here are probably fertility symbols. In 1923 Hutton observed a buffalo's head carved on the side of an ant-hill outside Mongnyu, a Phom village. J. P. Mills was the first to point out the relation between the 'ostrich feather' tattoo pattern of the Changs and the conventional representation of a buffalo's head, the horns having disappeared in the tattoo pattern or run over on the shoulders, leaving the curled ears and the prolonged nose.

Carvings of mithun heads are sometimes realistic but more frequently conventionalized, with the ears shown as squares and with greatly exaggerated horns.

Elsewhere, the mithun is regarded with equal respect and is so important to the economic life of the tribes as to be a form of currency, but carvings are not made. although the heads and horns of every mithun sacrificed or given in a feast are carefully preserved in the owner's house. The Monpas and Sherdukpons keep mithuns, but prefer to carve the head of the yak, which is used in the pantomimes that feature it.

With the passing of head-hunting, this 'warrior's art' is bound to change and, unless it is guided and encouraged, may disappear. But the natural gift
for carving the human figure can surely be diverted to the creation of toys and ornaments: the pacific virtues might be honoured by another kind of grave-effigy: and the pillars of morungs and Chief's houses can still be decorated—provided the right psychological climate is created by local officials and patronage is extended to the craftsmen by ready and generous purchase of their best products.

Carving on a pillar in a Konyak morung at Chi
Wancho grave-effigies, the faces heavily tattooed with the ‘spectacle’ design
After a dead body has decomposed, the Konyak aristocratic families remove the skull and place it in a stone urn carved with appropriate symbols.
A Konyak grave-effigy
A Chang tomb, its pillars decorated with tattoo designs and hung with the property of the deceased.
Konyak carvings in wood whitened with clay. The ornaments are of dog's hair dyed red and yellow. Height of head below is 7"
Wancho wood-carving. The height of the seated figure is 6½"
Wooden figure of a warrior from Tirap
Right: Phom morung-carving of warrior; a tiger approaches from above.

Left: Carving on a pillar in the morung at the Phom village, Pongu. It is said to commemorate the capture of a boy in a head-hunting raid.
Konyak wooden figure, coloured a dark red, with blue beads for eyes. Height, 8½”

Wancho carving on a ladder in the morung at Mintong
A monkey carved on a pillar of a Wancho morung at Lonkao, in the east of the Tirap Division

Seated figure preserved in a Wancho morung at Wakka
Wancho wooden heads coloured red, and (below) decorated with brass ornaments and bunches of red wool.
Wancho basket, decorated with carved heads and figure of a warrior, of wood coloured dark red
A bunch of small figures in white wood, to each of which is attached a tail of goat's hair dyed red and orange (Konyak)

A Chang dao-holder, 10" high, decorated with tufts of goat's hair dyed red
Basket, decorated with red and orange hair used as an ornament by the Konyaks, Phoms and others

A Konyak figure of black wood, with a band of cane, coloured red and yellow, and a 'tail' of black hair
Wooden heads worn by Wanchos who have in the past participated in a successful head-hunting raid.
Wancho wooden heads with the tattoo marks strongly emphasized. Height 2" to 3"

161
"up a wooden hand," English 12 and 11.

In the killing of a third enemy (for which they were entitled to put
much ornament worn by swimmers who have taken heads and assisted
Decorations worn in the hair by Wancho and Konyak warriors. The carved wooden hand measures 16½"
Wancho tobacco pipes
Wancho tobacco pipes
Konyak carving of figure; the wood is uncoloured except for the hair, which is black. Height, 6½"
Konyak carving of a man and woman. This is a common motif on the pillars of the morungs. Height of figures, 20"
Konyak figure of wood coloured red; the hair, eyebrows and tattoo-marks being done in black. The arms, each in two pieces, are made separately and nailed on. Height of figure, 19½"
Wancho carvings of dark wood, with decorations in white lime, and wearing red and white beads. Height, from 6" to 8"
Konyak carving in white wood, only the hair coloured black, of girls singing. Length 10"
Three figures, obviously carved by the same hand, of dark polished wood with red faces. Konyak. Height of the largest figure, 7\(\frac{3}{4}\)"
Above: Wancho warrior. Below: Wancho carving of man singing. Height, 5½"
Wancho carvings of the human figure, which were usually attached to the baskets carried on head-hunting expeditions. Height of above 7", of below, representing a boy and a girl singing, 3½"
Konyak morung carvings of an elephant and mithun heads respectively. Each is about 6' long.
Carvings of hornbills, and snakes carrying a human head, in a morung in the Phom village, Sakchi
Life-size carving of an old man with a basket in a morung in the Phom village, Pongu
Phom carving of a buffalo head in a morung at Nian
Children's toys from Tuensang
Drinking-mugs carved from bamboo by the Phoms and decorated with figures of warriors carrying human heads and with mithun heads, symbols of prosperity. They range from 12" to 18" in height.
A Frontier of Hope

At the beginning of this book I expressed my faith that it is not inevitable that the art of the frontier peoples must decline, but that properly guided and encouraged it may go forward to a far-reaching and exciting renaissance. For today there are many grounds for hope. There is a tradition on which to build. The people have found a new zest for living in the era of peace and security which a settled administration has brought them. Government is sympathetic and anxious to encourage and assist in practical ways.

But it would be unrealistic to suppose that the path will be easy. For the people's art has several enemies.

There is first the competition of bazaar goods. These come with the prestige of 'modernity', of novelty, and the fact that they are so largely used by the official staff. The tribesmen are earning a good deal of money, in road-making and building, in porterage and by selling their animal and vegetable produce. It is only natural that they should spend this money on manufactured goods instead of going to the trouble of making them themselves. Plastic ornaments easily take the place of the older, far more beautiful, ornaments of bone, seeds, and wings of birds. A singlet takes the place of the decorative coat: shorts supplant the finely woven and cowrie-decorated apron or the loin-cloth of leopard-skin.

Again the motif for much of the old art is disappearing. We have seen how the wood-carving, weaving, and personal ornamentation among certain tribes depended largely on head-hunting and the giving of Feasts of Merit. The Administration has stopped the one, the American Baptists have, in a number of places, stopped the other. Elsewhere, the splendid hats, decorated spears, war-coats were mainly associated with war: now that peace has come, why should they be made? There are taboos on the wearing of certain kinds
of cloth, on the carving of certain kinds of figures. It is no longer possible to perform the deeds that permitted this, yet the taboos are still operative.

Even where the art still flourishes, the mere impact of 'civilization' has a deteriorating effect, as scholars have noted in other parts of the world. Raymond Firth, for example, describes how the art of New Guinea has gone down.

'Certain it is that, when the culture of these people has been disturbed by European influence, in nearly every case the quality of their art has begun to fall off. The removal of the ancient norms of their economic, ceremonial and religious life has not resulted in the release of the energies of the individual artist and inspired him to novel and better creative efforts, but has destroyed the most effective stimuli under which he worked. This is the case even though by European agencies the craftsmen are provided with much more efficient tools than before. Though new elements of design are introduced, in wood-carvings, for example, the work becomes flatter, less bold, the relief is lower, the execution is more careless and the more difficult types of design and of handicraft tend to disappear.' Boas too has written of the 'slurring' of Aztec pottery designs as a result of rapid mass production. And, nearer home, there is constantly before us the result of attempts to 'improve' the textiles of Manipur which have deteriorated as they have grown more popular.

What can be done to avoid these dangers? The first, most elementary, need is to ensure a plentiful supply of raw materials of the right kind. In other parts of tribal India, wood-carving has died out partly as a result of official restrictions on the extraction of wood and bamboo from the forests. In Orissa, misguided social workers at one time told the Gadabas and Bondos that it was contrary to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi to weave with their traditional bark-fibre and they introduced spinning-wheels and the unfamiliar cotton. At the same time forest officials checked the free use of the shrubs from which the fibre had been taken. The result was that many Gadabas and Bondos stopped weaving altogether and began to buy mill-cloth instead.

In the areas under the North-East Frontier Agency administration the tribal people have large freedom over the raw materials of wood, bamboo and cane. Cotton and wool are more difficult to obtain. Sheep are kept only in a few
A Konyak boy who, in his own ornaments, has the dignity of a prince
Jugs made by Phom potters in Tuensaung
places and cotton is grown only on a small scale. The people have in the past depended on yarn imported from the plains by merchants and sold in small quantities at a rather high price. The Administration is now importing large quantities of cotton yarn and wool for sale at cheaper rates, and this has undoubtedly already given great encouragement to the weaving industry.

The next step is a psychological one. The Government is doing all it can to create among the people a sense of pride in their own traditions—their music and dance, their weaving and carving, their own dress, their own institutions. Every official is trained to approach tribal life with respect and humility and to ensure that nothing is imposed upon it.

Cultural centres, consisting of a museum, library and emporium, are being opened in each Division with the hope that as the tribal people see their own best products treated with honour and exhibited for the admiration of visitors, they will be encouraged to produce more and raise the standard of what they make. Many officials are now wearing elements of the hand-made tribal dress, especially Adi and Mishmi coats, and some of their wives wear the very beautiful skirts and shawls woven by different tribes. School uniforms, based on the traditional models, have been devised. Hand-woven tribal cloth is being increasingly used for curtains in offices, for cushion-covers and tablecloths. Carpets and mats woven in Tawang and Bomdi La are bought as soon as they can be made. There is a steady demand for the painted bowls of the Monpas, and the wood-carvings of the Konyaks and Wanchos, when available, have a ready sale as ornaments.

If, however, this is to be fruitful of genuine progress in art, a great responsibility lies on the purchasers: it is essential that they should refuse to buy inferior articles and those which show a falling-off from the high standards of tradition. The visitor or the official often needs education in aesthetics more than the tribesman, whose own taste is usually sound and true.

Much will depend on how far it proves possible to retain and develop the old designs and idioms for their decorative value, even though the former ritual associations may disappear. As Leonhard Adam, speaking of the Central Australian tribes, many of whose ceremonial objects are 'undoubtedly aesthetically attractive', says: 'If these aborigines should ever be given the opportunity of developing their artistic talent in a changed world, where there is
Gollong girls of the Along Cottage Industries centre
no room for primitive rituals. They should be encouraged to turn these ancient patterns into a modernized decorative style in connection with useful arts and crafts. That this is not impossible is proved by the development of American Indian art in the United States."

There is no reason in the world why even those tribes which have become Christian should lose their weaving and carving. In actual fact, there has been a revival of weaving among the Christian Lushais and Nagas, and the example of Achimota College in West Africa shows how a

A Konyak girl making a skirt of the traditional pattern, but of improved technique and larger in size, at the Cottage Industries Training and Production Centre at Mon
genius for wood-carving, formerly inspired by traditional ideas, can express itself with equal success in Christian themes.

Modern African art owes much of its progress on the right lines to the sympathetic research of artists and scholars. We need for the frontier areas of India men of the calibre of Vernon Blake, whose work on 'The Aesthetic of Ashanti' threw a flood of light on the subject, or of Roger Fry who was one of the first to reveal to Europe the true values of Negro sculpture. Such an artist would first survey the whole field, studying technique and design, and then with caution, humility and patience help the tribal craftsmen to select the finest models of their own tradition for preservation and develop new techniques and styles out of their past heritage.

The value of research in the finest traditional designs is illustrated by the revival of pottery among the Hopis of North America. At the end of the last century Nampeyo, a woman of Hopi First Mesa, was inspired by the artifacts unearthed at the Sikyatki excavations: she imitated the technique, colour and design and an entire new school of pottery came into being. Similarly Ruth Bunzel describes how a well-known potter was employed at the Santa Fe Museum and in various archeological diggings, and this revealed to him many new designs and techniques; he and others devised a new process of applying dull black paint to a polished black surface: the result was something which has become famous throughout the world. Dr Bunzel points out the significant fact that the style grew simpler in response to the demands of the new technique.

To what degree we should 'interfere' in the course of primitive art, how far we should try to teach and instruct, and above all whether we should create, among people where art is the possession of the whole community, a class of artists and castes or guilds of craftsmen is a matter which has excited considerable controversy. The problem is not made easier by the very varied results that have been achieved in different places.

For example, in his study of African masks, Leon Underwood points out: 'so soon as a traditional carver is made art-conscious—by European notions of art as something specialized—apart from ordinary life—his powers of expression decline.' and he goes on to refer to the cautionary example of the Government Experimental School at Omu in Nigeria. The Superintendent
A Monpa wood-carver of Dirang-Dzong with a mask which he has nearly completed
A Monpa woman, wearing a cap of yak's hair, makes paper in a village near Shergaon.
of Education there, J. D. Clarke, was concerned about the preservation under modern conditions of the Yoruba tradition of carving and he persuaded a brilliant African artist who, as a young man, 'when he did not know he was an artist', had produced many fine works, to come twice a week to the school to instruct the boys in wood-carving. 'But there was something lacking. The work done subsequently by both boys and their master suffered. It acquired an art-consciousness, parting from the ordinary position of art in African life, and soon became typical of the meritorious though lifeless work in European art-craftsmanship exhibitions.'

Clarke believed that the reason for this was threefold: an inferiority complex was created as a result of contact with the technologically advanced people of the west; in the African boys who went to school 'the link between the individual and the soil' was often severed; and the idea arose that an artist was something special, who worked mainly for profit and not, as formerly, to enrich his own life or decorate his religious and social institutions.'

The strange and rather tragic story of the Carrolup School illustrates another point, the danger of turning tribal children into artists without making proper provision for their future. The Carrolup Native Settlement was established shortly after the First World War to accommodate some of the detrabalized aborigines of the Great Southern District of Western Australia. It quickly became a 'dumping-place for the human refuse' of the whole area; here came the incorrigibles and inebriates, the rogues and misfits, both full-bloods and near-whites. A school was started, which ran with difficulty, until in 1945 Mr and Mrs Noel White took charge. The Whites had previous experience of the children of self-respecting tribal parents who

*A Phom wooden toy representing a hornbill*
earned their living by trapping foxes and kangaroos or working as stock-
drovers and shearsers, and whose self-respect did not allow them to accept any
assistance from Government for themselves or their children. These girls and
boys used to carve pictures on emu eggs, and shaped twisted roots and
branches into birds, animals and reptiles. The situation at Carrolup was very
different: the people were pauperized by misguided official benevolence; the
surroundings were corrupt; the school curriculum was uninspired.

Noel White found that the children had been taught a little drawing and
painting, mostly of objects which they copied from text-books and rarely or
never saw in their daily life. He started them on ‘scribble’ patterns,
encouraging them to scribble in their notebooks and fill in the spaces with
different colours. He taught them to portray natural objects with which they
were familiar and, as time went by, to sketch what they had learnt in their
regular classes. He left the style alone, being content to encourage their
interest and observation. They became fascinated by problems of light and
shade; they discovered perspective for themselves.

At the same time the boys began to carve beautiful inlaid trays and platters,
and the girls worked tapestries in startling colours. Above all, under White’s
guidance, they recovered their love of the bush and respect for their tribal
ancestors, of whom they had seldom spoken hitherto except in disparagement.
White told them of Namatjira, the Central Australian aborigine, whose paint-
ings had become famous: he taught them to listen to folktales and take
interest in their traditional way of life.

‘Hitherto the children had been half ashamed of their interest in the stories
of the old people and had talked with them surreptitiously. Now they gather-
ed happily round their camp-fires, learning the stories, almost forgotten, of
the fine old tribes, following the words and movements of corroborees and
ceremonial dances. They learned how the warriors of old had arrayed them-
selves for sacred occasions, of the weapons that had been used in the hunting-
days, how the bush people had stalked and killed their prey.

‘From their own people they learned that which no white man could teach
them—the deep, aboriginal feeling for country, a sense of mysticism and
ancient magic, which they infused into many of their pictures.’

As a result they were producing before long the remarkable paintings which
amazed all Australia and caught the respectful attention of the art-critics when they were exhibited in London. The style was not 'tribal': the materials used were 'modern'; but the inspiration and subject matter represented a true interpretation and revival of the ancient life.

And then—the whole thing broke up. A few boys were sent to the cities and given jobs, but they soon left them and went off to the vagabond existence in which they had grown up. The school was closed. The children scattered, some to farms and timber mills; others were put into a large Agricultural School, where there was no nonsense about art and which aimed at being a revenue-making institution. Nearly all the boys abandoned the artwork which had brought them such happiness and fame. 'In their leisure
time they were drawn to the local cinemas or the gambling schools; their homes were again the squalid camps of their people.'

'When questioned now as to their painting the boys seem vaguely troubled. A shadow of bewilderment clouds their dark eyes, as there was once a vision of beauty, colour, and hope that filled the days with promise and excitement, but the vision faded and was lost.'

The experience of the Carrolup School shows that tribal children may develop unexpected and singular gifts, but that these may easily be lost without constant fostering care and the creation of a psychological and social atmosphere in which they can thrive.

On the other hand, the success of G. A. Stevens at the Prince of Wales College, Achimota, suggests that attempts to revive traditional tribal art are by no means necessarily doomed to failure. Stevens went to Africa believing that 'primitive art is the most pure, most sincere form of art that can be, partly because it is deeply inspired by religious ideas and spiritual experience, and partly because it is entirely unselfconscious as art' and everything he saw confirmed him in this belief. Although it was obvious that it might be impossible to recapture the perfection of the older forms, Stevens was convinced that 'the peculiar characteristics of the African artistic genius' should certainly continue in whatever form was found most suitable.

There were, of course, plenty of new forms. Nearly every African boy who went to school was trained in 'Hand and Eye' or 'Brushwork', and he learnt something of light and shade, perspective, proportion and mixing of colours. 'There was widespread regard for the subject as an asset in examinations: a fairly widespread vulgar pleasure in imitative skill; very little power of selection between one kind of subject and another, and no attempt to represent living or moving forms.' Yet 'you can never quite destroy the artistic genius of a people,' not even through your training institutions, and Stevens' first task was to discover whether there was any new and worthy inspiration that would set free the artistic impulse which he felt sure was there. He began by showing his students photographs of the superb masks, figures and stools of tradition; the result was ridicule and a suspicion among the sophisticated students that their teacher was a crank. 'Their ancestors had not been to school, had not received "Hand and Eye", and therefore could not draw. To
The Sherdukpen Ajilama dance, drawn by the 22-year old Hemadhar Thung at the Bondi La school.
Crayon drawing of a Bori dance by Tallom, a Bori youth who in this was handling a pencil for only the second time.
hint that perspective was not a *sine qua non* of good drawing was almost blasphemy.'

Then one day Stevens discovered certain sketches with which the boys had decorated their dormitories. These had been done ‘out of school’ and were graphic, vigorous and exciting. Stevens decided to bring them into the classroom. He gradually weaned the boys from merely personal and scandalous cartoons to something which could be dignified by the name of imaginative composition. ‘Drawing from observed objects was no longer called “copying” but was confined either to objects, generally local in character which were interesting in themselves, or to exercises in the analysis of form and appearance of objects as closely related as possible to what they needed for their compositions.’ Stevens remarks that to those who are not artists this may not seem a very big change, yet it was in fact a complete revolution of aims and values. ‘People who are not artists and yet who have to teach the subject almost invariably make the mistake of fastening on the mechanics of art, while neglecting or ignoring the psychological processes which go to make a work of art and the development of the artist.’

It was not easy to bring about the change, but gradually the finished work bore ‘less and less resemblance to second-rate European drawing and more and more resemblance to the forms of the older indigenous art. The same love of clear design, rich pattern, rather precious surface quality, tremendous solidity, and appreciation of volumes: the same characteristics in the treatment of the human figure—large head and small bent legs—all came about, in these drawings, as if the race spirit, after lying dormant for so long, had found itself again.’ In fact, so successful was the experiment that when Captain Rattray asked Stevens to illustrate a book of Ashanti folktales, he turned the task over to his students: ‘thus was effected a linking-up with the past and a linking-up of two arts at the same time.’ Before Stevens left Achimota, it was the Congo mask or Ashanti pottery that excited his boys and the last shreds of disrespect for ‘bush art’ were vanishing.

Wood-carving also was revived with great success at Achimota. This was partly achieved by changing the subjects: instead of carving motor-cars or aeroplanes, the boys were taught to make local and familiar things. State swords, Chief’s stools, household implements and animals. The effect of
‘injudicious teaching’ and the result of following ‘the worst European taste’ was reversed: the boys were persuaded of ‘the beauty and desirableness of their own native forms’ and have since produced work of high quality.\(^1\)

All this has been mainly to do with painting and wood-carving, but it might apply equally well to weaving, for the people of India’s frontier paint their pictures and write their poems on their looms. We have seen how, in Kaman Mishmi tradition, designs were evolved from familiar natural objects—the ripples on the surface of a stream, the interlacing of branches against the sky, the markings on snakes, fish and butterflies. The border designs on the wings of the Northern Jungle Queen\(^1\) or the Manipur Jungle Queen\(^1\) may have directly inspired some of the Mishmi patterns and it is possible that the Mishmis and other tribes got their idea of the triangle and even the diamond from butterflies, though the diamond may also have come from the cobra. More important, I suggest that the ‘architecture’ of the weaving designs may have been inspired by the lay-out of the patterns on butterflies’ wings. The ability to build up an elaborate design in which every item plays its part, perfectly articulated into the whole, is one of the most remarkable achievements of the Mishmi weavers, especially when it is considered that the women make no kind of sketch and are constantly devising new arrangements of line and colour.

There is often talk of ‘improving’ the tribal patterns; it would be better to let them grow, naturally and inevitably, as they have done in the past.

> By viewing nature, nature’s handmaid, art,
> Makes mighty things from small beginnings grow:
> Thus fishes first to shipping did impart
> Their tail the rudder, and their head the prow.

On the north-east frontier, painting is a traditional art only in western Kameng, and here it is largely Buddhist in style. Yet the possibility of developing drawing and painting is illustrated in this chapter. When Shri N. Sen Gupta first visited Along, he gave paper and crayons to various youths who had never had them in their hands before. One of these boys was a Minyong, the other a Bori. Their different interpretations of the human figure are of great interest. The Minyong shows the hair cut short in the fashion
Portrait of a Minyong singer (Miri) engaged in leading a dance, done by a Minyong—Taba Jam
Crayon-drawing by Chinglum, a ten-year-old Taraon (Digaru) Mishmi boy
typical of his tribe; the traditional ornament (illustrated on page 123) is round his neck; he has a dao in his hand, suggesting that he is the leader of a dance. Here are the chief interests of the Minyongs clearly portrayed.

The Bori figures are of a quite different shape, but equally characteristic. The Boris, unlike the Minyongs, wear a cloak supported by a string over the head, which does give them the kind of appearance illustrated here. The leader of the dance also carries a dao. One of the girls has her breasts uncovered, for this is the custom in the remoter Bori villages. The dance is performed at night and an enveloping mantle of black surrounds the figures.

Inspired by this, a similar experiment was tried in the Bomdi La school. The tidy samples of jugs, desks, tables and some remarkably symmetrical cocks that had been displayed there were removed from the walls and instructions were given to the teachers that they were not to interfere with the boys in any way. Then the boys were asked to make drawings illustrating certain familiar themes, such as religion, trade, cultivation, and so on. Some of the results are shown on pages 89 and 197.

Sir William Rothenstein has observed that 'the African has preserved his strong sense of pattern: do not let us weaken it by putting before the young the dreary outlines of chairs, jugs and candlesticks, which are still found as examples to be copied in Indian elementary schools.' Let us too not introduce such models into the Cottage Industries centres and schools of India's frontier.

A number of these centres have been opened in NEFA and they will succeed provided that those responsible are able to approach the people's art in a spirit of humility and do not try to impose their own ideas on the craftsmen. All the guidance needed, says Adam in the course of a discussion on the possibility of developing handicrafts among the Australian and other aborigines, should be 'purely technical—how to handle the loom or the potter's wheel—whereas aesthetic arrangements of the designs and shades should be entirely left to the genius of the aborigines, without any interference by white artists whose vision is different and whose ideas would naturally spoil the originality of aboriginal work.'

Long ago, William Morris warned the world of the danger that the course of civilization would 'trample out all the beauty of life and make us less than men.' 'The aim of art,' he said again, 'is to increase the happiness of men,
by giving them beauty and interest of incident to amuse their leisure, and prevent them wearying even of rest, and by giving them hope and bodily pleasure in their work; or shortly, to make man’s work happy and his rest fruitful.’ On the north-east frontier of India today we have the situation as it existed in the European Middle Ages, towards which Morris looked with nostalgic yearning, when there were few professional ‘artists’ but everyone was a creator. The humblest peasant woman on the frontier makes her contribution to the colourful and varied beauty of the whole picture: every aspiring boy and maiden ripe for love adds to it by making delectable ornaments and decorating head and ear and limbs. Art belongs to the entire people: it has not yet become a monopoly of the few. And because it belongs to them, it brings them refreshment and happiness.

It is fortunate for the frontier people and indeed for India as a whole that the Government of India has recognized the importance of tribal art, and is doing everything in its power, not of course to freeze the cultural and artistic level as it is at present, but to develop, if need be to change, but always along the lines of the people’s own genius and tradition. It hopes to bring more colour, more beauty, more variety into the hills, which in turn will inspire the world outside with some of its zest and freshness.

‘Blessed are the innocent, for their’s is the Kingdom of Art.’

_A Phom toy_
Notes

INTRODUCTION

2 E. T. Dalton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal (Calcutta, 1872), p. 34.
4 Information: L. Lungalang.
5 Information: T. K. Barua.

‘ANOTHER WORLD’

2 ibid., p. 183 n.
4 Dalton, op. cit., note on Plate xvi.
5 The full text of these stories will be found in Verrier Elwin, Myths of the North-East Frontier of India (Shillong, 1958).
6 In an Assamese folktale the heroine is helped to provide her husband with the finest cloth by a kite. But nothing is said about designs.—See J. Borooah, Folk Tales of Assam (Gauhati, 1955), pp. 97 ff.
7 Information: T. K. Barua.

DESIGN AND SYMBOL IN TEXTILES

1 The technical processes involved have been often studied, as for example in L. Roth, Studies in Primitive Looms (first printed in J.R.A.I., Vols. XLVI-XLVIII, 1916-18) and D. N. Medhi, Handloom Weaving and Designing (Shillong, 1957), and need not be described again here.

205
The males are tattooed at the age of eighteen: the pattern is, in my opinion, of evidently Christian origin. The majority wear on the forehead a perfectly shaped Maltese cross of bluish colour: others wear the ordinary cross with the vertical beam running along the nose, and the cross-bar above the eyes. Others wear the Lorraine cross, with the upper cross-beam on the forehead, and the lower lying across the bridge of the same. Others again wear the Maltese cross on their calves. The women have the Maltese cross tattooed on the upper lip, and on their legs the Lorraine cross with two St Andrew's crosses drawn on either side’.—N. M. Krick, ‘Account of an Expedition among the Abors in 1853’, J.A.S.B., Vol. IX (1913), p. 114.

Information: D. T. Balani.


Information: I. K. Changkija.


**PILGRIMAGE AND PANTOMIME**

Information: R. S. Nag.


Dalton, op. cit., pp. 8 ff.

ibid., p. 7.

ibid., pp. 10 ff.

**THE COUNTRY OF THE WEAVERS**


ibid., p. 37.

Dalton, op. cit., p. 35.


206
THE WARRIOR AS WOOD-CARVER

1 Hutton, The Angami Nagas, p. 165.
2 Hutton, Diaries, p. 40.
3 ibid., p. 19. But where an effigy was for a man whose head had been taken, the horns were not made and the head was carved in the natural round.
5 For the relative importance of the buffalo and mithun in Naga culture, see Mills, The Ao Nagas, p. 78.

A FRONTIER OF HOPE

1 Firth, op. cit., p. 32.
9 See J. D. Clarke, *Omu: an African Experiment in Education*.
11 ibid., p. 47.
13 *Sticopthalma camadeva*.
14 *Sticopthalma sparta*.
15 Sadler, op. cit., p. xi.
16 Adam, op. cit., p. 238.

The concluding quotation is from George Moore's *Ave*. 

208
Index

Achimota College, 189, 196
Adam, L., qu., 187
Adis (Abors), 1, 5f., 8, 20, 30, 31, 36f., 48, 99, 124, 187; desc., 111f.
Aeroplane-designs, 50
Akas, 5, 16, 20, 23, 31, 43 49, 76; desc., 79
Angami Nagas, 135, 142
Ao Naps, 1, 50, 143
Apit Tanis, 1, 20, 36, 38, 40, 48, 99, 102; desc., 105f.
Art, motifs for, 183f.
Ashings, 23, 26, 31, 116, 119

Bangnis (Daflas), 20, 99
Beresford, G. W., qu., 132
Beyop, 11; desc., 122f.
Blhutan, influence of, 50, 68
Blake, Vernon, 190
Boas, F., qu., 184
Bokars, 99, 119
Bondos, 184
Boris, 23, 31, 99, 119, 184, 200, 203
Borooah, J., 205
Boswell, J., qu., 1
Brass-work, 111, 122
Buffaloes, carvings of, 144
Buguns, 16
Bunzel, R., qu., 190, 208
Burma, influence of, 50
Butterflies, 24, 200

Calcutta Exhibition, 80
Cane-work, 14, 69, 102, 106, 108, 116, 120, 124
Carpet-making, 187
Carrolup school, 193ff.
Changs, 31, 40, 43, 48
Clarke, J. D., qu., 193, 208
Climate, 5, 15f.
Clowns, 76
Coffins, 144
Cotton, production of, 36, 184, 187

Cottage Industries centres, 70, 203
Cowries, use of, 31f., 43, 48, 132, 183
Cross-design, 43, 206
Crowe, H. M., qu., 105
Cultivation, system of, 20
Cultural centres, 187
Cultural provinces, 19, 50ff.

Daflas, 11, 15, 36, 99; desc., 102f.

Dances, 30, 70, 187
Designs, origin of, 24f., 200
Dhammaus, 16, 23, 76
Difficulties of tribal artists, 2f., 183ff.
Dormitories, 101, 111, 138ff.
Dress-protocol, 5, 48ff., 69
Dunbar, G., qu., 1, 101, 116, 119, 120
Dyes, natural, 2, 36, 69

Earthquake, effect of, 2f.
Eliot, T. S., qu., v
Ethics, tribal, 23
Ethnological Congress, 79

Feasts of Merit, 49ff., 183
Fibre, used for weaving, 23, 69, 102, 111, 119, 131, 184
Firth, R., qu., 2, 184
Fry, Roger, 190, 208
Funerary rites, 6f., 23, 142ff.
Furer-Haimendorf, C. von, qu., 105f., 111

Gadabs, 184
Gallongs, 1, 38, 111, 116, 120, 144
Gandhi, Mahatma, 184
Government, tribal, 20, 111
Grave-effigies, 142f.

Hair, use of, 31, 115, 124, 135, 137
Harappan pottery, 40

209
Hats, 30, 111f., 115, 120, 131, 132, 183
Head hunting, 5, 48, 135ff.
Hesselmeyer, C. H., qu., 80f.
Hill Miris, 23, 99; desc., 106ff.
Hornbill, Great Indian, 43, 48, 120, 139, 143f.
Hrussos, 5, 16, 20, 23, 43, 49, 76; desc., 79
Human figure, carvings of, 136ff.
Hunt, Holman, qu., vii
Hutton, J. H., qu., 8, 25, 83
I
Iduki, H., 7, 7f.
Ilerowka, 5, 16, 30
Ileros, 5, 16, 30
Inferiority, sense of, Iff.
Iron-work, 20, 26, 111, 122; origin of, 26
Ivory-work, 84f.
James, Henry, qu., v
Jew's-harp, 8, 25, 83
Johnson, Samuel, I
K
Kaman Mishmis, 23ff., 47f., 50, 124, 200
Kennedy, R. S., 81ff.
Khambas, 16, 30
Khamptis, 19, 35, 43, 45, 83
Khienunga, 31, 142
Konyaks, 5, 19, 33, 38, 40, 43, 49, 135, 138, 140, 187
Krick, N. M., qu., 112, 206
L
Lhota Nagas, 135
Lushai influence, 50
Manipur textiles, 184
Maraini, F., qu., 71
Marriage rules, 19
Masks, 19, 70ff., 84
Medhi, D. N., 205
Millar, M. D., qu., 193ff., 208
Mills, J. P., qu., 11, 144, 207
Minyongs, 5, 26, 35, 111, 116, 119, 200, 203
Miris, 120
Mir Jumla, I5
Mishmis, 6, 12, 15, 20, 23ff., 30, 35, 40, 43, 47f., 50, 80, 99, 115, 131, 200; desc., 124ff.
Missionaries, 12, 43, 183, 189
Mithuns, carvings of, 139, 144
Monpas, 5, 19, 20, 30, 43, 50, 144, 187
Moore, George, qu., 204, 208
Morris, William, qu., 203f.
Morungs, art of, 138ff.
Mulla Darvish, qu., viii, 15
N
Namatjira, 194
Navajo art, 52
Needham, J. F., qu., 132
Nehru, J., qu., vii
New Guinea, art of, 184
Noctes, 19, 30, 33, 138, 140
Origin of the arts, 23ff.
Ornaments, 26, 33, 85, 105, 111, 112, 115, 122f.
Padams, 5, 35, 99, 119
Pailibos, 99, 119
Painting, 68, 75, 193ff.
Pantomimes, 70ff.
Paper-making, 70
Phoms, 19, 43, 135, 138
Poker-work, 82
Pottery, 2, 20, 40, 70, 122, 184, 203
R
Ramos, 119
Rattray, R. S., qu., v, 199
Read, H., qu., v
Religion, tribal, 20ff., 99
Renaissance, possibility of, vii, 14, 183, 189
Rengma Nagas, 135
Robinson, W., qu., 16
Roth, L., 205
Rothenstein, W., qu., 203
Rowlett, E. A., qu., 127
Rutter, R., qu., 193ff., 208
S
Sangtam, 33, 47f., 50
Sarkar, J., qu., 15f.
Scenery, 16, 20
Sema Nagas, 11, 31, 33, 135, 138
Sen Gupta, N., 200
Sherdikpens, 5, 20, 25, 30, 40, 43, 49, 72, 144; desc., 69
Shihabuddin (Talish), qu., 15
Shimongs, 11, 99, 123
Simpson, Dr. 7, 30, 80, 132
Singphos, 19, 26, 85
Soul in material objects, 8
Starr, R. F. S., 206
Stevens, G. A., qu., 196f.
Stone, work in, 127
Stoner, C. R., qu. 50, 206
Substitute for head-hunting, 135
Sulungs, 111

Taboos, 5f., 11, 143, 183
Tagins, 19, 108, 111
Tagi Raja, 76, 81; painting of, 7
Tangams, 8, 83
Tangsas, 19, 50
Taraon Mishmis, 23, 47f., 124
Tattooing, 43, 137, 144
Tawang, 67f., 71f.
Tombs, 6, 142f.

Underwood, L., qu., 190

Villages, tribal, 19f., 111

Wanchos, 8, 19, 23, 30, 33, 40, 49, 135, 138, 140, 187

Weaving, origin of, 23 ff.; techniques of, 35, 205; materials for, 36, 187; vocabulary of, 35; taboos on, 5f., 11, 183; designs in, 36 ff., 205; influences on, 50, 52; decline of, 2, 11, 35, 102, 183f.; revival of, 187 ff., 200; of Adis, 36ff., 43, 112ff.; of Apa Tanis, 38, 105; of Gallongs, 38, 116; of Hrussos, 44, 82; of Khamptis, 84; of Konyaks, 40ff.; of Minyongs, 116ff.; of Miris, 120; of Mishmis, 38, 47, 124ff.; of Monpas, 68f.; of Sherdukpens, 43ff., 68f.; of Singphos, 85; in Tuensang, 38, 47f.; of Wanchos, 40ff.

Weddings, display at, 30
White, N. 193ff.
Wilcox, R., qu., 112, 124
Wood-carving, 5, 14, 69, 85, 135ff., 187, 199
Wool, 36, 127, 184

Yaks, 44, 69, 72, 144

Zoomorphs, 43