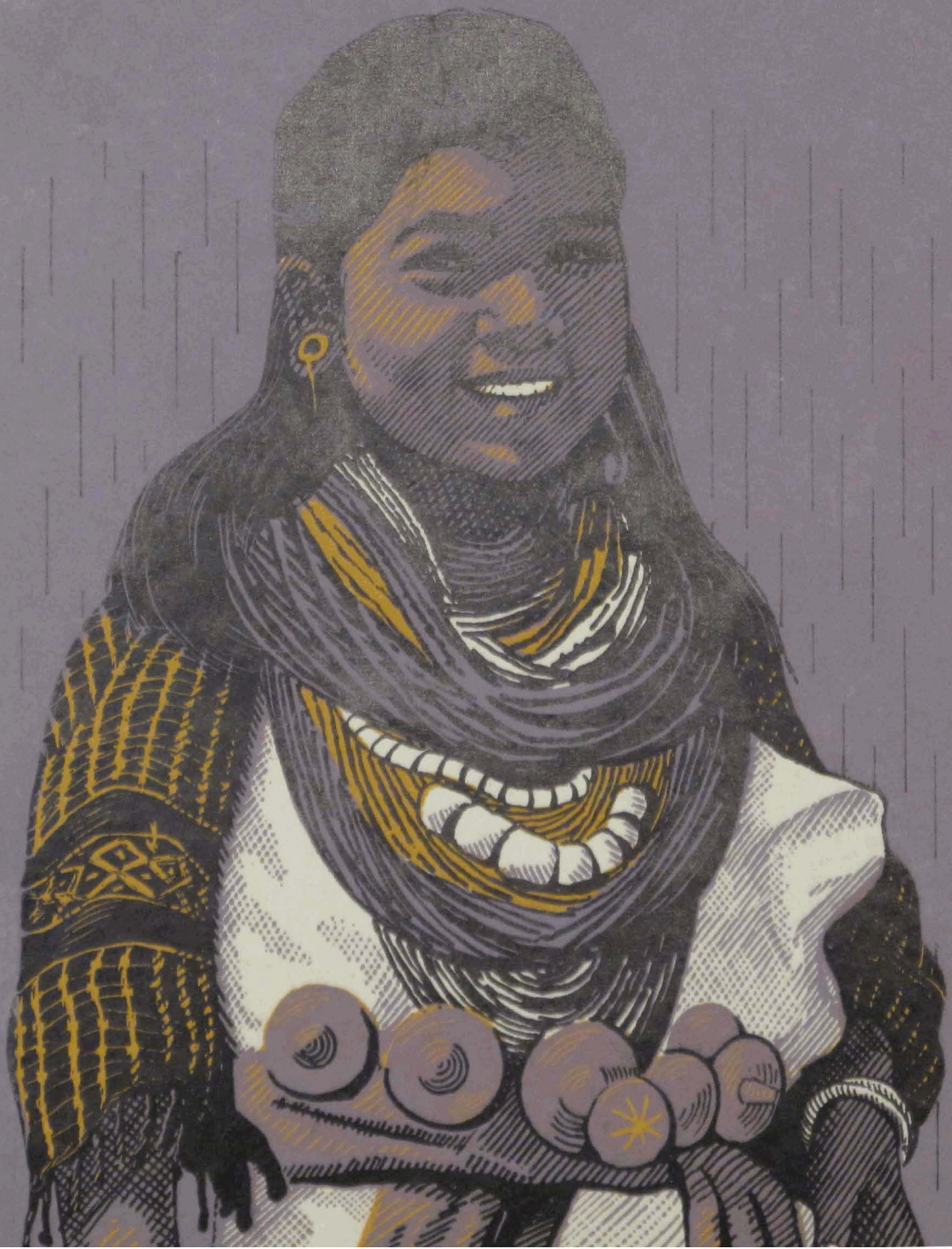
The DAFLAS

B. K. SHUKLA



NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

THE PEOPLE OF NEFA

THE DAFLAS

OF

THE SUBANSIRI REGION

BRAMHA KUMAR SHUKLA
Assistant Research Officer, Subansiri Frontier Division,
North-East Frontier Agency

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY
SHILLONG
1959

TO

DR VERRIER ELWIN

- PUBLISHED BY SRI SACHIN ROY ON BEHALF OF THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY, SHILLONG
- PRINTED BY SRI G. C. RAY AT NAVANA PRINTING WORKS PRIVATE LIMITED
  47, GANESH CHUNDER AVENUE, CALCUTTA – 13
- JACKET DESIGN BY
  R. BAGCHI
- ILLUSTRATIONS BY
  R. BAGCHI AND U. CHAKRAVORTY
- PHOTOGRAPHS BY
  PANNA PAUL
  S. SEN
  J. WINDRICK

PRICE RS. 4·00

CONTENTS

CHAPTER FIVE : *Religion*

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

The present treatise is a brief introduction to the study of Dafla culture and is the result of a year's work among the people from 1956 to 1958. It is a prelude to a bigger volume containing a more detailed account which will, I hope, be published subsequently.

I gratefully acknowledge the help rendered to me by scores of my Dafla friends, especially Shri Gollo Tegin of Tapo Gollo, and Shri Matin Taram of Solo, who are leading priests. Shri Bat Heli, Political Interpreter, accompanied me on a difficult tour to the village of Mengo, lying a few miles down to the source of the Panior; he was also a valuable informant. The tours to the villages of the Palin valley and the lower bank of the Khru, or the area administered by the Nyapin Administrative Centre, were taken in company of Shri Tara Kaha, an energetic young man of Yuba. He has helped me in learning the Dafla dialect, and his humour and laughter were a great asset on many a dull day. Many of these friends not only willingly sheltered me in their houses, but also took keen interest in my work.

I record my special debt to Shri K. L. Mehta, I.C.S., Adviser to the Governor of Assam, without whose kindness this work would not have been possible. Among the first to read the draft were Shri P. N. Kaul, I.F.A.S., and Shri Sono Loveraj, I.F.A.S., and their contribution, by way of helping me in the field and checking up the material, has gone a long way to improve the work.

Among my friends and colleagues in the Research Department of N. E. F. A., I thank in particular Shri B. Das Shastri, Shri Sachin Roy, and Miss Marion Pugh. All of them have extended their kind co-operation by

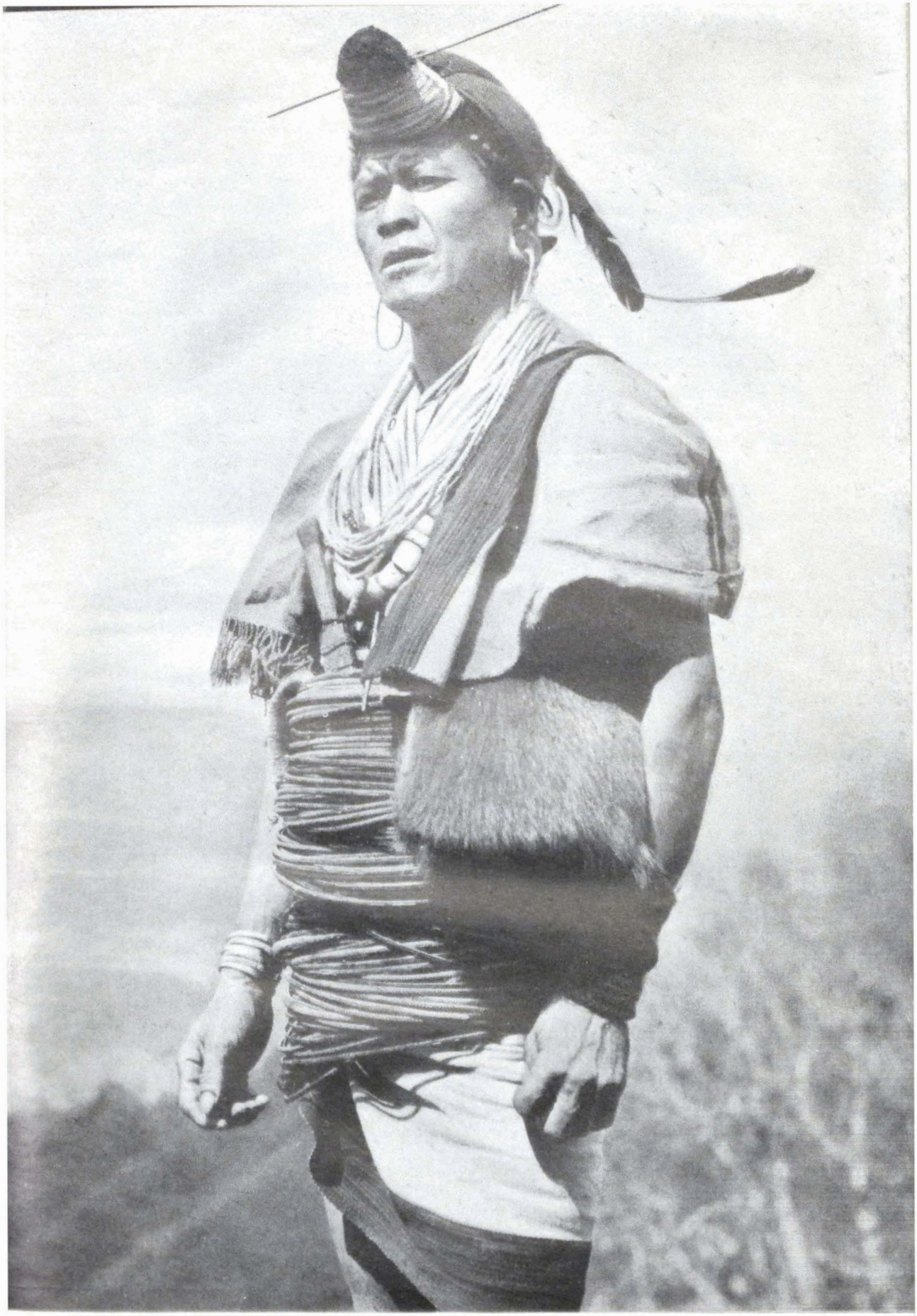
criticizing the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

My indebtedness and gratitude to Dr Verrier Elwin, Adviser for Tribal Affairs, N. E. F. A., cannot be adequately expressed. My debt to him is one of a pupil to his teacher. His affection and guidance has been a great source of cheer and inspiration to me. He has taken pains in going through the manuscript carefully and I am grateful to him for the valuable corrections he has made. As a token of affection and regard, this book is humbly dedicated to him.

Last, but not least, I am grateful to my wife, Shrimati Kusum Shukla, who has helped me in copying out the field-notes for the preparation of the first draft. The final manuscript for the press has been typed by Shri H. L. Syiemlieh, whose valuable assistance I gratefully acknowledge.

BRAMHA KUMAR SHUKLA

Ziro,
24th September 1958



Jorum Bat, a Dafla chief from Jorum

A Dafla girl

Chapter One

LAND AND PEOPLE

I. The Country

The Nishangs or Nisis, the root term being *ni* meaning man, known to the people of the plains as Daflas, occupy a vast stretch of hills and forest which roughly covers the western half of the Subansiri Division of the North-East Frontier Agency. The contours of the country are broken and the hills ascend to summits between 4,000 to 14,000 feet, the northern high ranges remaining snow-covered for a large part of the year. A number of rivers with their tributaries, which in turn are joined by numerous small streams, drain this difficult terrain and finally merge into the Subansiri river from which the Division takes its name. The most important of these are the Panior, which in the Assam plains is known by the name of Ranga, with its affluent Kiyi; and Par or Dikrang, and the Khru, with its tributaries Panyu and Palin, which finds its way to the Subansiri after flowing into the Kamla. It is mainly in the valleys of these rivers that the Daflas have remained for centuries preserving their mountain culture unaffected by the outside world. The population figures of the tribe are as yet unknown; for, with their houses situated among hills that are widely dispersed and difficult of access, and due to their suspicion towards the counting of people, an overall census up till now has not been possible. Nevertheless, the Daflas form the majority of the people of Subansiri and may well exceed 40,000 souls.

Their hills have remained *terra incognita* for centuries, enjoying the fame of brutal vengeance, raids and

ransoms, assaults and murders. Innocent adventurers and intruders were liable to be ambushed and killed.

But now peace reigns in the land and the manner of the people will at once proclaim that they are not accustomed to the ways of war. Women and children go to the fields unattended and men-folk make long journeys without any peril.

Climate, Flora and Fauna. The hills facing the plains of Assam receive the full force of the south-westerly monsoon. In the interior rain falls practically all the year round, but most heavily during the monsoon months. Summer is pleasant. Winter, however, is severe and marked by frequent frosts.

The sub-Himalayan climate with moderate sunshine and rainfall makes the country a paradise of tall trees and foliage. Undoubtedly the people have scathed enormous hills in the process of centuries of jhuming, but altitudes above five to six thousand feet remain covered with evergreen forests. There are tall trees to which creepers cling in abundance with leafy mosses, and through which the rays of the sun can barely peep. The ground below remains carpeted with the decaying leaf-fall largely overshadowed with thick shrubs. The jungle provides the people with house-building materials, land for habitation and sustenance, animals, birds and insects for supplementing food, and finally ensures the people the natural freedom without which life would not be worth living.

Among the tall trees are the oak, pine and chest-nut. Wild bananas and a kind of wild palm, called *taseh*, also grow in abundance. Elephant grass and other allied grasses grow on the banks of streams and in the abandoned clearings. Among the smaller shrubs are the wild berries, dye-creepers, lady-ferns and spear grasses, the last en-

dangering the safety of the unwary visitor in the narrow tracks. Cane and bamboos of numerous varieties grow large, and later we will see to what extent they help to satisfy the peoples' material needs.

Animal life is reasonably plentiful. With the exception of thin forests near the habitations and clearings, where animals are on their toes due to the fear of human beings, the thick evergreen forests hoard myriad varieties of animal life. Of the animals that maintain the balance of nature are the tigers and leopards. The leopard-cats, bears, wild boars and foxes roam in the wilderness of the nature's zoological garden. The other animals that beautify the forests are sambhar and barking-deer. The wild mithun is rare, though not totally absent. The elephants roam in the foothills and in the areas round Doimukh and Sagalee. They are, perhaps, immigrants from the jungles of Assam and are absent in the upper reaches of the Panior and northern Subansiri. Up on the tall trees are squirrels and red and black monkeys, the latter playing acrobatics with unfailing leaps. The creatures opening and aerating the earth here and there are rats, porcupines and pangolins. The crawling creatures are pythons, cobras, grass snakes, kraits and vipers.

Among the birds breaking the silence of the slumbering forests is the majestic hornbill. Minivets, orioles and sun-birds lend colour, and thrushes, robins, bulbuls and shamas carol and fill the hills with sweet melody. Drongos, red jungle fowls and babblers are some of the birds that warn of danger. Pin-tailed green pigeons, Hodgson's Imperial pigeons, and the ashy wood pigeons are also common. Other birds are the red-eared woodpeckers, flycatchers, kingfishers, black crows, hawks, black eagles and owls. Butterflies, with magnificent colours, swarm near the banks of streams on sunny days. Insect life too

is plentiful, and among the thousands of species which must remain undescribed here, are *damdims* and leeches, which are a continuous menace during journeys.

In such beautiful, but inhospitable, hills may be seen large cleared patches of land which human hands have tamed for habitation and agriculture.

II. Origin and Migrations

No one knows the original home of the Daflas or when they left it. All that is lost in the mists enshrouding the unwritten past. The people have no written tradition. 'We received our share of the skin,' they say, 'on which was written the wisdom of the world; but we ate it in hunger while the people of the plains preserved it.' This is how everything came to be 'remembered in the belly' and was passed by word of mouth from one generation to the next. Our only source of information, therefore, is the myth of origin and migration which is still largely remembered by the people.

All Daflas believe that they descended from Abo Teni, a mythical ancestor[1] and lived at a place called Supung, which lies somewhere in the far eastern Himalayas. Later they came to Narba and living in and leaving several villages like Begi, Bolo and Yalang successively, crossed the Shinit or Subansiri river, and then the Kumme or Kamla river. Here they spread all over the hills lying between the Kamla and the Khru, and later made their way to the Palin and the Panior hills. While coming to these hills they brought with them animals like mithuns (*bos frontalis*) and pigs, and such articles of value as

[1] Indeed, as the Dafla tradition lays it down, Abo Teni is not only the eponymous ancestor of the Daflas, but also of Apa Tanis, Sulungs, Miris and Bangrus, and also of the people of the plains or Haryangs. In fact a large number of tribes in the neighbourhood are one in the person of this ancestor.

majis (Tibetan tongueless bells) and *talus* (metal plates) and beads. They wore their hair in a bun called *podum* and knew weaving and agriculture.

That this myth has some significance in throwing light on the tribe's origin and migration is beyond doubt. All the priests, and many others, remember their genealogies from their own time back to Abo Teni, and a large number of myths gather about his person. The various places mentioned in the above myth are narrated in the *id* songs, which are sung during marriage and the Yulo ceremonies. What remains obscure, however, is the geographical location of each place. Nevertheless, one thing is certain. If the people's tradition is to be taken as a guiding factor, then in all probability they were the people inhabiting some remote corner of the eastern Himalayas. At some early date in human history, they migrated to their present habitat in a succession of groups. The migration extended, perhaps, over several centuries—one group ousting the other early settlers, till it itself was ousted by yet another and stronger group. This process must have continued till the people finally settled in the hills north of the Khru, and made further excursions to the west in the hills of Palin, Panyu and Panior areas.

But are the Daflas a homogeneous race? The myth of origin, the similarity of language, dress, material culture and religious beliefs would suggest that they are. But this theory fails on closer scrutiny, when we observe the varied and often contrasting pigmentary and qualitative characters of the people. Our only authority on this point is Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf who observes two distinct types among them.

'The more frequent is characterized by a round, flat face with a broad snub-nose, prominent cheek-bones, eyes

lying in flat sockets, and a small weak chin. Comparatively small stocky stature and a sallow yellow brownish skin colour seem often to go with this type.'

'There is a striking difference between the Dafla with these traits, which represent a fair picture of the Palaeo-Mangoloid type of the text books, and the Dafla with an oblong face, a prominent often hooked nose, with a narrow bridge, deepset eyes, a well pronounced chin, ruddy complexion, comparatively high stature and atheletic build'.[1]

The present Daflas, therefore, by no means constitute a homogeneous race. This contention gets further support when we hear from the northern Daflas of the Khru and Panyu, that they freely intermarry with such groups as Bangru, Na and Peesa, who inhabit the remote hills of the extreme north and trade in Tibetan articles with the Daflas.

Despite these physical variations, however, all the Daflas are well-built, muscular and handsome. The maidens are attractive with their simple and innocent looks and the children will always be found with rosy cheeks that win one's affection.

III. Early History

In the scanty records available to us about the Daflas, they occur as a turbulent people, engaged in raids and murders. Thus Kazim, in the days of Aurangzeb, wrote, 'The Duflehs are entirely independent of the Assam Raja, and, plunder the country contiguous to their mountains'.[2]

[1] C. von Furer-Haimendorf, *Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of the Subansiri Region* (Shillong, 1947), p. 3.

[2] Asiatic Researches, Vol. II, quoted by A. Mackenzie, in *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1884), p. 27.

From a few references in the *Ahom Buranji,*[1] it appears that they raided the Ahom subjects of the adjacent plains, though occasionally, the Ahom rulers succeeded in keeping them in check. While these references throw

A Dafla about 1847
(From J. Butler, *A Sketch of Assam,* 1847)

some light on the activities of the foothills' Daflas of Charduar and Lakhimpur, very little is known about the Daflas of the interior, referred to as the 'Tagin Daflas'[2] in the 19th century records.

[1] G. C. Barua, *Ahom Buranji* (Calcutta, 1930), pp. 218-19.

[2] The Tagins are an entirely separate group of people inhabiting the north-eastern Subansiri. Their concentration is mainly in the upper course of the Kamla river, and in the areas around the Taliha and Limeking Administrative Centres.

Early in 1835, it appears that the Daflas of Charduar had raided the people in the plains and were specifically forbidden to enter the plains. By the close of the year, however, they again made a raid near Balipara and captured a few people. As a result of this, a small military force was sent to the hills. The captives were recovered, and a number of Daflas were taken prisoners by Captain Matthie, the Officer-in-charge of Darrang.

But it is not until the year 1872-73, that we hear something about the so-called Tagin Daflas. In the Administration Report for this year, Sir G. Campbell mentions that the Daflas of the interior attacked the Daflas of the foothills.[1] The reason for this attack was a belief by the former, that the latter had carried an epidemic to the villages in the interior, resulting in several deaths. In consequence of this attack, all the Dafla passes to the east of Darrang, and along the Lakhimpur frontier, were blockaded to prevent any Daflas entering the plains. The blockade, however, did not succeed and in the year 1874-75, another military expedition had to be sent into the hills. There was no effective opposition and the force succeeded in recovering the captives taken earlier. In the later years, except for a few sporadic raids, the Daflas, both of the interior and of the foothills, have remained peaceful.

It is only from the beginning of the 20th century that effective contacts with the Daflas of the interior were made. Thus, in 1911-12, a Survey Party, known officially as the Miri Mission, was sent to the hills of the Subansiri region. Their recommendation, that a knowledge of the tribes in the region was necessary for the purpose of survey and exploration operations on an extensive

[1] See Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 31.

scale, was approved by the Government. As a preliminary, the western section of the North-East Frontier was formed in 1913. In the year 1919, however, on the suggestion of Sir Beatson Bell, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, this western section was named the Balipara Frontier Tract.

In the year 1944, Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf was appointed as a Special Officer, and was assigned the task of establishing friendly relations with the tribes of the Subansiri region. He made long tours and was able to reach as far as Mengo village near the source of the Panior river. He also entered the Kamla valley and succeeded not only in establishing contacts with the people, but also in collecting useful ethnographic material.

In the year 1946, the Balipara Frontier Tract was split up into the two divisions, the Se-La Sub-Agency and the Subansiri Area. In the year 1952, the headquarters of the Subansiri Area was shifted to Ziro in the heart of the Apa Tani plateau, in whose vicinity there are a number of Dafla villages. In 1954 the name of the area was changed to Subansiri Frontier Division.

CHAPTER TWO

DOMESTIC LIFE

I. THE VILLAGE

To a visitor gazing from another hill, a Dafla village appears strikingly picturesque in its natural setting. Embedded in green surroundings, long huts and granaries with grey and black thatches spread over the steep hill-tops. The large clearings lie far and near. Flanking the rear hill to its summit, stand thick evergreen forests unscathed by slash-and-burn. Deep below, flows a river or a stream, its banks covered with green vegetation and, occasionally, rich in floral treasures of the wilder species. The most exquisite, however, are the villages like Mengo and Pajee which stand against the magnificent background of the snow-sugared blue hills. Everywhere the clouds may be seen dangling in masses or patches and thick sheets of mist shrouding the valleys and the villages.

From the point of view of planning, there is no tendency to huddle up in the Apa Tani fashion. Everyone has ample space and the houses stand quite apart. There are no lanes and sublanes, no assembly platforms, no dormitories, and no public places for community worship. Small narrow paths lead from house to house and radiate further to merge in the network of tracks linking the different villages, clearings, river sides, and trails for the chase.

The boundaries of the villages are well defined, both geographically and historically. Every streamlet, ravine or a mound, has a name remembered by the people through generations. Indeed, each locality has a place name, although many villages are known by the name of

the predominant clan. The village sites have been occupied for decades. One or more families of individual households, however, may move to other hills in search of better fortune. The size of the villages consequently varies. Some, like Joram, Talo, Lingtelot and Pakba, may have as many as 30 houses, with more than 500 souls, while others, Layang for example, may only be new settlements with two or three houses and less than 30 people. But, whether big or small, sanitation within the village is always poor. The pigs and the fowls are seen revelling on heaps of rubbish everywhere, which the people never care to remove. As a result, most of the Dafla villages, howsoever charming in landscape, remain filthy.

For anyone of its members, a village is not so much the centre of group activity as his own house in which a man's life is lived. No doubt, a Dafla joins others in such group enterprises as the construction of a neighbour's house, or cutting his jhums, when invited with the offers of food and beer. But these are mutual reciprocal arrangements governed by the rule of normal courtesy in which he expects a similar gesture from his neighbours. Beyond this, not all the people of the village are 'his people'. His primary loyalty is to his long house and to its members, and then to the members of the lineage and other relatives.

II. The House

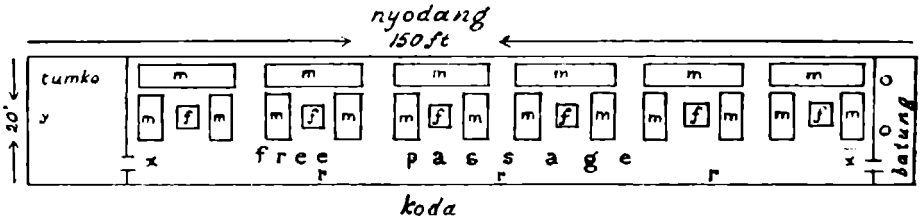
The Dafla house is a long hall erected on poles. The width of the house is usually 18 to 20 feet, but the length varies, depending upon the number of hearths. It is not unusual for a house, having more than ten families, to run to a length of more than 50 yards. The walls are made of twilled mats, and the floor of flattened bamboos. The thatches used are either dried banana or cane leaves and

the millet and paddy straw, or the thatching grasses commonly growing wild in the abandoned clearings. At the

The *tumko* balcony of a Dafla house

back end of the house, above the ground, is a spacious platform, *tumko*, of wooden beams, usually half open and half covered with thatch. On this will be found a small structure of bamboo splits and *kra* leaves representing Yobu Wiyu, the god of chase, and one or two sharpening stones. A notched ladder put slantingly connects it with the ground below. The other end of the house is a small porch, *batung*, with one or two sets of mortars and pestles for the pounding of grain. This is not much above the ground and serves as the main entrance and the exit for all. The doors opening on the back platform and the front porch are either sliding shutters of matted bamboo, or crude wooden planks.

Plan of a Dafla House



150 ft. × 20 ft. approximately

Key

f	=	Fireplace
m	=	Mats, place for sleeping and sitting
x	=	Exit or doors
r	=	Racks for keeping articles
o	=	Mortar for pounding cereals
y	=	Yobu structure

A little away from the house lie the granaries. The distance is on purpose as it saves them in case a fire breaks out. The pigsty is often sited near the porch and is reached by two logs connecting it with the latter. Around the house, at convenient places, may be found the *yugings* or ceremonial structures of past sacrifices, often lavishly decorated with bamboo shaves and bamboo split rings, as well as the burial structures of the dead.

Within the house, the fireplaces run in a row, parallel to the centre length on the *nyodang* side, each being something like a square of two and a half feet, with the traditional three stones to support the cooking vessels. Over these hang the two, and occasionally three, wooden trays, one above the other, for drying firewood, cereals and meat. Above the trays is the ceiling over which are kept the unused baskets, a few big gourds, and the fermenting millet tied in leaves. The ceiling is reached by notched ladders, which, while not in use, are left lying in a corner.

The main wall of the house called *nyodang* is prominent from the domestic point of view. The members of the household sleep on this side of the house and, occasionally, enclosures are made to keep the various household articles. The opposite wall, *koda,* has one or two racks for keeping things such as bamboo tubes, gourds and earthen vessels. In many houses may be found a few large rough conical baskets hanging on the *koda.* These are used for brewing beer on special occasions such as marriage. Hearth to hearth partition is not universal, though over wide areas, privacy is achieved by partitions, with doors closed with mats at night. There are a few openings in the *koda* wall but rarely any in the *nyodang.* As a result, howsoever cosy and comfortable to the people, the house remains always dark with plenty of smoke fuming and struggling to escape through the thatch.

Construction of the House. The Daflas themselves construct their houses. There are no professional house builders. Every young man of a village acquires this skill by participating in the actual constructions. Some of the elderly men, however, are more skilled than others. Their technical guidance and suggestions, therefore, are invariably taken. If such a man is not available in a village, he may be called from another and requested to supervise the work.

A Dafla house lasts for about three years. After this time, another house is constructed. The house materials are wooden beams, posts, cane, bamboo, and cane and banana leaves or other thatching. These are collected well in advance. Normally the collection takes two to three months. The long and thick posts are cut and straightened. The banana and cane leaves are dried. The materials are available in the nearby

jungle, but the cane and the bamboos are collected even from long distances and placed near the site of the building.

Prior to the construction of the house, omens are taken with eggs. It is important to ascertain beforehand whether the site for construction will be good or bad for the members of the house. If the omens are good, a day is selected for the actual construction. A request is made to all the grown-up members of the village to contribute their labour. The people, who help in constructing the house, expect the same co-operation in return.

On the appointed day, in the early morning, they all assemble at the site. There is no formal ceremony for the erection of the first post. Holes are dug in two rows with daos. A post is first fixed in the hole in the centre of one of the rows. The next is fixed in the corresponding hole in the other row. After that, the posts are put on both the sides of these two first fixtures, till the desired length is attained. The length depends upon the number of hearths. Every time the width is measured with a bamboo stick and kept even. Each post is further strengthened with two slanting supports which are notched to fit in a tight grip to the posts under the floor. Thus, each post forms a triangle at the base, as it were, making right angles with the ground. The land being slopy, care is taken to support the posts at an even height at which the floor is to be made. There are no instruments. Practical experience and simple measurements with bamboo sticks result in perfect symmetrical constructions.

After all these posts have been fixed, the wooden beams for the floor are tied to them. This operation is followed by tying the beams at the upper ends of the

standing posts. Next comes the placing of battens across the width of the house on the beams first tied to the posts. Over these again a second layer of the battens are so placed as to leave the gaps between them not exceeding eight to nine square inches. This frame-work is covered with a thick layer of the flattened bamboos. This completes the floor, save for the hearths. Spaces of two and a half square feet for the purpose are left without the bamboo covering in a row along the length of the house. Later on, these are properly fitted up with the wooden boards at the sides, and the bottoms are secured from below. These tray-like hollows are then covered with earth to render them fire-proof.

When the floor has been put, the next stage is to perform the Geglo ceremony. The priest is present. He starts the incantations and the head of the house produces the leaves of *tanyum* and *kra,* rice, the beer-ferment, ginger, and a small potsherd. These articles are placed on a big leaf. A hole is dug below the front balcony. The head of the house holds these things in his hand, and the priest prays to the gods and the ancestral ghosts:

'We have constructed this new house at a new place. O Wiyus and *orums* be kind to us. Do not come to trouble us. Do not make either us or our children sick. Do not take them to the Land of the Dead. O Wiyus and *orums,* we are giving you these offerings. Be propitiated and do not come to us.'

The person, holding the offerings, goes under the floor and puts them inside the hole. A big pole is then erected over this and the house is completed finally. The whole process takes two or three days.

While the men are busy in the construction work, the women in the house brew beer which is in great demand. The quantity consumed per day is more or

less 10 big gourds, which would roughly be not less than 10 gallons. The people who take part in the construction, are served with rice and vegetables in the noon. The beer, however, continues to be served frequently. If a person fails to have enough beer, the work of construction is postponed till sufficient quantity is procured.

Contents. The household artefacts are not numerous. They include such things as gourds of various shapes and sizes, bamboo mugs, and vessels for fetching water, cane and bamboo baskets, mats and skins, earthen pots and, occasionally, iron frying pans and aluminium mugs. Articles of greater value are the weapons of chase like daos, spears, bows and arrows, and ornaments like bead-strings and women's waist belts of metal discs. Their wardrobes are not particularly rich, and include a few *pudu* fibre and cotton blankets. The valuables such as *majis, talus* and *kojis* are buried secretly near the house and may only be taken out when the occasions demand. Among the ceremonial objects are the horns of sacrificed mithuns and the skulls of pigs, which are hung as exhibits on the *nyodang* wall. The trophies of chase find a conspicuous place, while on the *koda* wall may be found the horns of mithuns that died of sickness.

Daily Life. Life within the house starts early at dawn. One by one the fires are kindled. Earthen pots with water are placed over them for cooking rice or brewing beer. Men and women may sit for a while to warm themselves up. But the housewife cannot linger by the fireside long. By the time there is sufficient light, she pounds and husks the grains, while the husband and children sit near the fire eating maize pops. The moment she has done this, she would cook rice, brew beer and boil any vegetables that have been brought home the

previous evening. None sit quiet. They pass the time in gossiping about their fields, grievances, neighbours and the village affairs. Young girls hasten to fetch water. Everyone takes the morning meal and gets ready for the day's work before sun-rise. The husband may go to the jungle for chase or to the jhums, but the housewife has enough work in her clearings all the year round. By the time, therefore, the sun has gone up a little, the house is deserted except for the old, the infirm, and the children carrying infants on the back.

Men and women return home in the afternoon. The housewife has not forgotten to bring the leaves for tying the boiled millet for beer, the firewood and vegetables, that she could find in her clearing or the stream side. The extinguished fires are set ablaze and water brought. She runs to the granary, bringing back food cereals required till the next morning. The evening meal is prepared and beer is brewed. By dusk everyone has taken the day's last meal and the last mug of beer. The usual conversation continues, the housewife joining at times. Children go to sleep and others relax or sit near the fires. Gossiping continues long, perhaps, because a guest has come. Otherwise all feel sleepy by eight at night. Gradually the fires dim and all recline in sleep by the fireside.

III. Dress and Ornaments

The main garment of Dafla men consists of a coarse loincloth and a blanket woven from the fibres of a wild plant. It is held in front reaching half way to the thighs, and the ends, passed below the armpits, are received crosswise over both shoulders and fastened together in front of the chest with an iron or bamboo pin. In addition to this, occasionally, a man may wear a piece of

mithun hide to cover his chest. Around the neck are worn numerous strings of beads—white, red, blue, green, and grey, prized as valuables and inherited and passed down as heirlooms. With these may also be found brass chains, tusks of boars and deer, and an iron pin for cleaning the smoking pipe. The left wrist has a coil of hair strings and the right is decorated with a number of bangles. Around the waist are worn a number of cane rings woven with *tama* fibre, while below the knees are a pair of garters of woven cane, each being less than an inch broad.

A typical Dafla cane helmet decorated with hornbill beak and feathers

Other articles of wear are a big dao, often Tibetan, and a small multi-purpose knife. Both are sheathed in bamboo scabbards. The larger scabbard, containing the more formidable of the two, is often wrapped in an attractive monkey skin of silver ash colour. Its two ends are fastened to a sling, either of raw hide or of woven cane, the latter ornamented with neat rows of cowrie shells. The sling is passed over the right shoulder, allowing the sword to rest on the left side of the waist. Other pieces of wear are a long woven ribbon, *jusopus*, either of wool or *pudu* fibre with red and black stripes,

and a pouch containing tobacco and the smoking pipe. Both of these are put on in the style of the dao sling.

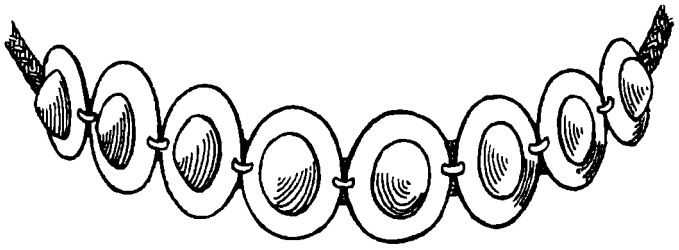
The most conspicuous, however, is the head dress. It is an admirable helmet of woven cane, surmounted by the crest of a hornbill beak, dyed scarlet red. It is decorated with feathers of distinction, the commonest being a white and black-barred hornbill feather. The talons of a hawk may also be seen fastened beneath the tip of the crest as additional pieces.

The hair is plaited and done in a bun on the forehead, called *podum,* which is wound in yellow Tibetan thread. A brass skewer of about a foot in length is passed through it horizontally. Around the head is worn a thin band of woven cane studded with miniature solid metal bells. The earlobes are decorated with bamboo plugs and earrings of distinction.

The women do not look less attractive in their simple dress. The hair is either done in a bun at the back, or parted in the middle to be plaited around the head. The latter is one of the commonest styles in many parts of India, and often enormously enhances a woman's charms. Neither the women, nor the men, use any fat or grease for dressing the hair. It is entirely done with touches of bamboo combs after a simple cold or warm wash. Like men, the women too wear numerous strings of multi-coloured beads. But, in addition to these may also be found a number of metal bells, brass chains and, not infrequently, tea-spoons, dangling from the neck over the breasts. In the earlobes are worn lead rings of large size, with or without bamboo plugs. On the hands, while the fingers may have a couple of rings of brass or silver, the wrists are always covered with bangles.

The women wear a skirt of woven fibre, often with a green border and stripe designs. Over this, they wrap

the same type of blanket as men wear, which, falling to the knees, is tucked over the right shoulder and tied at



A girdle of metal discs for adorning the waist of a woman

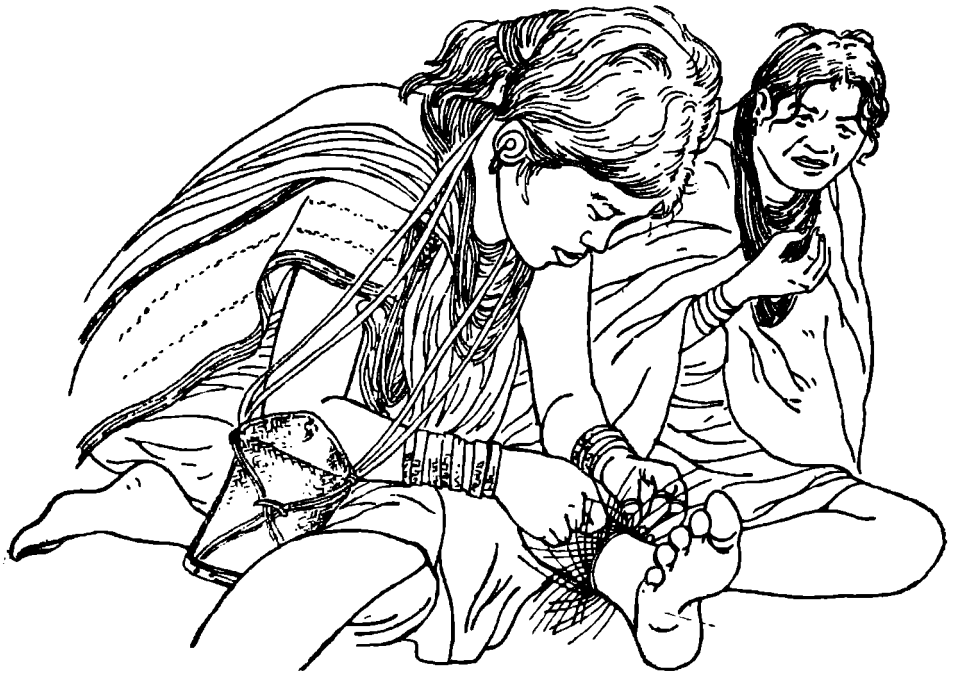
the waist by the *jusopus* ribbon. In the waist is also worn a belt of cane, decorated with *hoofi* or disc-shaped metal ornaments. While cane rings are absent over wide areas as waist bands, two other ornaments may be seen in common use. One is *tage* or a chain of crude metal rings, and the other, a more prized piece of decoration, is *tajing* or a chain with a number of flat square metal pieces and blue bead strings.

On the legs no ornaments are worn except the tight fitting cane garters on the ankles, which more often result in constricting the legs and causing ulcers, rather than adding to the beauty.

The children remain naked in infancy. At the age of three or four, they put on a piece of blanket. The girls above this age invariably cover themselves in the manner of their mothers, covering their baby chests. Both boys and girls do their hair in the same way. They are shaved, save for an unruly tussock left in the front. There is no prescribed age for wearing the hair in the fashion of the grown-ups. But, whereas in the case of a boy it may be sixteen or so, a girl often starts plaiting her hair as soon as the tresses are long enough to permit it.

While this remains the general pattern of dress,

variations do occur. In the recent years mill-made cloth has gained popularity. The markets of the Assam plains now attract the people from distant areas, who purchase cotton blankets, black and red cloth, cheap strings of beads, and brass chains and bangles in large numbers. Ready-made shirts, blouses and woollen coats have caught their fancy. Apart from this, however, two variations need special mention. One is in the case of



Plaiting a cane-band around the ankle

Gams, or village chiefs, who, in addition to their usual dress, put on a red coat presented by the Administration, and the other is in the case of priests. As a mark of distinction of his office, a priest not only decorates his *podum* with soft feathers of birds or a bunch of animal hair, but also carries at his back a fan of hawk wings. Head-dresses of tiger's skins, often profusely decorated with hawk's feathers and claws, porcupine thorns, and *tajirr* leaves, are reserved for ceremonies.

Tattooing, as an art of decorating the face or the body is absent among the Daflas. There are only a few people, old men and women, in the Joram-Talo area, who have any tattoo marks. The design is a perpendicular line at the middle of the chin crossed by two horizontal lines, and one line on each cheek connecting the edge of the lips to the ear. They have nothing to say as to how it originated, nor are they able to tell the meaning of the marks. All that they know is that these marks can conveniently be sold in Neli or the next world after death. This appears to be a borrowing from the Apa Tanis. The idea of selling the marks in Neli, however, appears to have been a device, invented later to justify their existence. In the rest of the country, there is none, none living at least, who heard of the Daflas ever having been tattooed.

IV. Manufactures

How far the simple economic interpretation holds true of a tribal society is an open question. While it is largely true that the pattern of economic life followed by a particular community is determined, to a very great extent, by their physical environment, no simple theory of economic gain can be the rule. The Daflas, for example, practise crafts ranging from the making of simple bows and arrows to the melting and casting of metals. For plying the latter craft, metals and beeswax are largely imported. The environment alone cannot give us the clue as to why this craft is practised by them. It is, perhaps, important to remember that the form of economy persisting cannot be unilaterally related to the environment of the people. It is also very largely determined by the ways of life and the culture, such as customs and beliefs, which a people develop indigenously

or by borrowing from others. It is only in this light that the material culture and subsistence pattern of the Daflas should be understood.

Fire. The people have no lamps. The native device is to burn a stick of *pasa* or pine. Being resinous, it keeps on burning with a bright flame and is useful in lighting one's way even in the darkest of nights. For this quality, it is indispensable during journeys. Where pine sticks are not available the people make torches of thin bamboo sticks. For again is of great utility as a source of heat. Especially during winter, fire is the only relief from severe chill, since the people have few clothes to keep off the cold. Fire is feared because, if Tamu Wiyu desires, it can lead to total destruction by an outbreak. It is used to scare the Wiyus and the *orums*, when they come to eat the dead in this world.

There are at least three methods known for the making of fire. The first is by sawing a dry cane in between the two forks of a dry stick pitched in the ground. This method, known technically as the fire-saw method, employs three persons: two persons for sawing and the third for receiving on *yangma* wool the spark produced by friction. The second method is also by friction. A stick of *talum* bamboo is held in the left hand and a stone with *yangma* wool in the right. The latter is struck against the bamboo to produce the spark. In two or three attempts the wool catches fire. The last method, which is commonly practised, is by the use of flint and steel. This does not differ from the second, save that in place of bamboo, a steel piece is worn around three fingers.

The tinder used is *yangma* which is obtained from a wild palm called *taseh*. The bark is removed and the naked stump is scraped with a dao. The soft shavings

coming out are called *yangma*. Bark fibres of *taseh* or *yangru*, when dried, are useful in igniting fire quickly. The Daflas burn all kinds of firewood except *sengri* and *sengne*. These trees are the abodes of the Wiyus and to cut them is tabooed.[1]

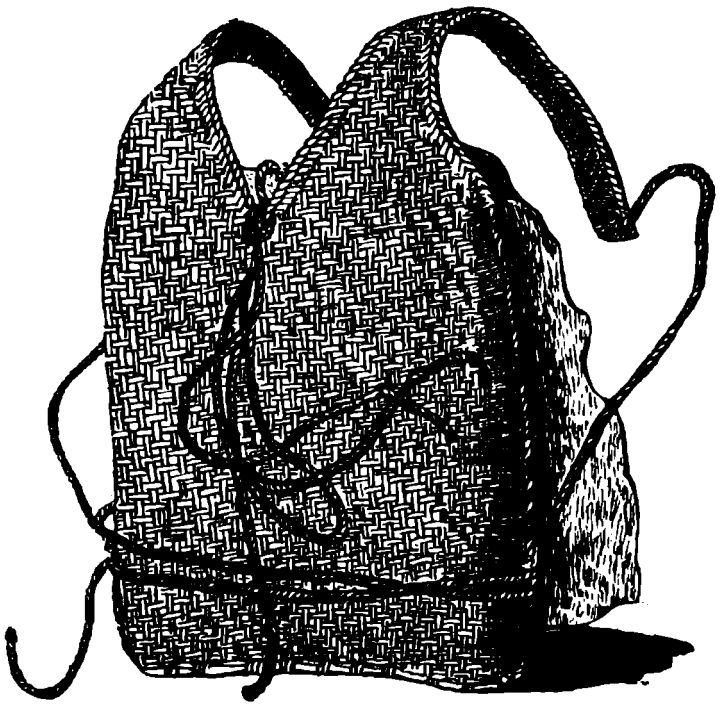
Cane and Bamboo Work. Cane and bamboo in the Dafla country grow in abundance. Consequently, the people make multifarious use of these in daily life. They form the chief building materials for the house, granaries, huts, temporary shelters during journeys, as well as suspension bridges. All and sundry artefacts of the household are made of them. They are useful both socially and ceremonially.

Bamboos of various kinds are used for making vessels for bringing water, mugs for carrying and drinking beer, spoons and plates to eat from, tongs for holding hot things, and pipes for smoking. Their use is evident in the making of mats for sitting and sleeping, and rough baskets to meet all temporary needs. They are useful in making weapons of war and chase. Dao handles, bow shafts, quivers, arrows and spears are invariably made of bamboo. Poisonous bamboo is used for making traps for large animals. In agriculture, bamboos are used for fencing and for making handles of spades, axes and dibbles.

Cane is mainly used for tying, making of strings and ropes, decoration of gourds, making of fine mats, multipurpose baskets, bags for carrying food, and fans. The important conical baskets called *ege* and *eber* are used for carrying grains and other articles by the women. *Chungcha*, a pot-shaped basket, is used for carrying grain during sowing. For men, *nara* or bag of cane for carrying

[1] However, when someone dies, one of his kinsmen may strike the roots or trunk of a *sengne* tree in anger and abuse the Wiyus.

food and other articles, is indispensable. It is carried on the back, and is also an item of the Dafla dress. Cane is also used for decorating the body. The women use tight



Nara, a Dafla cane-bag

ankle-bands of cane, and the men wear numerous cane rings woven with *tama* fibre. Among the bamboo ornaments are skewers, used by men in the *podum*, and ear-plugs. Combs of bamboo are used both by men and women to dress their hair.

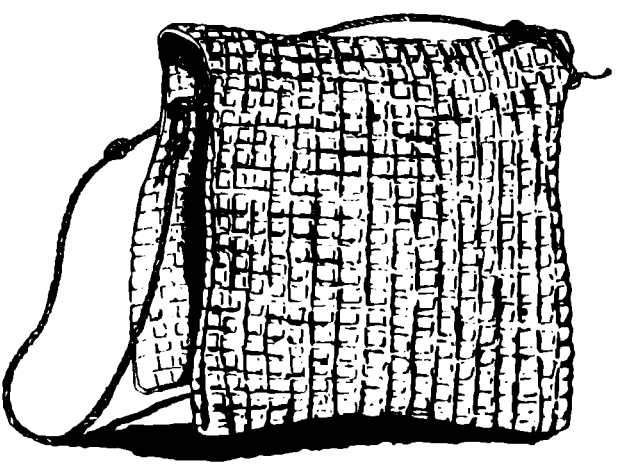
Among the ceremonial uses of cane and bamboo, the most important is the making of sacrifical structures. A variety of bamboo called *tajirr* is used by the priests in certain rituals and in the curing of sickness.

Hides and Skins. Daflas put hides and skins to various uses. Mithun, cow and deer skins are very durable and are mainly used for sitting and sleeping. Mithun hide is used to cover the chest and may also be used for

making *chukh* or pouch. Red monkey's skin is used for making hunting bags and that of silver-ash to adorn the dao scabbard. Tiger's skin is used for making priest's head-dress as well as pouches. Other skins used for pouches are those of bears, jungle cats, deer and goats. Goat skin is frequently used to cover the rear of the helmet. Shields, belts and slings are made of mithun and deer hide.

To make any skin useful, it is carefully removed from the body of the animal with the help of a knife. The coat is left on it, but the inner side is scraped. Several holes are made on the edges of the skin and thin cane threads are passed through and tied. The skin is stretched, tied and kept in the shade in the front balcony of the house, to dry. After six to eight days, it is taken out. The inner side is finally scraped again and it is ready for use.

For making pouches, however, the hair is shaved off the skin after it has become dry. A sizeable piece is cut off with a knife. A straight and thick bamboo stick is used for measuring and marking. The piece is scraped



A pouch called *chukh* bearing designs made with the teeth

again till it becomes clean and loses some of its thickness. It is then worked with the teeth to make simple designs and may finally be sewn with skin threads to make a pouch. Daflas have no knowledge of tanning or dressing skins with fats. For making skin belts and slings attractive, they often dye them in red with the help of a local dye-creeper.

Pottery. Abo Takam was the first Dafla potter and from him the art passed on to the women. Now only women ply this craft. A kind of earth called *dekam* is brought and pounded on a big stone with a wooden hammer. When it turns into powder, water is mixed and it is hammered till it gains the required softness. Clay lumps are then taken home. The woman sits with a piece of gunny bag, or old fibre blanket spread over her thighs. She takes a lump and shapes it with her fingers into a crude pot with a shallow opening at the top and a rim round it. When several such crude pots have been shaped they are kept in the top-most tray over the hearth to dry. Next day they are ready for the final processing. This is done by pushing a stone deeper and deeper through the hollow of the mouth to get the right bulge of the sides, which are beaten on the outer side with a *kamgi* to flatten them thin. The *kamgi* is a bamboo stick with a lineal design on it. It leaves the marks of the design on the body of the pot. The process is continued till the desired round shape, size and finish are obtained.

Finished pots are not subjected to any polishing or burnishing. They are carefully kept in the shade while drying. When completely dry, they are put in a fire outside the house. There are no kilns or pot-ovens, though a ditch, if available, makes it convenient to put burning firewood over the pots. More or less 40 minutes are

sufficient to bake a pot. When it cools down, it is taken home.

Women skilled in this craft are not found in every village. Consequently a number of people obtain ready-made pots from them in exchange for cereals or fowls. Pottery is exclusively limited to cooking utensils.

Fabrics and Dyes. As compared to the Apa Tanis, Dafla women weave very little. Indeed, people grow cotton in reasonably large quantities, especially in the areas of the Panior and Palin. But most of this is bartered with the Apa Tanis for rice and pigs. The Dafla fabrics are of two kinds: of cotton and of indigenous fibre. The former are soft but the latter are coarse and resemble gunny bags of fine quality. The blankets, which along with skirts, loincloths and waistbands are all the fabrics the Daflas weave, present neither colour nor designs.[1] Their aesthetic value is little even to the people themselves. They prefer Tibetan woollen blankets and cotton and woollen blankets from the plains of Assam to their own.

For the preparation of yarn for weaving, a spindle or *tapo* is used. It is made of bamboo with a round earthen piece at one end and a notch at the other. It is rotated over a piece of earthen pot for the making of yarn. The method of preparing yarn from indigenous fibre for weaving is, however, different. The bark of *pudu* plant is taken out and its upper skin is removed with a knife. The fibres are then dipped in water and hammered with a wooden stick over a log of wood or stone. They are dipped again in water and cleaned

[1] Many Dafla women, who live in the villages lying near the Apa Tani plateau, however, weave cloth with fine geometrical designs. The pattern of designs is akin to the Apa Tani textiles and appears to have been borrowed from them.

thoroughly. After this, they are allowed to dry. When completely dry, beeswax is rubbed all over to make the material pliable and strong. Gathered and tied at one end, the fibres are then taken out one by one and twisted

A woman spinning cotton

with fingers to form one single thread which is made into a ball. When sufficient yarn has been prepared, it is woven into cloth. The Dafla loom is simple. Its one end is fastened to a post and the other to the waist of the weaver. It is portable and has the advantage of being folded and used in and outside the house.

For the purpose of borders, Daflas use coloured yarn or fibres. The dyes are native and are prepared from creepers and greens growing in the jungle. The three important dyes are black, red and green. To prepare the black dye or *chakhe,* a variety of banana

called *kukhi* is preferred. Its black upper coating is finely shaved with a dao. It is boiled in an earthen pot to get the colour out of it. The fibre or yarn to be dyed is put into the pot and moved with a bamboo stick. When it gets coloured evenly, it is taken out, cooled, squeezed and dried. The red dye, or *chalang,* is prepared from the *tamin* creeper. The leaves are removed and the creeper is crushed on a stone. When it softens, the dye is obtained by boiling. If *chakhe* and *chalang* are to be prepared in the same pot, the latter is prepared first. Green colour is obtained when a plant called *ungu* is crushed by feet on a stone. The yarn is put with it and both are worked together till the latter is completely dyed. These dyes are effective and the colours do not fade away quickly as a result of exposure to the sun and the rain.

Metallurgy. The art of working metals is as conspicuous for its simplicity as for its enormous utility. The two metal industries known over wide areas are the working of iron into daos and knives, and the casting of molten bronze and silver in the traditional ornaments. These metals are not obtained locally and are imported from the plains of Assam and Tibet. Since in both the industries bellows are more or less of the same kind, it is convenient to describe them first.

A tree trunk, of about eight inches in height and one foot in diameter, is hollowed in such a way that the bottom remains intact. Around the mouth, new leaves of banana, first warmed over a fire to make them silk-soft, are tied with cane. The edges of the leaves are gathered above and loosely tied. A bamboo tube near the bottom surface connects the bellows to the hearth. The bellows are worked with both hands—first opening the mouth a little and then closing and pressing it down.

With this device, charcoal or wood in the hearth is kept blazing. To make them leak proof, the bellows are pasted with clay.

The tools for working iron are simple and even crude. They consist of hammers, chisels, and tongs with cane and bamboo handles. The iron piece to be shaped into a dao or knife is put in the hearth. When it turns red hot it is held secure in a pair of iron tongs, placed on a big iron piece, and hammered. The process of reddening and then hammering is continued till it is large enough to be cut into the required shape and size with a chisel. The daos and knives so made are fitted with durable bamboo handles and scraped with stones and knives to give them lustre. Finally, their edges are sharpened on one side by rubbing them on the sharpening stones. With the above process, the ironsmith makes and repairs not only daos and knives, but also felling axes and his own tools.

As compared to an ironsmith, the work of a silversmith is more intricate and artistic. The first stage in the manufacture of the traditional ornaments he makes, is to make a wax mould of the ornament. This is done by warming the wax sticks or coils and then placing them on the standard moulds made of wax or wood. Where designs are essential, as in the case of a *tangdung* or smoking pipe, they are made with thin wax coils and cut with a knife where necessary.

Once the wax mould is ready, the next stage is to make the *kamdung* or earthen container for mould and metal. For this purpose, a wet mixture of clay and charcoal dust called *takam* is used. A lump is placed on a bamboo frame and shaped flat with a knife and spittle. The mould is first covered inside with *takam*, and then placed on it. A small plug of wax is stuck to it, joining

it at the other end to the bottom opening of a small banana-leaf funnel. The mould and the funnel are finally covered with *takam,* shaped to smoothness, and allowed to dry near a fire. After some time the banana

A silver tobacco pipe

funnel is removed and the empty place is filled with metal pieces. The mouth is covered with a potsherd, and sealed with *takam.* It is dried again. A hole is made almost in the centre of the funnel and the *kamdung* is ready for the next operation which is burning.

Unlike ironsmithy, in which only charcoal is used, the hard and dry wood of the *taja* tree is essential for melting metals. The *kamdung,* with its mouth downwards, is supported on the hearth-stones. It is covered with firewood, and fire is kept constantly blazing with the help of bellows. After about 20 minutes the metal is tested by inserting an iron rod in the hole. If it has turned into liquid and discharges a turquoise flame, the *kamdung* is removed with the help of two pairs of strong bamboo tongs and slowly turned upside down. The wax in the mould is burnt by then and the plug has disappeared,

leaving a passage for the molten metal to pass into the mould. The molten metal fills the empty space created by the wax mould. This is what is technically known as the *cire perdue* process, and is prevalent in Mexico and other parts of the world.

The ornament thus cast is taken out by breaking the *kamdung*. It is scraped with a knife and rubbed with stones to make it clean and bright.

The Craftsman. In the Dafla society every person works, so far as possible, to meet the needs of his daily life. The men make their own weapons, baskets, mats, and cane bags, all kinds of bamboo vessels and hide bags they need. The women do the spinning and weaving. But there are at least two crafts, iron and silver, which are practised only by the specialists. Their services are indispensable to the people in the same way as that of a priest.[1] Indeed, these professions are only a secondary means of livelihood; the primary means of subsistence for them too is cultivation.

The professional skill of these craftsmen gives them some status. They are known by name over wide areas. The people come to an ironsmith's house or workshop for bartering daos and knives with fowls or cereals. They call the silversmith to their houses for making ornaments like *hoofi*. He is offered food, shelter and hospitality, and requested to make the articles nicely. People within the house attend to his needs eagerly so that he may do his best. When he has finished his work, he is paid on the spot before his departure. Payment is in the form of meat, beer, daos, beads and pigs. Normally, the articles made by the silversmith are remembered to have been made by him.

[1] This is also implied in the names. A priest is called *nube*, a silversmith *yeppi nube*, and an ironsmith *ryugmu nube*.

But the Dafla craftsmen do not form any classes. They do not rank high or low in the society. They are, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from the other members of the society.

V. Hunting

The Daflas are expert hunters and none will be found without his set of archery. This consists of a simple bow of about five feet stave, fitted with a durable creeper string, a quiver of bamboo with a woven cane cover and containing plain as well as poisoned arrows, and a bag of red monkey hide. In addition to this, people wear a piece of cane, while shooting, around the fingers of the right hand, and wind a hair rope round the left wrist to receive the rebounding string after the release of the arrow. This equipment, apart from its utility during war and chase, also forms an item of the Dafla dress in their day-to-day life. The training in archery is received at an early age and by the time a boy is in the prime of his youth, he not only learns to shoot with precision but also the necessary field techniques of chase. Hunting as such is a useful occupation, for it adds considerably to the meat supply of the household. But it is much more than that. It is a way of life that brings excitement into the monotonous routine life of agriculture. No moment could be as thrilling as when a team of hunters kills a tiger or a wild boar.

Hunting is an individual as well as a group undertaking. The game forest in its entirety belongs to the village as a whole. No family, or a household, may claim any part of it as its own game-reserve. Thus any person from the village is theoretically free to hunt in any part of the forest he likes; but it is forbidden to disturb the

traps already laid. This prerogative is so strictly adhered to that any infringement leads to an open quarrel and abuse, which can only end when the offender has paid the traditional fine of a pig.

The organization of the hunting team does not follow any rigid pattern. Any man may take the initiative and send word through the village. There are no recognized leaders. Everyone knows his job and works in a team spirit. The composition of the team varies, depending upon whether a few or many people are occupied otherwise. But usually, there is a good response, participants gathering in strength of as many as 20. They take their food, beer, pet dogs, and weapons, and leave in the morning. Often it may be necessary to halt in the jungle for the night under temporary shelters. The method followed during the chase is to surround the area where an animal is supposed to lurk. Young hunters, often guided by an older man, point it to the dogs. The latter with their incessant barking start the game. The hunters hide behind the bush at positions of vantage and, moving cautiously, form a cordon round it. The moment the animal attempts a blind break through in confusion, it is shot with a poisoned arrow in the flank.

Hunting requires tact, patience, courage, and judgement, in addition to an extensive knowledge of topography and animal habits. By studying its foot-prints, a Dafla can tell the species of the animal, its relative size, and the route taken by it. Such marks help a great deal and are remembered. However, a hunter may prefer to mark the place frequented by an animal with crossed bamboo splits for future guidance. The recovery of the quarry again requires caution. Dangerous animals like tigers, panthers and boars, when shot down, are not touched until the poisoned arrow has had its

effect. In the case of deer, however, people run over to the prey as soon as it is brought down.

In the case of community hunting, the game is equally divided among the hunters. The head and skin of the animal are given to the successful hunter who shot it. The arrow that killed the game is taken out and preserved in the house as a token of success. The skull of a boar is kept among other trophies, but that of a monkey is hung near the door opening on the *tumko*.

Apart from the community hunting, which may be once or twice a month, individual enterprises are equally significant. A man may go to the jungle any day in search of small game and return by the evening with the day's bag. However, it is from the hidden traps which he lays that he expects a good catch. A number of these traps are in common use and are based on the principle of lever release. Widely used is the trap called *kuma*. This is an ingenious device by which an animal, while passing by, touches a lever of cane thread resulting in the release of a poisonous bamboo spear which kills it.

Birds, rats and squirrels are caught in and killed by smaller traps. Many of these follow the principle of lever, while some of them are noose-and-spring traps. In the latter kind of traps, a sapling is bent down with an attached noose held insecurely by a holder. The animal caught in the snare, in its attempt to free itself, releases the holder thus causing the sapling to spring back with its body or neck tightly noosed. In catching birds, people make use of a kind of trapping gum called *tachur*. The branches of nut trees, so often frequented by all kinds of birds, are pasted here and there with this gum. The bird perching on them flutters and gets its legs and feathers entangled. The trapper, who sits be-

low in hiding, reaches the bird by climbing a single pole ladder fixed to the tree. Yet another intelligent device is to trap birds by *chirgo*. The gum is pasted to a cane piece joined to a stick holder in the shape of a semi-circle. A kind of fly called *pigin* is suspended by a thread in between the two joints, and the trap is held secure on a long thin bamboo. The trapper hides behind a bush holding the trap and giving it gentle jerks to keep the fly vibrating its wings. The birds, in their attempts to snatch the fly, are trapped by the gum and are bagged quickly.

VI. Fishing

The common method of catching fish is by erecting a dam called *sepa*. At the time of erection, care is taken to select that part of the river bed, which is not very deep and has many huge stones. The dam is constructed with wood and bamboos laid across the river bed and finally tied with cane. The gaps are closed with leaves. The flow of the river is directed through a long cage of bamboo made on one side of the dam. Fish, in their attempts to swim forward, are checked by the dam and are automatically directed into the current. Once they come and enter the cage, they are pushed forward by the flow of water and are caught and collected by the men who are on watch there. Big fish, however, are first struck hard with a stick and stunned and then picked up in their unconscious state.

Another method is by poisoning the water. This is done in shallow streams. An artificial barricade is made with stones and banana stumps and the water is directed to flow on one side. The bark of *tam* or *mup* is brought from the jungle and placed on a stone near the pool. It

is hammered with a wooden pestle and water is added to soften it into a pulp. When it is ready, its juice is squeezed out in the pool. The process is continued till the bark has left all its colour. The fish are disturbed from under the stones and, when they enter the pool, faint from the effect of the poison.

In shallow waters, fish are also trapped in a conical basket called *sikam*. Apart from these, there are other trapping baskets meant for individual fishing. In certain villages, small nets made of fibre strings are also used. Stones are tied to the nets to give them weight. The nets as a rule are set inside the water, tied to stones, and kept stretched. Fish swimming across get entangled in the nets and are taken out. The men, and even the young children, occasionally, succeed in catching fish with their bare hands during the night. This is possible, for the 'fish at night sleep under stones.'

Fish is a delicacy among the Daflas. Hence the fishing dams are claimed by the local members of a clan, and occasionally, by a particular family. In certain areas, for example, in the villages around the Nyapin Administrative Centre, omens are taken before the construction of a weir. It is only when the omens are good that the people construct one and expect a good catch. Fishing by *sepa* usually amounts to a heavy catch and continues for three to four days. During these days, men do not go home and eat only fish and rice. All other meat and vegetables are taboo. Though *sepa* prerogatives are guarded against infringement by the people of other villages, yet by courtesy, members of the same village often join in the enterprise. The daily catch is then equally divided and is smoked to preserve for months.

VII. Livestock

Among the livestock, mithuns are the most important. They are greatly prized as objects of sacrifice to the Wiyus. They are used for payment of bride price and form the standard of value for exchange of precious things such as *majis*. They are the most acceptable as compensation for any crime including murder and were formerly used for ransoming captives. Their socio-religious utility is so significant that they are treated with the greatest care and affection.

Each mithun is given a personal name and one or two of them, especially cow-mithuns, may be the favourites of the owner. They are branded on the ears to distinguish them from those belonging to others. Normally, they wander in the nearby jungle and return in the evening to the drinking place. The owners keep watch and bring them home for salt licks. Certain water points are thought to be good for the mithuns' health, and hence, once or twice a month, they are taken there for drinking. Despite all precautions, however, the foot-and-mouth disease takes a heavy toll each year. The people have no remedy except keeping them in water and performing sacrifices for their recovery. In case a mithun is sick, it may be sacrificed or allowed to die as ordained by the Wiyus. In both the cases, meat is preserved by smoking and eaten for months. The Daflas do not milk them.

Next to the mithun stands the pig, as it is difficult to take cows to higher regions. It is useful in various sacrifices. It is the established form of currency to obtain valuables. It is also used for the payment of bride-price. Being cheaper and easier to rear, pigs are available in large numbers. They are fed on *taseh,* raw

banana fruits, and the remains of brewings. Pigs loiter within the village but, during the harvesting season, are kept in the pigsties to keep them out of the fields.

Cows and goats are available in comparatively small numbers. Since they are reared for their meat only and are not very important for religious purposes, little care is taken of them. They may wander in the outskirts of the village and feed on grass and leaves. Fowls in the Dafla houses are indispensable for obvious reasons. They are the common objects of sacrifice and exchange. Eggs and chickens are necessary for taking omens. The Daflas rarely kill a fowl for the sake of its meat. It is only when sacrifices are made that they roast and eat it.

As pets dogs are invaluable to the Daflas. Whether in guarding the fields, or in hunting, they are constant companions. The children are very fond of them. Often they tie mice to cane strings and run about in the house. The dogs run after them to catch the mice. The play continues for hours to the enjoyment of children and the members of the family. They also dig small pits below the granaries to shelter a bitch and its puppies. They carry the latter in their laps to protect them from cold. Dogs are not allowed to wade a river by themselves and, even in crossing shallow streams, they are lifted across. Despite all the affection they get from the members of the family, they feed only on the remains of the meals. They are trained not to steal food or prove a nuisance during meals.

Except for averting the dangers of witchcraft, the Daflas do not sacrifice dogs. Unlike the Apa Tanis, eating of dogs among them is rare.

VIII. Agriculture

Despite hunting, fishing, and livestock breeding,

cultivation is the main activity of the Daflas. There is no dearth of land, but in so simple a culture, where ploughing and the wheel are unheard of, the tools for deriving sustenance are few, and judged from the standards of developed communities, even crude. The methods are exacting, and the effort and energy spent are much greater in proportion to the product obtained. Nevertheless, in a society, where everyone not merely works but has to work very hard, this disadvantage is rarely felt.

Cultivation is a laborious process. The method followed is the usual slash-and-burn agriculture, ash serving as a fertilizer. When a plot exhausts its fertility in a period of three to four years, it is left fallow to grow with scrub till it recoups for use again. The selection of a new plot does not involve much trouble. Indeed, a man will prefer to have the plot comparatively nearer to the village, with a gentle slope rather than an abrupt steepness, and with soil rather than stones. But in practice, these considerations do not matter much. Often *rikte* or distant plots are located at a distance of more than a mile, necessitating a long walk everyday. The nearer plots called *balu,* however, are more intensively cultivated than the former and may be viewed as kitchen gardens. Once the site has been selected, the jungle patch is cleared of its undergrowth, creepers and scrub, and the debris is allowed to dry up. In this operation the trees are marked by dao-cuts to indicate the boundary of the plot, which may be fenced properly at a later stage. After a few days the large trees are felled with axes, which are not different from those used in the plains of Assam. Protruding branches are then slashed with daos. The wood is allowed to dry for several weeks before it is burnt to serve as a fertilizer. The work of

cutting and burning starts by the middle of December and continues till the middle of March. Normally, windy days are selected for burning. This avoids a second burning, which would be necessary, if the fire fail to cover the whole compass of the plot. Big tree trunks, however, are left unburnt to decay.

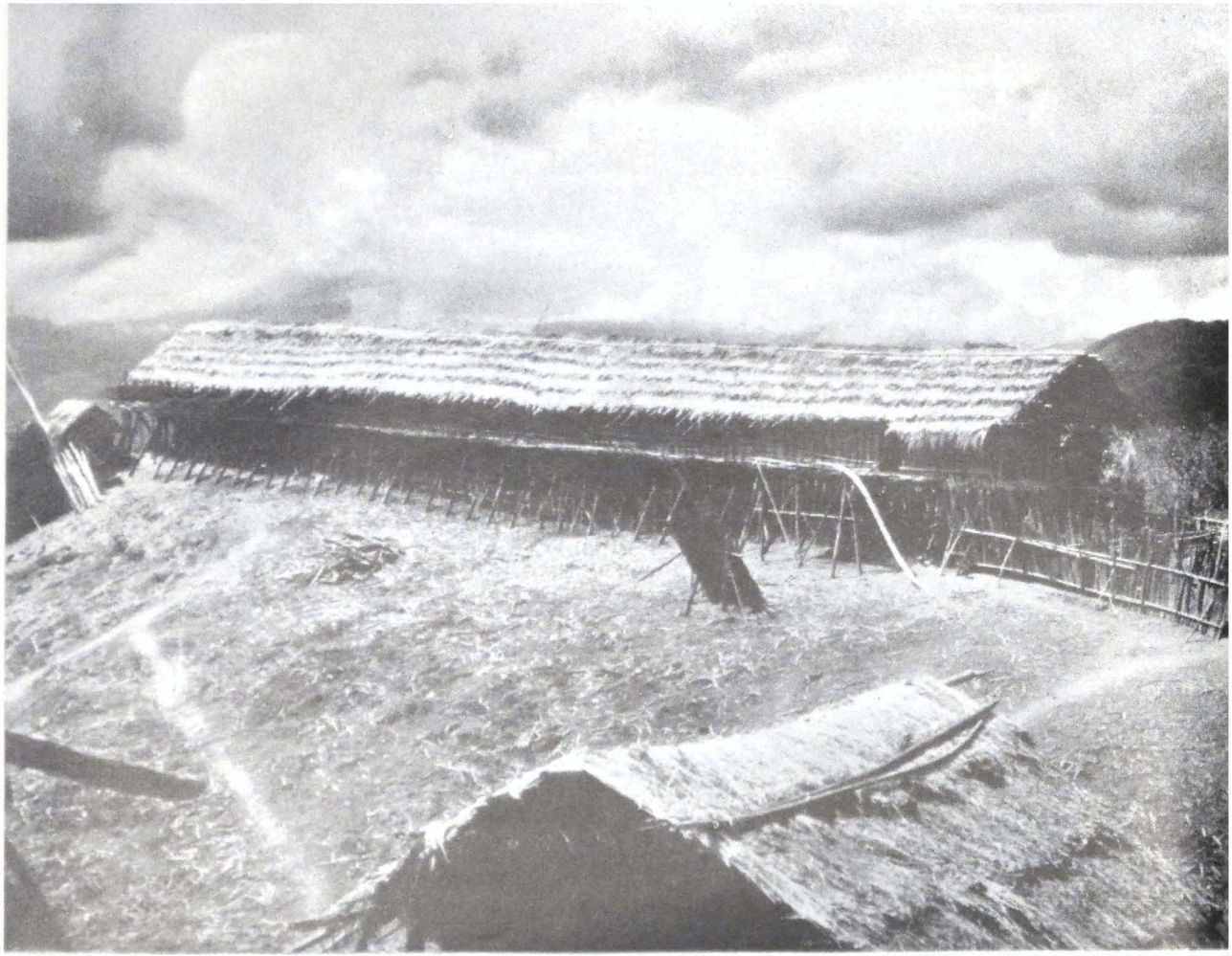
The felling of trees is a strenuous task and is done by men alone. The plots, which for the purpose of cultivation and collection of cereals belong to women, are cleared by the men members of the homestead. However, the long monotony of arduous labour may be avoided by a co-operative system called *reglung*. An invitation is sent to the members of the village for felling trees on a particular day. Courtesy requires that, unless otherwise occupied, everyone should join the team. The women, for whom the plot is cleared, only too gladly brew beer in large quantities and prepare rice for the workers, who are served food at noon. Thus a cumbersome task is turned into a small festive occasion. Women cheer the men with beer and jokes, who work with enthusiasm and in high spirits. In the preparation of old plots there is not so much expense, either of time or of effort. The previous year's stumps and grasses are scraped and burnt by women with comparative ease. The soil is loosened by the *lodap*, which is a kind of dibble with an oval iron spoon fixed in a bamboo handle of about a foot length.

The Daflas have only one crop during the year Due to the hilly terrain of the country, irrigation is virtually impossible except at a few places, where they have taken to wet-rice cultivation by making terraces. However, the annual rainfall, varying from 80 to 100 inches or more, is sufficient enough to keep the soil damp throughout the region. The raising of the bulk of the crops

AGRICULTURAL CALENDAR

Seasons	*Months*	*English Months*	*Activities*
Duri Polu	Leking	March-April	This is the busiest month for sowing tubers such as *ini, guria, ninkang, ningryo, tapar* and *ninke.*
-do-	Lechir	April-May	Sowing of different kinds of paddy such as *lengbu, ampa, taba, amdo, rakhi, kapa* and *yayum* is the main activity during the month. These are mainly sown in the distant fields. Cotton may also be sown.
-do-	Yulu or Hilu	May-June	Weeding is the main activity of the month. People may also go for hunting and fishing.
-do-	Tilu	June-July	Weeding is continued in this month.
-do-	Sengo	July-August	Reaping of early paddy such as *teming, minsang* and *mingte,* which have been sown in *balu,* is started.
-do-	Sengte	August-September	Weeding is the main activity in the fields, which during the day are also guarded. Reaping of early paddy is completed. *Tayak,* a kind of light millet is reaped and eaten.
Dra Polu	Pira or Pra	September-October	Maize is reaped and brought to the granaries. The most important activity of the month, however, is the collection of bamboo shoots. Other activities are hunting and fishing.
-do-	Libi	October-November	Reaping of various kinds of paddy sown in distant fields is started during this month and the new crops are eaten. All kinds of vegetables are taken out.
-do-	Ralih	November-December	Reaping of paddy is over by the beginning of the month. This is the month for reaping *timi,* a light millet mainly useful in the preparation of beer. Digging of cultivated tubers is completed during the month.
-do-	Rajo	December-January	This is the month for selecting and cutting new jhums. Women may start clearing the undergrowth of the old plots. Other activities are bringing of the construction materials for new houses and spinning and weaving.
-do-	Rate	January-February	In this month, in addition to cutting, the burning of jhums is also an important activity. The *balu* plots are prepared and light millets like *mami, tai, tanam* and *timi* are sown. Early paddy is sown in this month along with maize.
-do-	Limi or Date	February-March	Jhum cutting and burning is more or less completed by now. Women sow maize in *rikte.* Vegetables like chillies, pumpkin and beans are sown. Tobacco of local variety is sown in *balu.*

A Dafla wearing a fibre cloak as a protection against rain



A typical Dafla long-house

requires the agricultural operations to continue throughout the year. The various phases are determined ultimately by the weather and the season, but are timed to the appearance of particular types of birds and insects. Thus, with the coming of the *yaya* insect people think that it is high time to burn their jhums. When the *pako* bird sings, they sow maize. Chanting of the *chepe, pipi* and *pinching* is taken to be an indication that they should sow paddy in distant clearings.

The Dafla agricultural year, consisting of 12 months, each month roughly of 30 days,[1] has two main seasons: the summer or Duri Polu, and the winter or Dra Polu. Each season has six months and is indicated by the flowering of different plants. The annual cycle of work (p. 44) describes the agricultural and other economic activities month by month. We start from the month of Leking, which is the first month of the summer season, and corresponds to the middle of March to middle of April.

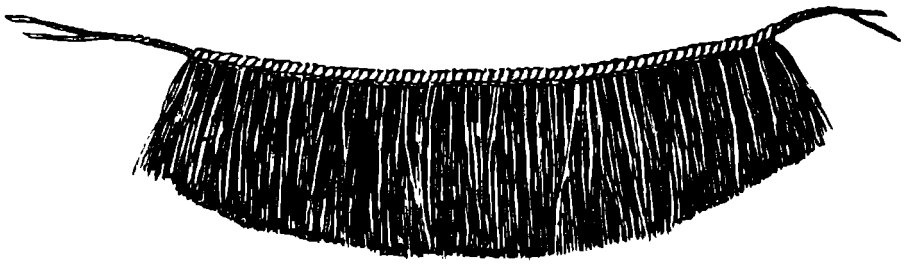
Sowing. Sowing, which starts by the month of February in the nearer fields continues up to April in the case of distant plots. Normally in the *balus* only those crops are sown which ripen earlier. They secure people against the food shortage when the bulk of the crops are ripening in the *riktes*. While paddy and maize seeds are sown, light millets such as *tai* and *timi* (*Eleusine coracana*) are simply broadcast all over the field.

The sowing is done by women who carry the seeds in a pot-shaped basket called *chungcha*. It is tied at the waist on the left side. The women hold the digging stick of bamboo in the right, and seeds in the left hand. They bend down and dig holes in succession. Simultaneously, they go on dropping two to three seeds of maize, or four

[1] The Daflas reckon their months on the basis of the moon. The view held by many of them, that each month has 30 days, is not unanimous.

to five seeds of paddy, in each hole. A large number of seeds sown not only insure against the non-sprouting, but also against the damage done to them by field-mice and cut-worms.

Sowing is a tedious job since it requires women to remain bent for hours. Usually it is done by three to four women, who starting from one end of the field proceed forward in a line. Each kind of seed is separately shown and the holes, which receive it, are spaced about a foot or so apart. After sowing, the holes are covered and the soil is made even with a broom tied in a bamboo stick. A typical Dafla field is always mixed, a variety of crops growing together in close proximity. At several places vegetables and tubers are sown and may be seen climbing on the decaying tree trunks and maize plants.



A grass skirt worn by Dafla women while they work in the jhums

Weeding. When the seeds sprout and attain a height of four to five inches, weeding is carefully done. In this activity men and women join together. It is done with the *tabupe,* which is a strip of hard bamboo about one foot and a half, warmed on a fire, bent in two, and twisted to make a round head with two ends for holding in the right hand. A dibble with an iron spoon is also used in this process. Weeding is a piecemeal operation

and each field is weeded twice before the crops start ripening.

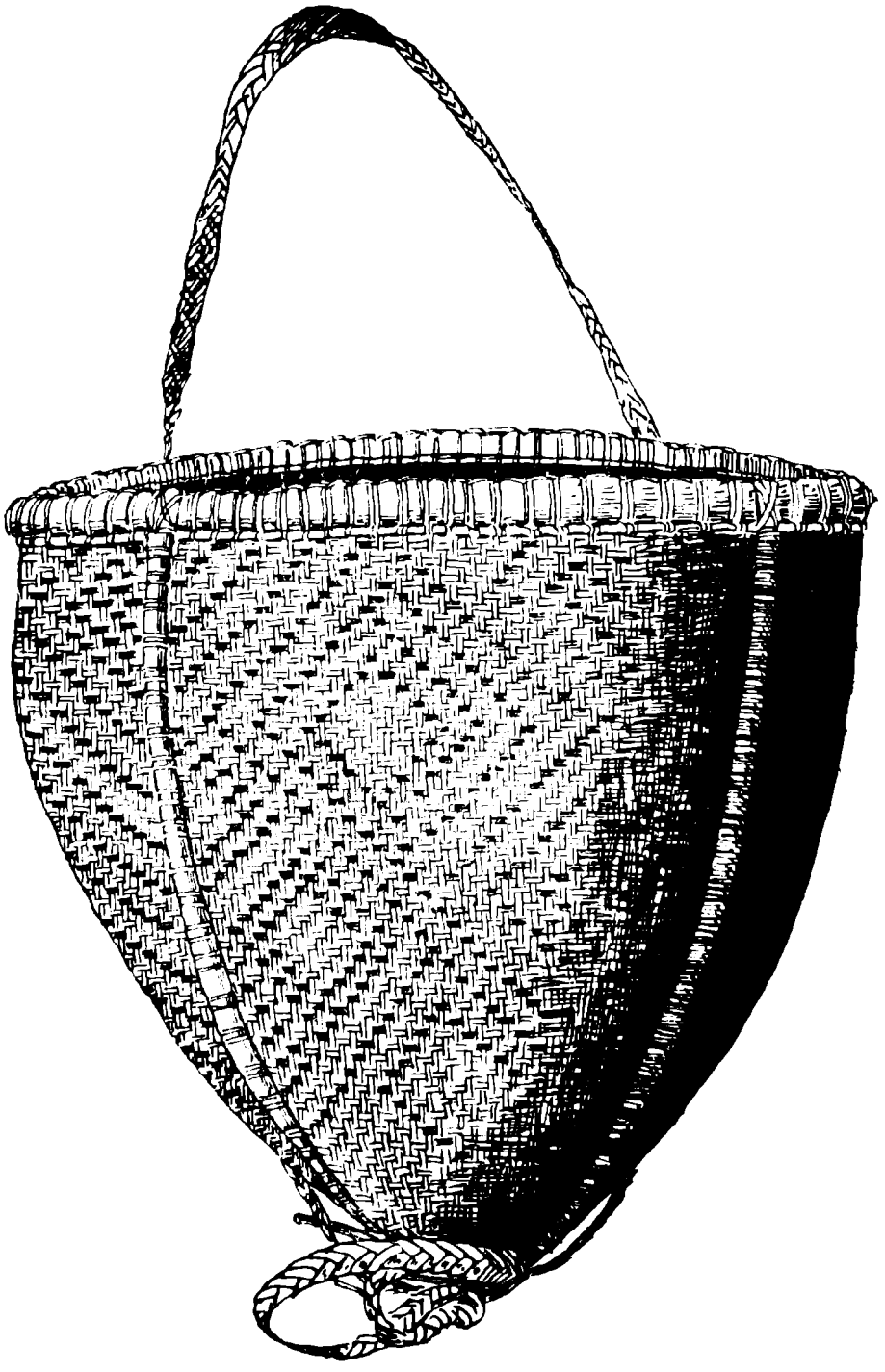
Since in the activities such as sowing and weeding clothes always get soiled, women often wear skirts made of millet straw.

Guarding and Reaping. When plants grow to a certain height, guarding them against damage is an important task. The danger of damage increases when the crops start ripening. Birds, rats, monkeys and wild boars are a continuous source of menace. The people have a number of devices to scare them, and keep them away from the fields. Since distant clearings are not always fenced, bamboo split arches are made all round to frighten them. The common device, however, is the use of scarecrows. A number of bamboo poles are erected on the ground throughout the field. Each of these is cut at its upper length for about a foot into two halves and tied with a cane string. The other end of the string is fastened to the watch-hut in the field. Whenever one or more strings are pulled by the man guarding the field, the scarecrows make a rattle and frighten the birds away.

In most of the distant clearings small huts are constructed and men and women stay in them during the reaping season. Reaping is done by hand, though occasionally a sickle may be seen in use. The grains are pulled away by hand and collected in the conical baskets used for carrying burden. They are temporarily stored in the field-huts before being taken to the village granaries by women in baskets carried on their backs.

Storing and Consumption. The threshing of paddy is complete in the reaping operation itself. In many villages, where ears along with the part of stumps are pulled, they are struck hard against a wooden piece put in the basket for collection. At times, it may be neces-

sary to thresh them again. This is done by spreading the paddy on a mat and then working on it with the feet. Light millets also undergo threshing in this manner.



Ege, a typical Dafla cane basket

Maize grains are removed from their cobs by hand. The cereals are preserved in big bamboo baskets, or are heaped on mats within the granary. There is no remedy for the damage by rats.

Sweet-potatoes and other tubers are generally dug up as and when required, but they are preserved for the next sowing season in the fields. A sizeable pit is dug in a slope and dry straw of millet and paddy are put inside it all round. The roots, which have been dried of their skin moisture, are then heaped up and covered with a thick layer of straw and dry leaves, on which big stones are placed and the pit is covered with earth. Additional stones, and even tree trunks, are placed finally for greater security. Since the storage pits are dug in slopes, the possibility of rain water trickling inside and decaying the roots is lessened.

To make the cereals ready for consumption, they are brought from the granary everyday, dried on mats placed on the hearth trays, and finally pounded with pestles in mortars. They are husked and winnowed in the winnowing-fans before they are ready for cooking.

The Daflas believe that good crops are always the result of the wishes of Parte Rinte Wiyus. If, in any year, the crops go bad, they are propitiated by the offerings of fowls. When crops are obtained from the *riktes* for the first time, rich Daflas sacrifice a pig and invite the kinsmen and other members of the village to enjoy the feastings. Such occasions are marked by singing and dancing.

IX. Food and Drink

A meal to the Dafla is cooked rice, meat, vegetables, and beer. Fresh meat is not always available and hence it is smoked, dried and preserved. Fresh or otherwise soft meat is roasted over the fire, the crust scraped off,

and cut into pieces with a knife. Smoked meat however, is boiled in water. When it becomes soft, chillies and salt are added before it is served in bamboo plates. Rice is cooked in earthen pots and the excess liquid is collected in bamboo mugs for drinking.

Next to rice, maize is the only cereal which can be prepared for consumption in various ways. To make bread, it is first turned into flour on a grindstone. Sufficient water is added and it is kneaded into dough. The dough so made is flattened on large leaves which are wrapped up from all sides. The packet is then inserted into the ashes of the hearth and burning coals are placed over it. Within twenty minutes it is taken out and is ready for eating. To make a sort of porridge, flour is added to boiling water and stirred with a bamboo spoon until it is cooked to the required thickness. The easiest way to enjoy maize, however, is to place the grains over ashes and stir them to and fro with bamboo tongs. The moment each bursts into a white pop, it is picked up with tongs and eaten. A number of light millets like *timi* and *tai* are also ground into flour to make bread or porridge.

The Daflas have a vast knowledge of vegetables and roots. Wild roots of numerous varieties are searched for and detected by their creepers. The digging may occasionally take a long time, but the effort is rewarded if the root is heavy. A number of wild leafy vegetables are also collected. While roots are roasted in ashes and coals, vegetables are always boiled and mixed with cooked rice while eating. Roots of the jungle supplement the normal food supply for a number of months, but a fairly regular supply of tubers like sweet-potatoes can only be obtained from the jhums for a few months after reaping.

On the rottening tree trunks lying in jungle and

jhums grow a number of mushrooms. Many of these are poisonous and are believed by the people to be eaten only by the Wiyus. But many varieties are harmless and are sought for as additional dishes. They add taste and flavour to the vegetables with which they may be boiled. Bamboo shoots, which are collected by men and women in the months of September and October, are considered a great delicacy. They are preserved in large quantities for the annual need and are used in each meal. They may be boiled with other vegetables or separately. A number of insects collected from jhums and jungle are also eaten. They are either roasted or boiled. The people make various kinds of chutneys with bamboo shoots, ginger, chillies and spices such as *hanam*.

The most important drink of the Daflas is *apong*. It is believed that the ferment for the preparation of this beer was received by Abo Teni in mythical times. Since then it continues to be made and used again and again. Beer among the Daflas has social as well as ceremonial significance. It is necessary in all important ceremonies, and before a man drinks, a little quantity is invariably dropped on the ground for the ancestral ghosts. In daily life it is an essential part of the Dafla diet. All guests are entertained with beer and the mug is passed from one to another. As an exhilarating drink it is excellent, though in taste it may vary from sweet to sour.

To prepare the ferment, it is necessary to have a few tablets in stock and ready at hand for use. Rice or *timi*-millet is made into flour and the tablets are mixed with it thoroughly. It is moistened with water till the dough can be made into tablets. These are then packed in leaves and are not opened for five to six days. Each tablet so made is used in fermenting the millet for beer.

Beer can be made with millet, rice or maize. But beer brewed from maize is supposed to give you a headache, and that from rice a pain in the stomach. It is millet alone which is suited to the preparation of fine beer. To prepare beer, first water is put to boil and the required quantity of millet is added to it. It is stirred with a bamboo spoon until the water evaporates. It is then spread on a mat. When it cools the ferment is mixed with it. It is placed on leaves in a basket and finally wrapped up and tied. The basket is kept for three days and then it is ready for brewing. Whenever it is necessary to prepare beer, the required quantity of fermented millet is taken out and put in a funnel placed over a gourd. Often a little ash of the millet chaff is added to give it a finer taste. Warm water is slowly poured into the funnel and the liquid that trickles down is the *apong*.

The first small brew of the beer is called *potu* and is the finest. The second brewing is called *pobam* and is inferior in quality. But later brewings are only *poka* which is thin. It has the smell of beer, but not its potency. It may fill the stomach, but does not taste good.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL LIFE

I. THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIETY

An important feature of the Dafla society is its organization into several social groups. These are mainly based on mythical traditions, kinship, locality, and social status. Our main object in this chapter is to discuss those groups specially founded on kinship, which regulate such institutions as marriage and the inheritance of widows. We shall, accordingly, begin by dealing with the tribe and its main divisions and give an outline of the clans. Further, we shall describe the nuclear and the extended families, give in brief the life cycle and end the chapter with a discussion on the institution of marriage. We will not consider groups founded on status, or the two classes of freemen and slaves, and the voluntary groups of hunters, fishers, jhum-cutters and house-builders, which find a place elsewhere in this treatise.

The Tribe and its Divisions. All the Daflas are related to each other as children of a common ancestor Abo Teni. All the relevant myths indicate that he is a half real, and half mythical character. The Daflas are good at remembering genealogies and the paternal line of descendants is remembered in detail, beginning with Abo Teni right to the present generation. Abo Teni's descendant was Atu Nyah, whose son was Herin. Herin's son was Ringdo who had three sons, namely, Dodum, Dol, and Dopum. These three sons then form, as it were, the three main divisions of the tribe. The Dodum and Dol groups still form a large majority, but the Dopum Daflas are now very few in number. For the purpose of marriage,

these major groups are endogamous as well as exogamous. That is to say that a Dafla, belonging to the Dol group, for example, may either marry within his own group or outside it with members of the other groups. Except for the purposes of tracing descent and migrations, therefore, these divisions are not significant. More important are the phratries and clans.

Phratries and Clans. The three major divisions of the tribe are subdivided into a number of exogamous phratries, which in turn, comprise of a number of patrilineal clans. Due to the lack of data from the widely separated and hitherto unknown areas, it is not possible to give an exhaustive list of all the phratries and clans. What is presented below is only a partial list based on the existing groups in the Panior, Palin and parts of the Khru valleys, and in the areas around the Nyapin Administrative Centre.[1]

Major Division	*Phratry*	*Clans*
Dol	Durum-Dui	Tasu, Likha, Chuhu, Pil, Hijang, Harku, Takyang, Chonyu, Yowa, Tade, Tajing, Byabang, Byajang (Nengbia), Byari, Ganku, Gami, Dohu, Dolang and Dobam.
	Dukum-Duri	Tari, Tai, Hora, Huryang, Ryangpa, Ryangra, Ryankyo, Ryangme, Takyo, Tame, Tadang, Tali, Lindum, Linko, Gida, Gichik, Biri, Dadung, Damang, Khyoda and Joram.
Dodum	Kemdir	Pei, Pochu, Nara, Ralo, Toku, Tab, Telih, Taha.
	Dumchi-Chili	Yumri, Yumdo, Khasang, Rengu, Nabom, Hidu, Hibu, Gyamar.
	Pekhi	Devya, Sodu, Sobum, Niri, Kholi, Tao, Techi, Tana.

[1] For a fuller account of the Dafla phratries and clans see C. von Furer-Haimendorf, *Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of the Subansiri Region* (Shillong, 1947), pp. 1 ff.

Whereas it is possible to give at least an outline of the subdivisions of the Dol and Dodum groups, little is yet known of the subgroups of the Dopum Daflas. There are a few scattered clans of this group especially the Gnuri, Gnurang, Hilang, Heba, Deying, Hodu, and the Hopu. Nothing is known about the phratries of this major group. Some of the clans of this group, such as Tede and Deke are extinct.

In the villages around the Nyapin Administrative Centre exist a number of clans who claim to have descended from Atu Nyah through Riku. Thus they constitute a separate major division. We do not yet know the phratries of this group, but the important clans are the Teder, Tayer, Tayi, Take and the Rare. These clans claiming their descent through Gnukha, a descendant of Riku, do not intermarry. Other scattered clans are the Charu, Pate, Lido, Linya, Liyo and the Lidung. The Gollo clan, which Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf includes in the Dol group,[1] actually belongs to this Riku group. The well-known priest of this clan, Gollo Tegin, lives in the village of Tapo Gollo near the village of Mengo. He traces his descent from Riku, through Pale, Gnuri, Mabu, Tayang, Dago, Kagnu, Kojum, Tago, Kanu, and Tamang in a direct line.

Without going into the details of the phratries and clans, two features of the Dafla clans should be noted. In the first place, the clans are not totemistic. Each clan is named after an ancestor, who is thought by the people to have been real. The clan consists of a few lineages or groups of men and women, who trace descent from that ancestor in the patrilineal line. Secondly, all the members of the clan regard themselves as brothers and

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

sisters. Thus clan exogamy is the rule for marriage. This criterion is further extended to the phratries which too are exogamous. The inter-relationship of clans within a phratry is very loose, but for the purposes of marriage, the members act as if they were consanguineous kin.

Beyond this, a clan does not function as a close social unit. Not all its members occupy a common territory. The whole clan is not a political unit for war and peace, nor is it a unit for economic and religious purposes. In fact, only those members of a clan, who are also bound together by the bonds of individual kinship and neighbourhood, form a unit for the above purposes. This leads us to a consideration of the structure of the Dafla family and the extended family or kin.

II. The Family

The Dafla family is polygynous. It consists of the father, his wives, and unmarried children who live under the same roof. Its structure, as of any other family, keeps on changing with the change of members composing it. The father may bring another wife, a daughter goes to live with her husband, or again the death of a member brings about a change. Nevertheless, the above description gives the usual pattern. The husband lives, as seen in the majority of cases, with the eldest wife, though he sleeps with each wife in turn. Variations in this practice, however, may occur due to especial circumstances. Thus in the case of Toko Chada, his first wife, who is barren, willingly agreed that he should live with the second wife. Byabang Ekha of Radeng too lives with another wife. His first wife is old though still hard working. But she did not object to the new arrangement. It is difficult to lay down any definite criterion for the deviations from the normal practice. But old

age and barrenness often make a man live with the second wife.

The above picture is by no means complete, for within a single homestead also live a man's brothers or cousins, their wives and children. In other words its members are two or more lineally related kinsfolk of the same sex, their wives and children. This group of families may roughly be described as a joint family, though it should be remembered that they are not necessarily subject to the head of the house. When quarrels become frequent between the families, one of them may move to live in the house of another lineal relative, or establish a separate home in the vicinity. Each family within the homestead is independent of the other. The clearings are separate and the produce is not jointly stocked. The economic and blood ties, however, are not lessened by the domestic independence. All the members of this unit work together in each other's clearings turn by turn. The men join in hunting and fishing and participate in feastings and socio-religious activities.

Apart from these members, there are other lineal kinsfolk who, though not living within the same house, live at least in the same locality. In a lesser degree they too form an economic unit in the enterprises of daily life.

A particular behaviour pattern emerges among the members of the homestead. All elderly male members of the ascending generation are respected. A child not only obeys his father, but also his uncles and grandfather. Obedience to elders is a part of training for the Dafla children. However, when a son is adolescent, the father as a rule takes his opinion on domestic matters. A different pattern exists for the women who come as wives. The attitude of a grown-up boy towards them appears to be one of avoidance, except for the elder

brother's or cousin's wives with whom he may jest. Nevertheless, this avoidance is practised to preclude a man from stealing sexual favours from a woman during the lifetime of her legal husband. As we shall see, all such women can rightfully be inherited by a man after the death of his brother or father.

Among the Daflas descent is reckoned through the males only. Thus it is agnatic or patrilineal. For the sake of convenience in remembering their genealogies, people follow a simple rule. While giving the name to a son, they add the last syllable of the father's name to his name in the beginning. Thus, Herin's son is named Ringdo for the reckoning of descent, though ordinarily he may have a popular name like Tado. Descent is important from the point of inheritance of widows, since only close agnatic descendants inherit. The Daflas demarcate this group from the rest by partaking of the sacrificed pig's blood together. None, who is not a member of this group, can have the privilege of sharing it. Adoption is very rare. A slave, though not formally adopted, however, takes the clan name of his master.

Position of Wives. The Dafla customary law is silent over the rights of women. In the minds of the people, for all practical purposes, a wife is obtained for a specific payment. Consequently, the husband claims all rights over her person and the labour of which she is capable. In fact, if a person punishes, or even killls her for a misdeed such as adultery, her kinsmen may be offended, but will not be entitled to demand legal redress. She cannot leave her husband legally, unless someone compensates him for the loss. This is one reason which makes divorce difficult. Theoretically at least, unless a person is prepared to pay with mithuns, neither husband nor wife can divorce each other.

In the field of religion, women hardly have any privileges. A woman does not take part in the religious ceremonies, except in the preparation of beer for ceremonial use. She may watch but does not participate. The same is true of political activities. She has no say in public affairs. Except for the sake of evidence, her presence is not required in the assemblies which decide cases.

These considerations, and the factor of polygyny, however, should not lead us to think that the Dafla wives are merely chattels, only a little better than slaves. There is no such thing as a high or low position of women, but it is only relatively high or low within particular domains. The Dafla women have more privileges and freedom in the household than in the political and religious spheres.

Each wife has a separate hearth by which she lives. She has a plot of her own which she cultivates. Indeed, she has to work hard in the clearings, but the husband cuts the crops and helps in the cultivation. She has poultry of her own and may have pigs and goats. The economic partnership requires that she should do the household work, bring firewood, and provide her children with food, edible roots, mushrooms and vegetables. She is not required to offer food to her husband every day. It is a matter which entirely depends upon the mutual understanding of the wives themselves. The obligations, which she is supposed to fulfil, are in fact those which she willingly performs to keep her husband pleased. Whatever the mutual arrangement, a loving wife provides her husband with beer almost every day.

On the other hand, if she is displeased with him, she can easily disturb the peace of the house. Bickerings may result in quarrels and she may go to the back balcony

of the house to cry and weep. She may abuse the husband and attract the attention of the people in the village. This naturally brings shame on the husband. If the quarrel goes too far, she may run away to any other man who gives her shelter. Occasionally, such cases do occur and they lead to a lot of complications.

With our ideas of monogamy, it is perhaps difficult to realize how a man can live peacefully with a number of wives. It should be remembered that here fidelity extends to several wives instead of one. He should try to divide his favours as equitably as possible. A father takes active interest in the training of all his children. Paternal duty requires that he should try to get all of his sons married by paying the bride-price. He should also see that his daughters are married and fetch good wealth. Once he fulfils these duties, the sons and daughters pursue the normal career. A Dafla is greatly relieved of his burden when his sons are married.

Traditionally, the eldest wife has a greater say in the household affairs, and has in her charge the *majis* and *talus,* which she secretly buries in the ground. Many wives virtually control their husbands in such matters as the sale of a mithun or the children's marriages. This is due to their personality rather than to any right granted to them under the customary law.

III. The Life-Cycle

A Dafla child is a gift of the Wiyus. 'A woman may sleep with her husband every night and yet not conceive', says Toko Dum, wife of Likha Teji of Likha village, 'It is only when Duini and Polo are pleased that she may have a child'. As a pre-requisite, a fundamental physiological necessity, the fact that a girl will not conceive till after her first menstruation is recognized.

Conception is linked with the act of love, though it is not one but a series of sexual efforts that establishes physiological paternity. However, once a woman conceives, her husband's work is over, since it is for the Chengtom Bot Wiyu to shape the baby in the womb. Normally, a young woman conceives within one to three years of her married life, failing which appropriate sacrifices are made to the Wiyus. Barrenness is considered a misfortune and a barren woman is miserable all her life.

Dreams play a great part in foretelling the sex of the embryo. A dream of purchasing a smoking pipe indicates a son, and a *rini,* the bell for decorating the woman's neck, indicates a girl. A dream of banana plants laden with fruits, or bamboo shoots sprouting up the ground, indicates the coming of children.

Pregnancy is recognized in the second month, and after five months, when there are foetal movements, the side on which the movements regularly occur are taken to signify the sex of the baby. If it is on the left, the probability is a son, for a man holds the stave of his bow in the left hand. The movements on the right side indicate a girl. During pregnancy, certain food cravings are observed and the women commonly eat baked earth from the hearth and ashes of millet chaff. The period of gestation lasts for nine to ten months and a baby born earlier than nine may not survive.

Pregnancy intrudes but little upon a woman's regular work. She continues her cultivation, grinds corn, cooks, and brings firewood and water for the household. The change is gradual and inconspicuous. The feminine ideal, at least during the first pregnancy, requires not only a show of modesty but also a pretence of innocence. Pregnancy is not a subject for proud exhi-

bition and a girl will never talk about it in the presence of her elders. Modesty and shyness lessen, however, as she gets accustomed to it with the advance of age. Custom does not demand any period of abstinence.

Morning sickness and vomitting are infrequent, though, in the advanced stages, there may be pain in the back, which is considered normal. But, in a case of acute pain, the priest may be called to make sacrifices to the Wiyus. The woman is supposed to observe certain taboos during this period. For instance, she does not eat from a bamboo tube or a metal plate for fear that she will bleed excessively during the delivery.[1] Nor does she go to a house where death has occurred for fear that the child will die. Likewise, the husband does not fell big trees, nor eat in a house where a death has occurred. Among many tribes in India there is the belief that the sight of an eclipse harms the baby in the womb. No such belief is held by the Daflas and the pregnant woman may see an eclipse without any fear of evil.

Childbirth. Childbirth is a simple affair. Normally the woman continues her daily work until the labour pains start. The place of delivery is the enclosure where the fowls are kept, though it may occasionally take place in the house. There are no professional midwives. Only one or two old women may attend. The delivering woman sits on her knees and the attending woman holds her shoulders from the back. If the baby is not delivered, the attendant may put her knees on the delivering woman's back and ask her to exert pressure. This process usually results in a safe delivery. Nobody touches the baby until it is fully delivered. The mother then ties a thread at two points on the umbilical cord,

[1] This belief is limited only to the Panior region. The women during pregnancy eat food served on leaves.

at a distance of approximately two inches. It is cut between the two points, by a sharp edged piece of bamboo, kept ready specifically for that purpose. The placenta is thrown below the house, and is not subjected to any special care at its disposal. Often it is eaten by the pigs. The baby is immediately washed with lukewarm water and the mother comes with her child to her hearth and sits near the fire.

The priest is called the next day. He takes omens from a chicken's liver and gives the baby a suitable name, in keeping with the patrilineal line of his ancestors. The baby girl may be named after the month, for example, Pra, or be given one of the traditional names such as Yamang, Yarang, Yasap or Yanyang. The next day following the naming ceremony the child is washed again, and the visitors are offered drinks of beer and if possible, food. The mother washes her clothes the next day, and then again on the sixth day, after which the baby can be taken out of the house and the mother can attend to her normal duties. The stump falls away from the baby within five or six days. Postnatal abstinence lasts for a month. A man breaking the taboo invokes the wrath of the Wiyus who may kill him.[1] During this period the woman does not eat any meat procured from the jungle, nor any meat that has been brought by a priest after a sacrifice.

Complications in delivery may occur at times, and this is always attributed to mischief caused by the Wiyus, who are immediately given offerings by the priest. An abnormal delivery may result in the death of the mother. According to the Dafla tradition, if a woman dies in delivery, and the omens in the egg confirm that the baby

[1] This is again limited to the villages of the Panior region. In other areas, the abstinence period varies from 10 to 15 days.

is unlucky, the dead mother and the living baby are buried together.

Early Childhood and Training. The Dafla baby is born and brought up in nature. In its first months it is never away from the mother's breasts or someone's arms. Wrapped in a blanket or cloth that the mother or sister puts on, it enjoys the warm security of their bodies. It sleeps in comfort with the mother's nipple in the mouth. When it is six to eight months, it has learnt to remain on the back well supported in a sling. Now the mother can safely leave it for hours in the care of another, daughter or son. If the baby cries, the finger is inserted in its mouth as a substitute for the nipple and to quieten it is rocked or sung to. Inside the house lying on a mat it watches the glowing fire, while the mother busily prepares the evening meal. Both father and mother may teach it the first terms of address, *one* and *abu,* mother and father. The imparting of early education continues, most interestingly, by the repetitive method.

When children begin walking, it is not a source of trouble. Clothes are hung well above their reach. Beads, clay pots and gourds are kept on the racks, and there is always someone who watches. Children at this age are taught to keep away from the fire. The lessons in hardship are almost a matter of environmental conditioning. Naked, they are bitten by *damdims* and other flies. Inside the house, smoke and darkness become a normal part of life, and they come to enjoy it as a cosy and comfortable environment. Dafla children are not given lessons in cleanliness and they dislike water. Otherwise their's are happy and warm lives loved by everybody with affectionate display.

By the time a boy is three of four, he has learnt many things: how to use the rickety ladder, run errands

such as calling someone from a neighbour's house, and play games by himself or with friends, although there are only a few organized games. He knows too that he must obey his mother. When he troubles her at night, she

Dafla boys at play

says, 'Look yonder, *orum*', and the child goes to sleep immediately. Should his mother spit on his face, he sobs with shame and understands the rebuke intended. If he is sulky enough to snatch her clothes, he is beaten thoroughly. Thus he gradually learns the difference between socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. At this age, he is taught to carry and look after the babies, and do such a simple task as bringing water.

Children above six help their parents in several ways. At this age a boy may carry a small or a big dao, and develops a sense of duty. A failure in guarding the field may earn a beating from the father. When the child is eight to ten years, he goes to the jungle with the grown-up boys and may bring firewood, a little game, or fish. The boys fulfilling these tasks or small responsibilities naturally come to possess a sense of growing up and of superiority. The girls are usually busy in tasks that the mother assigns, such as bringing water, carrying the babies, bringing firewood, helping in the cultivation, cooking, and other household tasks, in short, all the tasks that they will have to perform when they go to live with their husbands. The entire training is meant to prepare a boy or a girl for the future career as a husband or a mother.

The socially approved habits of smoking and spitting are learnt at an early age, and practically every child carries his pipe and tobacco in a pouch. No other habit is more pronounced than spitting. It becomes necessary because of incessant smoking and chewing of raw tobacco or tobacco-ash. People spit near the hearth and while talking, in and outside the house, in fact, anywhere they go. Spitting on the palms is automatic for a firm grip of a dao or a stick. Spittle is applied to the palms before releasing an arrow, and is essential on the head before a shave. It is applied to all kinds of cuts, burns, bruises and ulcers. It appears to be an unfailing cure for *damdim* stings, and for pain following an awkwardly released arrow. On certain occasions, however, it has more meaning. As indicated above, a vexed mother may spit on a son who demands the major share, and this will send him sobbing. In such cases it serves as an effective check on the child's unapproved behaviour.

Spitting may, at times, be taken as a joke, as when someone tells a lie and another spits; but if a man is offended due to a lie of another and spits in front of him, it is an expression of utter contempt.

Puberty. Puberty among girls is marked by the first menstruation at an early age of twelve or so. However, there are no formal ceremonies to mark her admission into the age in which she becomes ripe for procreation and motherhood. A girl is not embarrased at her first menses, for she has already secretly learnt what it means. A menstruating woman is not surrounded by many taboos; consequently, though she may feel a little awkward, she has very few practical inconveniences. She should, however, not touch the ceremonial horns of mithuns and skulls of pigs hung on the main wall of the house, nor any of the ceremonial structures representing the Wiyus in and outside the house. She must not have sexual congress with her husband for five nights and should not eat wild boar. But for the rest she has nothing to avoid. She can cook and do the household work, brew beer and go to the jhums. There is no taboo on touching people, nor on eating with others. 'It is our organ that is dirty,' said a Dafla woman, 'and not our hands'.

The pubic cloth is unknown, so the skirt that a woman puts on below the main garment, serves as the sanitary towel. She may bleed on the way and wipe herself with green leaves, and even if she is careless in throwing the leaves away, no harm will come to her from the Wiyus. Nor is a man embarrassed by finding a trail of blood on the track, or of accidentally touching the blood of a woman working in the jhums. Dread of the menstrual blood, which is so prominent among some tribes of central India, is absent here. The sixth day after her period commences, she washes her hair, hands

and thighs, in a secluded corner slightly away from the house, or sometimes in a small stream. She does not wash herself or her skirt in big rivers for fear of offending the Wiyus of water. As she grows older, menstruation is taken as a routine that occurs every month and which ends only when a woman has become old.

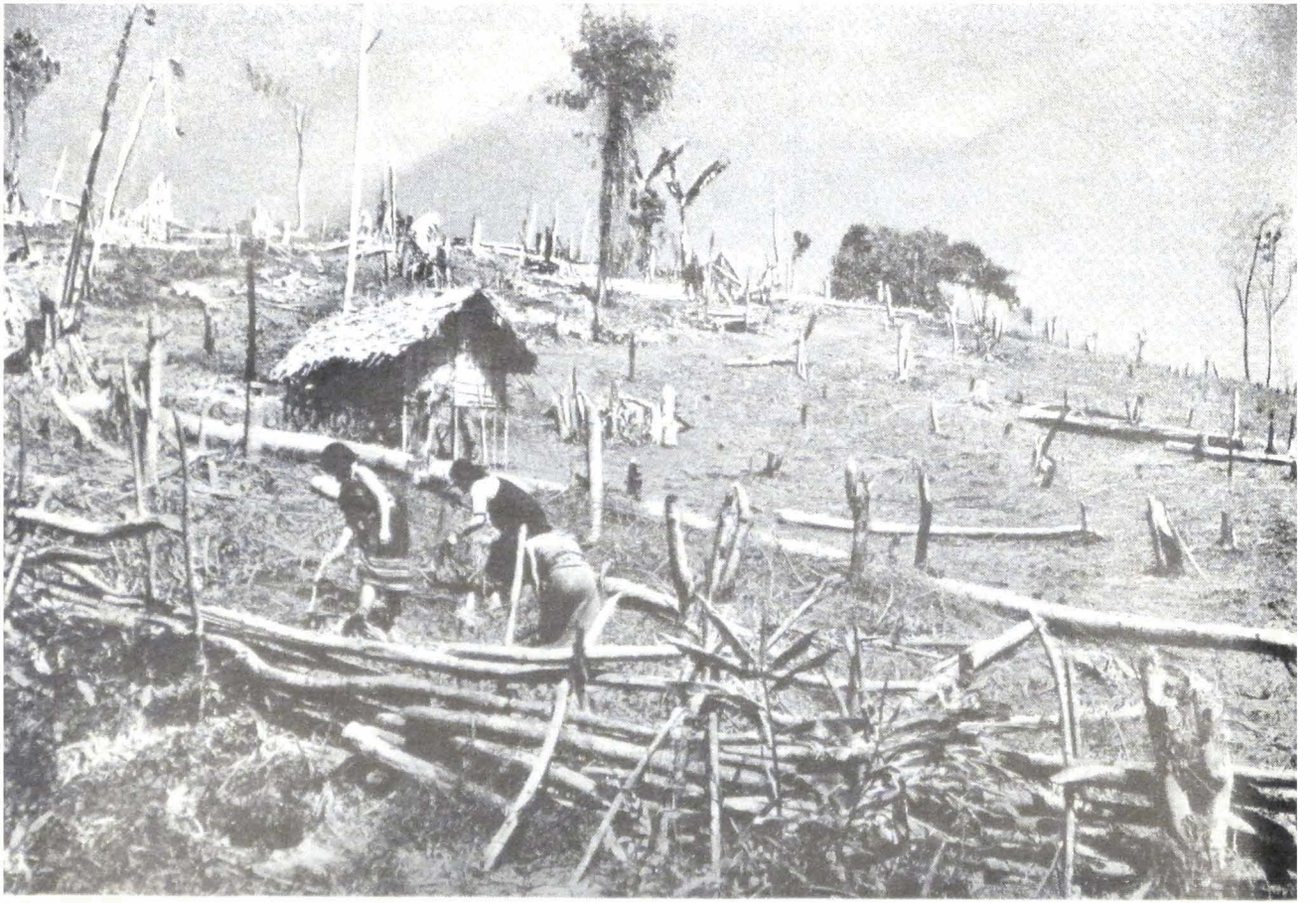
Puberty among boys is marked by wearing a hair knot, and a mature boy is described as one who wears a *podum*. The age for wearing a *podum* is about sixteen or seventeen years. Variations, however, may occur when it is worn even earlier. It indicates that the boy has reached the age when he can and should take up his duties as a grown-up member of the society. There are no ceremonies, no day fixed, and no omens looked for in the egg. The priest's services are not required and tying the hair knot may be done by the boy himself or by any other person. The Dafla *podum* is attractive and at this age, adds to the handsomeness of the wearer, who is proud of it. Age brings with it a little freedom from parental control, though love-making and romance may start even earlier.

Premarital Love. Marriage is not normally preceded by love, yet wooing mostly results in a happy union rather than frustration. Obviously, a girl whose bride-price is already being paid in instalments should act with prudence and is usually guarded against the overtures of young men. Yet there are times when the heart wins over the conflicting claims of the mind, ignoring the consequences. The passionate and romantic urge of a young couple is beautifully put in the following *abyu* (love) songs from Yuba:

Both of us are in the prime of our youth
Let us be friends
Let us cling to each other

Young Dafla girls

Daflas with their pet dog



Dafla women preparing land for jhum cultivation

As two young leaves of a banana
If we are to climb a hill
We will climb together
If we are to cross a river
We will cross together.

and again:

Let us cultivate the fields together
And grow old
Our hair will grow grey
And our teeth will fall
But we shall live.

It will be erroneous to presume that love among these simple people is merely an outburst of passion. The carnal aspect is not minimized, but love rests on deeper foundations. In every case, the young lover's ambition is to get married and establish a happy home. The exchange of gifts is a recognized way of showing attachment. The lover, for example, may give his beloved some fine beads and she, in turn, may offer him the finest beer. Seclusion is the essence of romance but, whereas many a lover may confess that he has fondled his girl, rarely will he admit that he has gone beyond that. The love situation gradually becomes known to the parents. If the bride-price is paid to the parents, she can get married and live with her lover in the new status of a wife.[1]

Maturity. With the coming of age, a Dafla aspires to get the best out of his resourcefulness. He tries to marry as many girls as he can afford, and more than ever, the rearing of mithuns assumes great importance. He

[1] This presupposes that the girl's parents are under no contract to offer their daughter to someone else. In case another person has already paid a heavy price, the love may end in frustration, for the girl is quickly sent away to live with him.

tries to accumulate valuables such as beads and *majis*, and settle his cases or take revenge. 'When I was of your age,' said Nilom Serra, a rich old Dafla of Nilom village, 'I had married three wives. I took part in several raids. I killed a man who had brought disease to my village. But now I am old and ailing. Those days were different. Then I was strong and everyone feared me.' Likha Teji of Likha village remarked, 'I have eight wives and I am happy in my house. My father died when I was too young. I have married them all with my own resources. But I have no mind to marry any more. I have sons who are growing up. I have to look to their marriages also. My eldest son is already married, but I am paying mithuns for the others.'

Marriage, begetting of children, and bringing them up are the tasks to be completed during this age. For some Daflas, privileged with eight or ten wives, it is easy to live a comfortable life. A rich Dafla therefore, can often be seen living an idle life, drinking beer and gossiping or settling cases. It is the woman whose lot is hard. She has to manage the household, cook, bring water and firewood, care for the children and bring them up. Thus, while at home, she is always occupied with some work or other. But her major burden is cultivation. She is fully occupied in her clearings throughout the year, as she is responsible for all the produce for the year's consumption. These duties are tiresome and only the efficient and hard working wives are able to run the household smoothly.

Old Age. Old age among the Daflas is not necessarily respected unless a man is a distinguished priest or a craftsman. With the decline of age, the authority of a person also wanes. Sons have respect for an old father,

and his advice may still be taken on important matters. But they do not always obey him. Old men and women, unless too old or disabled, have to work and help in the cultivation. It is only when one ceases to be a useful member of the society that the life becomes miserable. There are quarrels and everyone shirks the responsibility of support. People with several wives to look after them, are considered lucky in so far as they do not face this difficulty. However, all of them at this age crave for death as a release from their miserable condition.

IV. Marriage

Reasons for Polygyny. The Daflas assign a number of reasons for being polygynous. The commonest is that women are indispensable for agriculture. As a Dafla remarked, 'What good is there in having a number of mithuns which may die of sickness. Get more wives for mithuns and they will produce lot of crops.' Another reason given is sexual variety. Thus Likha Teji was curious to know how people with one wife manage to sleep when she is in her courses. A Dafla woman from Kugi said, 'Our men dislike old women and are always after young girls.' Yet another reason is progeny. In many cases, where a woman is barren, she actually demands that her husband marry another girl. This was the case with Toku Chada of Poru. Though married for a number of years, his eldest wife did not have any child. She was able to force her husband to take her younger sister as his wife, but she too failed to bear any child. Being persuaded by both the wives, Chada has already begun paying the bride-price for a third wife. Lastly, polygyny is supposed to be a token of a man's status. A Dafla with many wives not only has the privilege of having additional hands for raising

his economic status, but may also become a lavish entertainer, serving guests with beer and food. A few of them can, at times, even afford to remain idle.

It may appear, that since the Daflas are polygynous, a section of the people may find it very hard to get any wives at all. This danger, however, is mitigated by two factors. Firstly, the amount of bride-price paid for each wife limits the number of women a man may marry. In practice, therefore, it becomes the privilege of a few rich, who can afford as many as eight wives. Secondly, it is often possible for the unmarried to inherit the widows.

Considerations for Marriage. Love, as already mentioned, is not a pre-requisite for marriage, nor is age a bar. The customary acceptance of the disparity in age often makes it possible for a rich old Dafla to marry a girl of fourteen, or again, a nubile girl may be married to an young boy. The best age for marriage, so the Daflas think for their children, is adolescence. In many cases, this is conditioned by the economic factors. Thus a rich man is able to marry a number of wives not only himself, but to bring as many brides as possible for his sons also. Consequently, sons of rich men get married earlier. But this is not so with poor people. A man with few mithuns always finds it hard to bring a girl for his son or an additional wife for himself. The difficulty is solved if he has one or more daughters, for then he can accept the bride-price for them and pay it for a wife or a daughter-in-law. As a result, daughters of poor people often get married earlier than their sisters who are rich.

Finding a suitable girl is not difficult, since girls all over the area are usually known to the parents who arrange the marriage. In many cases, a boy himself may take the lead in selecting his bride. He may visit the house of his maternal uncle frequently, each time giving

him little presents of meat, beads or daos. The maternal uncle is obliged to make presents in return, but the gestures from the boy by way of presents are well understood. He may ultimately succeed in winning the maternal uncle's daughter. Wealth and family status are important considerations to be taken into account. Generally the boys and girls have little say in such matters and tend to approve the decisions of their parents in settling their marriages.

Betrothal and Payment of Bride-Price. Initially, the boy's father talks about the proposed marriage to certain people, who indirectly try to know the views of the girl's father. If he favours the proposal, it is known in advance. Then one day the groom's father goes to the house of the girl's father with certain presents such as meat, cloth and a dao. These things are customarily accepted. In the discourse which follows he tells the purpose of his visit. It is now that the bargaining begins. The girl's father generally says, 'Take beads, *kojis, majis* or *talus,* whichever you like. But where and how should I find a girl for your son?' The talks continue for hours to settle the bride-price, after which the boy's father returns home.

After a few days he takes omens from chicken livers. If they are good, he goes to the girl's parents, this time with one mithun, pig's meat, one piece of *endi* or other cloth, one dao, five bundles of salt and many baskets containing fermented millet for beer. The mithun and the articles are carried by kinsmen who compose the party along with the prospective groom.

When the party reaches the girl's father, he too takes omens. He smears the mithun's horns with a paste of rice flour and beer. The articles of bride-price are accepted. He kills a pig and numerous gourds of

beer is prepared for a feast in honour of the guests. The party stays for three days. Every night during their stay the priests from both the sides sing *id* songs. The singing often takes the form of a contest in which the priests of each side try to outwit those of the other party.

The payment of the bride-price is made in annual or half yearly instalments, or at such intervals as may be convenient to the boy's father. Each time the girl's father gets a part of the payment, he gives cloth, beads and daos in return. The return gifts are only a fraction of the bride-price and are merely a gesture of courtesy and hospitality.

Marriage. After the stipulated bride-price has been paid, the girl comes, according to the rule of patrilocal residence, to live with the husband. There are no formal ceremonies which mark the consummation of marriage. Only the husband and the wife are both clad in new clothes and wear a number of ornaments. The marriage party with the bride and groom returns home carrying presents given by the girl's father. On the way they sing songs and continue drinking beer. At the approach of the village the path is closed with a number of bamboo arches. Offerings of eggs or chicken are made to the Wiyus of the jungle and they are prayed to return to their abodes, if coming along with the party.

When the bride comes to the husband's house she is received at the *tumko,* where she sacrifices a fowl. Immediately afterwards she enters the house. The only ceremony a few days later is the Yulo in which a mithun is sacrificed. The kinsmen and relatives join in the feasting and make merry.

Other Ways of Finding a Mate. The marriage by the payment of bride-price is considered ideal. But there are two other ways which are also significant. A fre-

quent practice is to elope with the girl, who then goes to her lover's house. This is normally possible only for a couple of lovers, whether married or unmarried. The girl's parents make a search and try to bring her back, if necessary, forcibly. If someone has already paid for her, this results in complications. However, if the lover insists on keeping her and pays the bride-price to her father, the latter is then obliged to restore the original bride-price to the first husband. In certain other cases, a man forces a girl to live with him, which inevitably leads to serious brawls continuing for months and years. Elopement is, however, one of the established ways of getting a wife, though in such cases, elopement and compensation do not exclude each other.

Another method practised is marriage by service, when the prospective son-in-law spends a couple of years with the girl's family doing all the necessary work. Among the Daflas the incidence of marriage by service, though it exists, is very rare as it is considered undignified. Sometimes a girl's father may take a fancy for a boy whom he thinks suitable for his daughter. If the boy's father agrees, the former comes to live with his would-be father-in-law. He goes through the usual routine work of agriculture, hunting and fishing and is supposed to keep the latter happy. He eventually gets his wife and may return to his house. In the instances recorded, however, it was found that they had settled in the houses of their fathers-in-law and did not intend to return to their parents.

Implications of Bride-Price. In all kinds of unions where the girl goes to live with her husband, the Daflas insist on the bride-price. The contract actually binds the girl's parents in more definite terms than one would imagine. Thus, if the girl dies within a few years with-

out any children, the husband will, by custom, claim back whatever he paid for her. His prerogative clearly extends not only over the sexual privileges and life-long services of his wife, but also over the bearing of children. Barrenness alone, however, is not a sufficient reason for claiming back the bride-price. To the Dafla mind, even a barren woman is economically useful and she, in turn, does all she can to persuade her husband to marry one of her own sisters.

The bride's father has yet other responsibilities. If the girl runs away with some other man, he must help in restoring her to the husband; and if she returns home due to the maltreatment by her husband, he should compel her to go back to him. The obligations imposed by the bride-price very often force the parents to coax away her obstinacy. Sometimes she may be beaten, or even be put into a stockade to make her submissive to the husband's wishes.

The case of Yasap, a girl from Ganku village, will illustrate this. Yasap was married to a man of Tok village. Since her father was dead, the payment was made to her brother Epa. When she went to live with her husband she had no liking for him. She would not sleep with him willingly nor talk to him. The husband ill-treated her, beating and abusing her. There were many quarrels in which she felt hurt and disgraced. She tried to escape, but was caught. Her husband cut her hair off and threatened to kill her by witchcraft if she ventured to run away. Only with difficulty did she reach her brother's home.

Her husband tried to take her back, and even her brother was reluctant to keep her in his house. But Yasap refused to go. In a few months her husband, unable to recover his mithuns, caught Epa's mithuns one

by one to make good his losses. Epa was annoyed and threw the whole blame on Yasap. If she would not go to her husband, she could no longer stay in his house. Yasap, though adamant, was helpless. She was unwelcome in her own paternal home, and her brother abused her in the filthiest language. She was compelled to leave and live in a neighbouring house.

This did not quieten Epa, who now asked her to go anywhere she liked. He was only interested in getting back his mithuns. Ultimately, she agreed to marry an young man of Lungba village, who promised her brother to pay for her. Yasap has gone to live with her new husband, though the bride-price still remains to be paid.

Inheritance of Widows. The implications of the bride-price appear to be far-reaching when we note that the Dafla customary law specifically prescribes the allotment of widows to the dead man's heirs. Thus, after the father's death, the sons inherit his wives with the exception of their own mothers. On the other hand, in theory at least, it is always possible for a father to keep his deceased son's wife for himself. But in practice this rarely occurs. Daflas also permit the levirate, which provides that if a man dies, his widow may become the wife of one of his brothers. As we have seen earlier, disparity in age is no bar for marriage. It is not rare, therefore, to find a young boy inheriting a widow of his father or brother who may be more than thirty years of age.

For the inheritance of widows, commonsense adjustments are made. Unmarried sons or brothers are taken into account; the wishes of the widow too are considered. The outcome is appropriation with agreement. It is only when a widow intends to leave the house that quarrels occur. Then, as a rule, the person who takes her is

required to pay at least part of the bride-price. Normally, no Dafla expects quarrels over the inheritance of widows. In many cases, when a widow is too old, she may continue to live in the house without being inherited. This is more likely if, due to her old age, no one is willing to keep her as a wife. Again, even when a widow is young, a man may waive his claim in favour of a close male consanguineous kin.

A Dafla widow about 1847
(From J. Butler, *A Sketch of Assam*, 1847)

The above arrangements ensure that there is little or no social friction within the household group. They also ensure a widow's care and companionship for the rest of her life. But from another angle, they also refute

the notion that the bride-price among the Daflas does not involve the conception of women as property.

Kinship Terms and Prohibited and Prescribed Marriages.

How the Dafla classificatory kinship terminology is inter-related with various forms of marriage is an interesting subject. The Daflas prohibit union with the paternal aunt's daughter. The latter is addressed by the kinship term *ku,* which is also the term for one's own daughter or son. This usage is further extended, and the same term is also applied to the paternal aunt's daughter's daughter, and so on to infinity. To put it logically, a paternal aunt's female descendants *through females* are always *ku.* Hence a union with paternal aunt's female descendants is impossible.

On the other hand, the Daflas permit marriage with the mother's sister. A person calls his mother's father by the term *atu,* which is also applicable to his wife's father, or father-in-law. The terminology is in accordance with the permitted union. The term *meyi,* with which a person addresses his mother's sisters, also throws light on matrilateral cross cousin marriage. A person addresses his mother's brother's daughter also as *meyi,* and may take her as a wife. But, he does not address his mother's brother as *atu.* He addresses him by the term *kei,* with which he also addresses his wife's brother. A little thought will show why this is so. Since the mother's sisters are possible mates, naturally it is in keeping with tribal usage to call him *kei.* From another angle it is apparent that, for the purposes of marriage, a mother's sister and mother's brother's daughter, are treated as if they were sisters. Further, the term *meyi* is also used to address a wife's sisters. This usage conforms to the soroal marriage among the Daflas, which is actually in vogue over wide areas.

The Daflas also consider those women as possible mates whom they address by the term *nyahang*. This term is applied to a father's wives (other than the actual mother), a father's brother's wives, and one's own brother's wives. We have already mentioned that a father's wives, other than the mother, are inherited. The terminology extended to a father's brother's wives is also in keeping with the usage. When extended to a brother's wives, however, it proves the levirate marriage. In this case a man's wives, his brother's wives, his father's wives, and his father's brother's wives are treated, for the purpose of marriage, as if they were sisters. This clearly shows how it is possible for a Dafla to keep even his daughter-in-law as his wife. In one case in the village of Ganku, it was actually found, that even in the life time of his son, the father appropriated the son's wife for himself.

Before closing this discussion, we may note an axiomatic conclusion following from the Dafla cross-cousin marriage. The Daflas, while prescribing marriage with a maternal uncle's daughter, forbid it with a paternal aunt's daughter. This restriction automatically precludes the possibility of exchange of sisters, which is one of the important forms of marriage among many people.

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL LIFE

Before the establishment of peace and order by the Government of India, life and property in the Dafla hills were not secure. There could be no respect for human beings in a world claiming right through might. Anyone could take offence at the slightest excuse. Few, in the first instance, cared for settling a grievance by mediation. There being no recognized Chiefs[1] or Councils of Elders as peremptory authorities, none interfered if a man chose to take the law into his hands. Supported by his kinsmen and relatives, he was free to avenge his wrongs. Thus rivalry resulted in raids and not only led to the capture of mithuns, men and women, but also to murders. Intense anger provoked deep hatred for the enemy and there is no dearth of men who, provoked by this hatred. have more than a dozen murders to their credit. Scores of ceremonial trees bear the mark of vengeance in the form of human palms pierced with numerous arrows.

I. WARFARE

Dafla warfare had its own characteristics.[2] In the first place, even when the rivalry was inter-tribal (as between the Daflas and the Apa Tanis), it was not organized on a mass scale. The parties were normally two households supported by their kinsmen and relatives rather than two whole villages. Secondly, every able-

[1] Now the Government presents an influential man of the village with a red coat as a token of authority and distinction.

[2] The description is in past tense, since the raids have ceased after the establishment of peace.

bodied Dafla being a potential soldier, there was no regular system of hired mercenaries. Thirdly, the warriors did not form a privileged class. They were, and still are, not different from the common people. Fourthly, the religion did not induce or promote warfare and murders. Murder of an enemy was merely an approved way of retaliating a wrong, and conferred no social distinction on the warrior. He preserved no part of the body of the enemy slain as a prized exhibit in his house, nor did he acquire any magical or spiritual powers from the act. The Dafla traditions do not require human heads for the enhancement of the fertility of the land, and any ritual related to the killing of an enemy is performed to avert the evils that may be caused by the dead. Lastly, the motive for making a raid was *prima facie* to take revenge. The expected reward of spoils was the consequence, and only rarely the cause of war. Profit motive, like the capturing of men into slavery, was not always considered sufficient for making raids on innocent people, either within or outside the community.[1] However, the people being easily provocable, often petty thefts and suspicion of a man having carried an epidemic from one village to another were and occasionally still are, avenged with serious consequences.

Weapons and Strategy. The Dafla weapons of warfare are simple, though formidable. A complete set consists of a spear with iron head, a large sword or dao, a bow and a quiver full of poisoned arrows, and a black cloak of *taseh* fibre woven over a *nara.* In addition to

[1] There are, however, records of numerous raids by the Daflas, living near Darrang and Lakhimpur districts, on the plains villages. It has to be seen whether these raids were made in retaliation of wrongs supposed or real. The mischiefs they wrought are on record, but the motives, which led them to commit them, are still not known. Their version, if known, might give us insight into the other part of the picture.

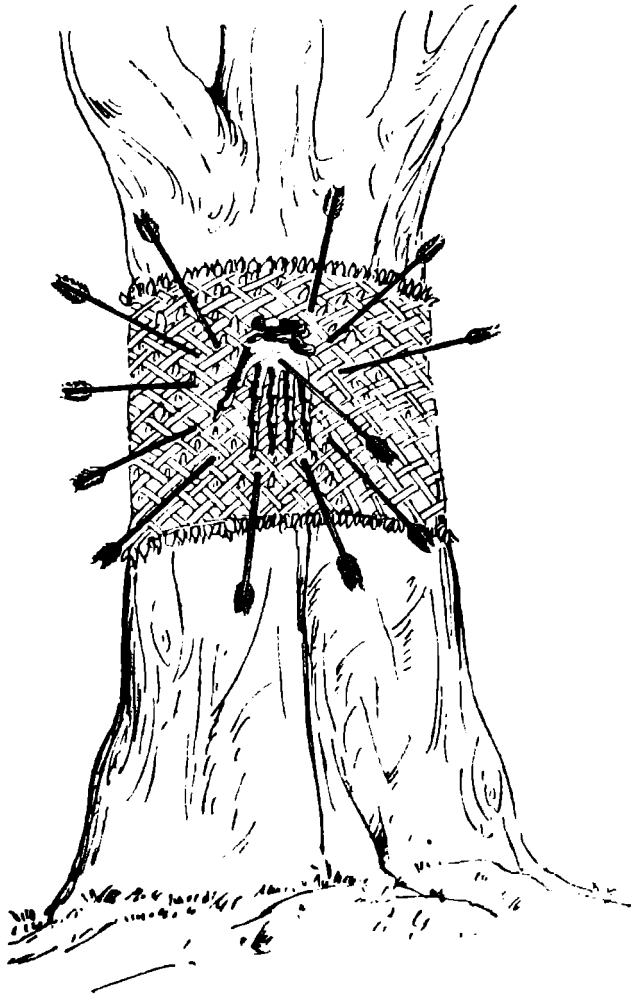
this, the warrior covered his back and chest with a single piece of mithun hide and carried a hide shield.

There was no war leader. All were equal and knew their job. Omens were taken and, if they were good, the band of warriors secretly slipped into the enemy's territory. The secrecy of movement was maintained and everyone was all alert to know the enemy's plans and movements. The technique of war was not a face to face fight, though occasionally, it became unavoidable. But this was never so planned, as such a technique is of disadvantage in the hills. Instead, the warriors lay in ambush, taking the most advantageous positions for a surprise attack. If the enemy had inflicted a loss of life, the aim was to kill any kinsman of the enemy in retaliation. This is quite justified according to the principle of collective responsibility. In other cases, they were satisfied with the capture of a man or woman for the purposes of ransom or slavery. If circumstances permitted, as for instance when the enemy houses lay on the outskirts of the village, the warriors even ventured to put fire to them all in surprise. They slashed and cut, and killed and looted, and ran away before anyone got an opportunity to do anything in self-defence.

Fate of the Slain. The victim's body was cut at the neck and the waist into three pieces, and was allowed to remain there or thrown away in the jungle to be recovered by his kinsmen. The warrior, who killed the victim, chopped off the left palm and, if possible, his *podum* and a bunch of hair. No time was lost. The moment they had finished, a run for safety was the first thing. The killer suspended the palm to his shield and the band brandished their daos and yelled the paeans of victory. On the way everyone wore the leaves of *talam* and *kra* on his helmet. When a river or stream came on the way,

the palm was placed upon a stone and hammered with another stone in utter contempt. All the blood was then washed off the palm and it was fastened to the shield again.

The warriors, on return to the village, did not enter any house, but sat near a ceremonial structure of wood and bamboo called *basar yuging,* which was renewed for the occasion with fresh *kra* leaves. The palm was placed on it and a little beer was poured. At this rendezvous, and in the presence of a large gathering of men, women



An enemy's palm fixed on a sacred tree and arrows shot at it

and children, the victors danced with spears and daos around the structure with loud and lusty cries of wild joy. The palm was then displayed to all who touched and pierced it with daos to humiliate it. A priest, during the dance, fulfilled his role by appropriate invocations.

The palm was finally taken to the ceremonial tree called *nila sengne* for the last rituals. Every village has this ceremonial tree to the present day, and in the remote villages, palms may still be seen hanging from trunks of the trees.[1] A small decorated frame of split bamboo, embellished with *kra* leaves, was put round the trunk and the palm was nailed on it. The priest started incantations and the warriors once more gave out loud cries while dancing round the tree. Numerous arrows were then shot at the palm and everyone returned to the village. The only rite, performed a little later, was to chase out a pet dog out of the house and kill it with a spear. It was then thrown in the jungle for the Sotung Wiyu to avert any subsequent witchchaft. Finally, the victor, after taking omens, sacrificed a mithun, and the warriors and friends joined in the feast. This is termed Ropi Tamu and was in the honour of the Wiyus who helped the band to kill the victim.

If the people from several villages joined in the adventure, the palm was equally divided among them. In such cases, they performed these rituals in their own villages.

Fate of the Captive. The fate of the captured person was different. He was tied with cane ropes and brought home. He was imprisoned in a stockade and guarded against escape. The kinsmen of the captive persuaded some intermediary to contact the enemy for

[1] Such villages are, for example, Sengo and Pajee. In the latter village only *podum* was found fixed on the trunk of the sacred tree.

his release. The ransom was declared. The case was then discussed by the representatives of both the parties. Account was taken of all wrongs and retributions connected with the case. The ransom agreement was a matter of hard bargain and took several days to arrive at. The payment in the form of mithuns, *majis, talus,* beads, daos, and cloth had to be made on the spot. No promise for future payment was entertained. The captive was freed after the payment. The stockades were taken off and he went home with his people. The captives not ransomed were made into *nyiras* or slaves.

A man held prisoner in the stocks

The lot of a slave was apparently miserable. He lost his independence and status as a free man. For all intents and purposes, he became a chattel which could be disposed of at will. The master had the sole right over his person. He was at liberty to abuse him and to chastise him for his faults. If he tried to escape and proved troublesome, he could be sold to another man in a very distant village. In reality, however, this was not always the fate that awaited a slave. Often he behaved well and received good treatment.

A well-behaved and loyal slave always won the affection of the family. He was given a hearth within the house. He ate the same food and lived practically the same kind of life as his master. He was never asked to do more work than an average man can do. If he fell sick, due attention was paid to him and sacrifices made for his recovery. Of course, he was subject to the taboo against marrying a girl other than a slave. However, if a slave girl was available, a generous master even paid the pride-price to the girl's master and procured the bride for him. He was allowed to have his own clearings and granary. He could own fowls and pigs. The members of the family helped him in cultivation in the same way as he helped them. If he wished, he could have his own house and live in it with his master's consent. The affectionate attachment to the master's family, however, of which he felt himself a member, could seldom induce him to live in a separate house.

II. Legal System

The Daflas are basically individualistic. The only source of cohesion among them is their feeling of oneness through blood and the clan spirit. The same religious beliefs and the same pattern of life lend it a veneer of

oneness. Beyond this allegiance to these bonds of unity, a Dafla accepts no authority. He may do as he pleases, if he thinks himself capable of doing it, irrespective of any consideration whether it is social or anti-social. There are the traditional laws of conduct to which he also subscribes, but, if his personal inclinations prompt him to break them, he will not hesitate in the least to do so. Wrongs are considered to be personal rather than social matters, and the wrong-doers and the wronged are left to themselves without the interference of the society. The community merely expresses its disapprobation in the form of idle gossips, which affect the wrong-doer according to his power and mentality. If he is a rich and a powerful person, he does not care about such talks in the village. Generally scandals are hushed into oblivion in such cases. If the culprit is a brazen reprobate, he makes no secret about his transgressions, and may laugh the community in the face. Justice, however, is administered within certain limitations, and there is a system of fines and punishments which is followed where the parties concerned agree to submit their cases to the decisions of others. This gives us an insight into their legal system.

The theoretical anarchy, that can be inferred in the absence of the Chiefs and the Councils of Elders, does not exist among the Daflas for the two important reasons. Firstly, the co-existence of the several clans and groups of people in the same area compels them to conform to a certain peaceful standard and the social sanctions, such as public opinion, aid in this. Secondly, the services of the go-betweens[1] are universally recognized and accepted. Undoubtedly, they have no political power, nor can they

[1] Over wide areas they are known as *gingdungs*.

enforce their decisions. Their success lies in a free and serious discussion with persuasion, resulting in unanimous agreements or decisions. What is reasonable and just is normally accepted. They must not be guided by the motives of self-interest, but by the traditional norms of justice. They are the people well-versed in the tribe's jurisprudence, some of whom succeed in establishing a reputation over wide areas. Their services are paid for by the parties concerned.

What happens when a crime is committed? At the initial stage, it may be possible for a man to avenge the wrong. It is not necessary for the revenge to fall on the actual offender. It could fall on any member of the family or kinsman. In a feud resulting in raids and murders, there is no emphasis on criminal intent. Any man from the offender's group is as good a victim as the offender himself. But at a later stage, when the case has got to be settled to cement the relations between the two groups, the parties select their go-betweens to make contacts for peace. They hold an assembly which consists of the parties involved or their representatives, their go-betweens, and a number of spectators. There is no rule for the place of meeting; it may be held in a house of the offender's village, or any other village convenient for the parties. The assembly is a forum of free debate where the parties present their grievances. They use small bamboo sticks for enumerating the losses sustained and compensations made in the past. Every active participant in the discussion, produces his own bamboo sticks and arranges them according to his own statement. This is called *khotur,* and is typical of all Dafla assemblies which decide cases.

Often the intricacies of a case call for many days of debate, before they reach a unanimous agreement. The

penalties decided upon, and agreed to by the offender, are then paid by the latter to the injured party. In all important cases, the rival parties stop eating and drinking with each other. To establish normal relations, therefore, an offender has to kill a pig or mithun. If a pig is to be killed, its neck is tied with a rope and placed over a forked post of about two and a half feet in height, fixed to the ground. It is embellished with *kra* leaves. One or two men hold the hind legs of the pig. With its belly and snout upwards, its neck is kept in between the forks by a pull of the neck-rope. A priest invokes Poter Met Wiyu to witness the ceremony. In the mean time, a person, with a single stroke of a dao, kills the pig, and then the parties partake of this meat, together. This is called the Pahi ceremony, and its performance brings about the relations of friendship. However, in case of certain vendettas in the past, which were long and involved the loss of many men, the parties also pledged to bind themselves in a perpetual treaty called *dapo*. These were treaties of mutual non-aggression celebrated with solemnities and witnessed by Poter Met Wiyu. They involved sacrifices of mithun or pigs and, once performed, have never been known to be violated. In a few cases, *dapos* are still performed.

The Dafla customary law prescribes standardized compensations for various crimes, though, realizing the fine depends upon the status and ability of the offender to pay. However, there is no wrong which cannot be compensated for by the payment of fines. Essentially, therefore, most of the Dafla laws are the laws of 'torts' rather than 'crimes'. With this in view, we consider a few important crimes.

Yosinee. It literally means sexual gratification by stealth and includes all sorts of relations, conducts and

intercourses between the opposite sexes, which are contrary to the traditional customs. It is a term of wider significance than adultery and embraces all types of sexual misbehaviour according to their standard.

This offence is frequent among the Daflas and there are a number of reasons for it. Pre-marital freedom is allowed and no stigma is attached to the children born of such unions. This freedom may grow into a habit and continue after marriage. The polygyny practised by the people also encourages this looseness by leaving the wives unsatisfied and prompts them to seek pleasure elsewhere. Again, the disparity in age between a married couple is another cause. Thus, if a girl is mature and the husband adolescent, she may take fancy to a young man of her age. Likewise, if the husband is old and his wife young, she may not wish to sleep with her husband. Over and above all these, there is the passion for sexual variety.

Yosinee is not a matter of public concern. As indicated earlier, a wife is customarily the property of the husband. Since she and her services are paid for, he has the sole right over her. If, therefore, he chastises her for *yosinee,* no one interferes or questions his conduct, In principle at least, he has the right even to kill her, though he seldom does so, as he would gain nothing. The people, therefore, punish her by beating with a stick or a red hot firewood. Alternatively, she may be tied and abused, threatened to be killed or have her ears cut off. If she becomes abusive, she may be put into stockades. Occasionally, a man may mutilate her private parts.

The extent of punishment to the offender depends upon the influence exerted by the aggrieved person. There are many persons, guilty of this crime, who remain unpunished; but, the husband feels ashamed and hurt.

When caught, the person guilty of *yosinee* feels foolish, not because he has committed any wrong, but because he is detected and may be required to pay the fine. If the aggrieved husband is a man of power and position, he may make the offender too poor to pay the fine, into a slave. In such a case, the woman may be given to the slave who then lives with the master. In a case, where a girl runs away with her lover, the latter may choose to pay the bride-price to the husband and keep the girl for himself. There are, however, cases where the girl is recovered by the husband. When this happens, a wealthy culprit may defy all attempts to punish him by asking 'why so and so should not pay him a fine for *hanyang*.' This means that the culprit claims that the restoration in itself has meant a loss of prestige to him, by implying his inability to pay for his beloved, and he can lawfully claim compensation for this humiliation. This is possible only when the girl goes to her lover of her own accord.

Yosinee within the clan is rare, though not absent. Clan members are regarded as brothers and sisters, and any such affair between them is considered incestuous and disgraceful. Nevertheless, in the two cases, where *yosinee* within the clan occurred, the couples, who are still living, were married with the usual formalities.

The traditional fines for *yosinee* are one mithun for sexual congress, one *maji* for fondling the breasts, and one pig for the Pahi ceremony. *Yosinee* is not a matter for anxiety, unless it is detected.

Thefts and Murders. Theft or *ducho* is not infrequent, and thefts of mithuns are common occurrences. The thief, if caught, may pretend that the mithun of a particular colour, size, and ear-mark was his own. The traditional fine for such thefts is a mithun in addition to the restoration of the original mithun to the owner, and

a pig for the Pahi ceremony. Generally, the grievance is ended with the payment. If, however, the original mithun is killed, it has to be replaced by another. When thefts in the granaries occur, and if the thief is caught *flagrante delicto,* he may be speared while trying to escape. The fines for stealing are a Tibetan dao for cutting the cane rope of the granary, a string of *dukh* beads for opening the door, plus a pig for the Pahi ceremony. The punishment of undetected thieves is entrusted to the spirits to whom sacrifices are offered. In certain cases, a shaman may be requested to detect the thief. Formerly, thieves unable to pay the compensations were made into slaves.

The compensation for a murder is more elaborate. Each part of the body has its own specific price. The compensations for the head and the thighs were a slave each; for the face, heart and the eyes, a *maji* each, a Tibetan dao for the ribs, and a *talu* for the chest. In addition to this, the fine of two mithuns was imposed for a feast to all the kinsmen of the deceased, and for the Pahi ceremony. If the slaves were not available, the offender was required to give six to eight mithuns in lieu of each slave.[1] With changing times, however, the fines for murder as well as other crimes have changed to realistic terms. In the case of old murders, the compensation in reality has been one to two mithuns and a few valuables only.

Oaths and Ordeals. An important feature of the Dafla legal system is the exact determination of guilt. In most cases, the evidence is not lacking and it is always possible to charge the offender. But there are cases when it is not possible to ascertain the guilt. Thus in *posinee,* theft, and witchcraft, if the offender escapes

[1] This scale of fines was common in the villages around Nyapin till recent times. It varies elsewhere.

detection, or protests to the contrary, the truth of the accusation is ascertained by magico-religious methods, or, in other words, by oaths and ordeals. It is believed that Poter Met Wiyu witnesses the ordeals and oaths, and punishes the offender for his falseness.

Among the important oaths are the eating of earth and taking certain articles between the teeth. Such articles are *omyo* or poison, a dao, a poisonous bamboo, an elephant tusk, a tiger's jaw-bone or skin, and the head of a poisonous snake. An ordeal practised over a wide area is to dip the right hand in boiling water contained in a bamboo tube, keep it there for some time, and pick up a stone from the bottom. Before the suspected offender does so, the priest recites incantations to the effect that, if the person be guilty, Poter Met Wiyu may burn his hand and cause his death. As a final proof of his innocence, the offender is required to scratch his palm with a dao. If the skin does not peel off, his innocence is proved and the plaintiff is required to give a mithun as a fine.

Ordeals are always dangerous. If a person is guilty, he invariably prefers to give the fine rather than go through the ordeal and suffer the loss of property, moral degradation and death. When oaths are taken, obviously there is no immediate decision. The plaintiff waits till the oath-taker meets some serious accident or death, and then infers that he had perjured himself.

Chapter Five

RELIGION

I. General Character of Popular Beliefs

To a Dafla the world is full of Wiyus. There are Wiyus in the jungle, on the lofty hills, in the shadowy recesses and inaccessible caves, on the tops of tall trees, in the rivers, and inside and outside the house. The Wiyus are dreaded, for, as men hunt wild animals, so do the Wiyus hunt men. When the rains are incessant and the sky stormy with lowering clouds, and when gale blows across the hills, the Wiyus in their hunting dresses walk all over the world in search of the souls of men. There are the *orums,* the ancestral ghosts, who return from the Land of the Dead to carry the things they had forgotten to take with them. Both, the Wiyus and the *orums,* make people sick and even cause death, unless appeased with appropriate sacrifices.

Life would have been extremely miserable, had there been no Ane Duini, the Sun-mother, the good, the benevolent. She is the supreme mother. Nothing can be obtained or achieved in this world without her kindness and will. Duini gives crops and keeps the granaries filled. She gives children and keeps them well. She gives mithuns, pigs, *majis, talus,* and precious beads. Without her mercy, none could get or keep slaves. It is Duini who determines whether a man is to be rich or poor, whether he is to have one wife, several or none. But Duini appears to be so forgiving and indulgent and overflowing with mercy that there are no special prayers for her to be offered on the ordinary occasions of life. Yet she is given the highest offering, the sacrifice of mithuns, and

her name is sung in songs on all important occasions such as marriage, and the Yulo. She is remembered in distress but, unlike other Wiyus, is not reviled even in the most trying calamities such as death.

II. The Dafla Pantheon

The Dafla pantheon of Wiyus is very large. Most of them are malevolent rather than good to the people. It is impossible to describe them all here; only an important few are described below.

The most important Wiyus of the jungle are Dojing and Yapom. They take toll of human lives as they please, by making people fall ill. They can be appeased only with sacrifices of pigs and mithuns. The Wiyus who are particularly noted for causing various kinds of fevers are Jengte and Pamte, Nyori and Pamri. Living in deep valleys and ravines are Girr and Nyori making people ill and suffer from every sort of pain. Yan Wui is supposed to live in the northern high hills with a large family, and to visit the people with diseases of one kind or the other. There are numerous other Wiyus of the forest whose function appears to make people miserable by sending fevers and aches, swellings, dysentery and sores.

On the banks of rivers live Kirri and Lirri. They are prone to take offence when the people go for fishing or otherwise trespass into their haunts. They occupy a prominent place in the Yulo shrine, and share the sacrifice of mithuns or pigs with the other Wiyus.

By far the most important aspect of the Dafla social economy is agriculture. If a man is to have good crops, Parte Rinte Wiyus should be favourably disposed. Small bamboo representations of them are hung in the granaries to guard them from harm. Hunting can only

be successful through the grace of the Wiyus. In the front balcony of the house, or at the entrance, Yobu, the god of the chase, is invariably found. Like other Wiyus it resides with a large family and has a special liking for *kra* leaves with which the structure is decorated. If Yobu gets offended men may not get any game in spite of their best efforts. Consequently, if men return empty handed from the jungle for a number of times, Yobu is propitiated with the sacrifice of a fowl. The same sacrifice is made to Yobu when a man kills a tiger.

Inside the house are hung several small representations made of woven split bamboos and decorated in various ways. These are for the Wiyus, living within the house, who are responsible to a great extent for the welfare of the inmates. Thus, on the main wall or *nyodang* reside Neer Lyer, Chusi and Khesi. If they get annoyed, they get men and women killed in the jungle by tigers or snakes. Other domestic Wiyus are Rintum Purtum, Rine Chirne, Chirr Yorr, Nimi Gami and Erki. All of them look after the welfare of the family and receive offerings of chicken or fowl. The opposite wall or *koda* is for Hirub Gorub and Isir Posur. If they are displeased, deliveries are likely to have complications with haemorrhage. On such occasions, they are immediately propitiated lest a woman dies in childbed. Under the family hearth lives Yeni Wiyu who causes premature bleeding in a pregnant woman.

Dugur and Siki Wiyus live near the house under the ground, where the troughs for feeding pigs are kept. They look after the pigs. Piki and Lene likewise live where the fowls are kept. Duini Kangi Hirgi and Si Hirgi reside where the mithuns drink water.

With so many Wiyus, only a few of whom have been mentioned, there is no denying that the Dafla is always

in danger of getting into some trouble or other. With only a few exceptions, all kinds of diseases are attributed to the malice and wrath of the Wiyus who are only too eager to do harm. As a result, there is a large number of rituals with complicated techniques to propitiate them.

III. Disease, Cure and Sacrifice

The Daflas have very little knowledge of herbs and medicines. The swelling of face or hand, however, may be cured by making a few punctures in the skin and cupping the blood by means of a hart horn. Bad blood is sucked into the horn and the swelling subsides. In cases of dao-cut, the sticky sap of certain thorny bushes may be applied. But in cases of fever, dysentery and aches, the people feel helpless. It is here that the priest comes in to rescue the patient from the grip of the Wiyus and the *orums*.

A cure, which involves the identification of the Wiyus or the *orums* causing illness, for the purpose of appropriate sacrifices, is a complicated process. In certain cases, the priest sits near the patient holding a *kra* twig, or a *dup* which is a bundle of *kra* and *tajiir* leaves. He is supported by an assistant, called *boo*, who repeats the incantations after him line by line. After the incantations are over the priest moves the *dup* and blows at the patient. The Wiyus are then prayed to have mercy and leave the patient for which they are promised appropriate sacrifices. In other cases, especially in aches, where the illness is suspected to have been caused by the *orums*, the priest holds an egg while chanting. The egg is thrown away to appease the *orums*. Yet in other instances, a chicken is sacrificed each time a priest finishes an incantation. Whatever be the method followed, the aim of the priest is to appease the Wiyus

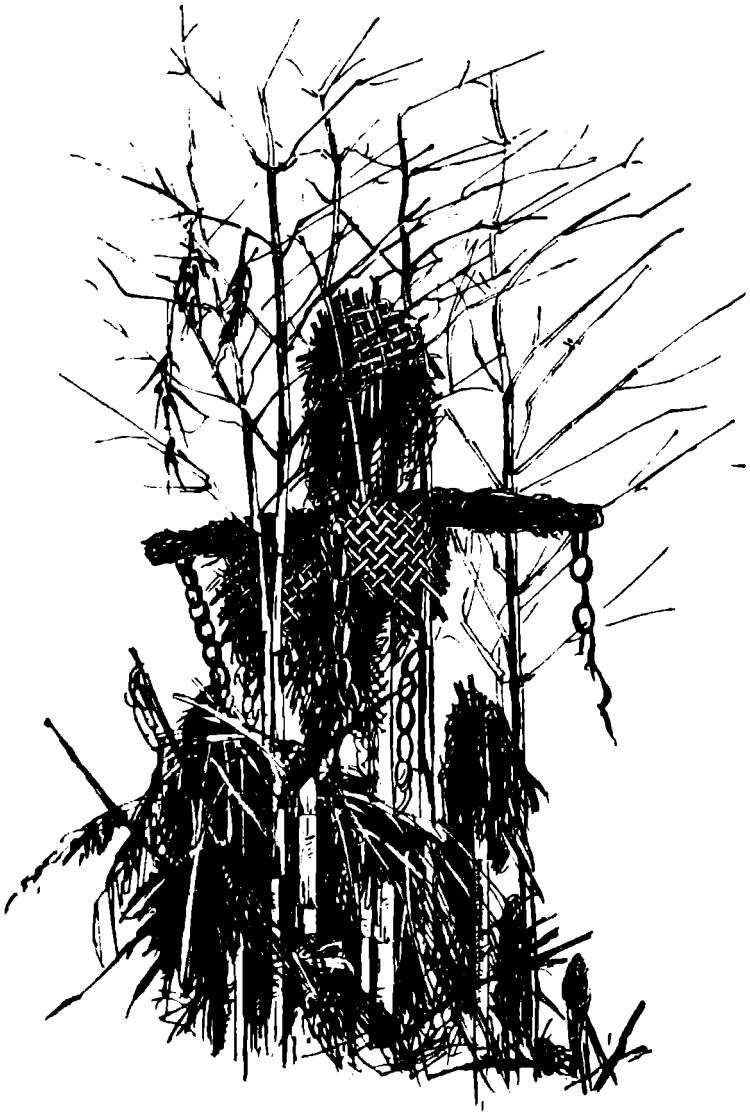
and the *orums,* induce them to accept the promised sacrifices, and grant recovery in return. If one priest fails, another may be called.

The number of eggs and chickens required in these sacrifices is very large. At times, it is so great that the sufferer's family may run short of its own stock and may have to purchase from other villages, unless a relative helps it out.

The taking of omens for the identification of the Wiyus is done by observing the egg-yolk or chicken liver. After the incantations, the chicken's throat is cut half through with a dao and, after it is dead, the belly is punctured. The liver is then taken out for observation. If an egg is used, it is boiled, cooled and peeled. With a hair it is cut into two equal halves. The yolk is scratched with an iron pin in the centre for the observations. This is called *rosin,* and is invariably performed before the final sacrifice. Often the patient's relatives too perform the *rosin* and sacrifice fowls to the Wiyus. The meat is then roasted and given to the patient to eat. In most cases, where the patient recovers, food taboos are observed for a period ranging from one to five months. Such tabooed food includes pumpkins, a kind of fish called *gnupee,* the meat of birds and animals like monkeys and barking deer, and certain leafy vegetables growing near streams.

Nature of Sacrifice. All the Dafla Wiyus and *orums* love blood and hence all rituals are marked by the sacrifice of animals. The place of the sacrifice is normally near the house and elaborate ceremonial and sacrificial structures of bamboo are constructed to represent the spirits. Often these structures, called *yugings,* are profusely decorated with bamboo shaves and bamboos having linear designs engraved on them. Occasionally,

a crude hornbill, carved out of a branch, is also attached to the structure. All objects of sacrifice are tied to these shrines and the shavings are smeared with blood of the sacrificed animals. Their importance, however, lasts



A sacrificial structure called *yuging*

only up to the moment of sacrifice. After that they are neglected and later, not only they do fall down but may also be burnt, perhaps to roast a pig.

The Daflas consider the sacrifice of a mithun as the most important. No other sacrifice can match it in efficacy. It is as dear to the Wiyus and the *orums* as to the people who eat the meat with great avidity. No other ritual is so elaborate, nor in any other case are the injunctions so strictly adhered to, as in case of the Yulo ceremony marked by the sacrifice of mithuns. Over wide areas, the pig stands second to the mithun. Cows are offered only where they are available, especially in the villages lying near the markets of the plains. Goats are more frequently used and fowls are the commonest objects of sacrifice. Dogs are sacrificed to avert witchcraft.

The manner of sacrifice also differs in case of different animals, and at different rituals. A mithun is tied to the sacrificial structure by the horns and felled unconscious with a stroke of the axe on the neck. A dao is then plunged into the heart and the chest is cut open. Pigs are beheaded as in the Pahi ceremony,[1] felled unconscious with a wooden pestle as in making an offering to the dead, or may be pierced in the heart with a bamboo spike as in making the offerings to the *orums* before marriage. Fowls are invariably cut half-way through the neck, and allowed to die gradually. Whatever be the methods followed, a slow painful death, attended with squeals and flutters and prolonged spasms of a death is believed to please the Wiyus and the *orums*.

In all sacrifices the livers of the animals are taken out for taking omens. In case of the pigs and mithuns, the blood is collected in bamboo *chungas* to be warmed

[1] If a man kills another man, the two clans sever relations of eating and drinking with each other. It is only when the Pahi ceremony is performed by sacrificing a mithun or pig, that the two clans resume their friendly relations.

and eaten by the members of the clan. In the Yulo sacrifice, however, the priest collects the blood in a bamboo tube and hangs it in front of his house as a mark of distinction.[1]

Priests. In Dafla society, the priest holds a distinct position by virtue of his knowledge of diagnosis and cure, and the supernatural world. But not all priests are alike. There are priests, called *nijik nube,* who treat only ordinary diseases and take omens in the egg or chicken. They do not require extraordinary training. Priests of this category are common. More capable and distinguished priests, called *but nube,* are few and are known over wide areas. They are called from distant villages to render services in sickness and sacrifice. A third category of priests includes a few shamans or *nyoki nube.* They serve as intermediaries between men and the Wiyus. Such priests profess to cure all kinds of patients, perform all kinds of sacrifices, and forecast all kinds of miseries and evils.

How does a man become a priest? All priests, including shamans, say that it is Chene Mane Wiyu who, while the baby lies in the mother's womb, tells him that he is to become a priest. In early childhood, the boy feels the inspiration in him and picks up sacrificial songs and incantations quickly. A number of typical dreams, followed by appropriate sacrifices to the Wiyus, endow him with the power of curing the sick and performing sacrifices. If a man is to become a shaman, the Hilu Ryayung Wiyu enters his body after appropriate invocations are sung. It is in a state of trance that he prescribes sacrifices and cure for the patient.

[1] These bamboo tubes indicate the number of mithuns that a priest has been called to sacrifice. Larger the number of these tubes or *hidungs,* greater is the prestige of the priest.

Shamans are few and it is therefore difficult to watch a shaman in trance. Before passing into a state of trance, the shaman sits near his hearth and is offered beer. He holds in his right hand a fan made of a hawk's wing. He sings songs swinging the fan to and fro. In singing, he is assisted by a *boo*. Gradually, the body becomes tense. The priest moves the fan violently, a clear indication that the Wiyu has entered his body. In trance the priest becomes violent trying to get up and dance. People present hold him down and make him sit. They ask him questions and he suggests sacrifices for cure. In such a state, he can treat patients suffering from arrow wounds. Some of the shamans have been reported to have cut open the belly of a sufferer with a dao without causing pain, and to have cured him. A shaman is also known to cure snake-bite by inflicting dao-wounds. When the shaman's work is over, he prays the Wiyu to leave his body and finally lies down to sleep. When he gets up, he regains his normal condition, except that he feels feverish and has pain all over the body.

The priest's services are indispensable to the Daflas. Whether the occasion be birth or death, sickness or sacrifice, a priest is invariably called. He does not kill the sacrificial animal himself. His duty is to sing songs and make incantations. It is under the direction of the priest that a sacrificial structure is constructed. He alone determines the Wiyus who are to be represented in the shrines. For his services, he receives the traditional presents of special parts of the animal, beer and valuables like beads, *majis* and Tibetan daos.

Distinguished priests are lavishly entertained. Often their balconies remain decorated with more than a dozen *hidungs* or ceremonial *chungas* containing mithun blood. Inside their houses hang such articles of distinction as

head dresses, fans of prized feathers, and mithun shoulder blades with charcoal drawing. Both *but* and *nyoki nubes* observe certain food taboos. These include mushrooms, certain kinds of birds, and wild animals.

IV. Dreams and their Significance

The Daflas attach great significance to their dreams. A man sleeping with his wife dreamt that his organ had been cut off, and in fact, he never had any child by her. Another man saw himself combing his hair and plaiting it in a knot, and soon thereafter his son died. These are not considered matters of coincidence, but are accepted beliefs which are rooted in the people's philosophy of life. According to the Dafla dream theory, the soul leaves the body during sleep and goes out wandering. Whatever it sees or experiences, the man recollects on awakening as a *yuma* or a dream. The departure of the soul during sleep is the important factor in the whole dream situation, for the Daflas believe that the soul can foretell things, since it can see and experience things in its wanderings that are beyond the range of the human senses, and that through dreams, it warns the sleeper of happenings in the future. It may foretell success in a hunt, or a calamity such as sickness or death, or it may foretell a failure of the crops, or the prospect of getting a *maji*. Every dream has a meaning and is significant, though most of the dreams are more or less on predetermined patterns. Again, what Dr Verrier Elwin states of the Saoras is also true of the Daflas. 'The dreamer's explanation is invariably the traditional one; the key to the symbolic code is not individual but is known to all; it is almost impossible to obtain a personal reaction'.[1]

[1] Verrier Elwin, *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* (Bombay, 1955), p. 506.

A number of dreams are related to hunting and the success or the futility of a chase may be foreseen in a dream. Thus a man, who sees the brass pin used for decorating the hair-knot, knows that he will get a barking deer. To dream of the female organ signifies sure success in the hunt and the reward of a wild boar. The killing of a man in a dream, an otherwise dreadful act, is a symbol that ensures a tiger as a reward during a hunt. A wild-boar as a possible reward in a hunt may be indicated by a dream of snake-bite, or of a pigsty with an open door. Pounding of *omyo,* the native poison for smearing arrow-heads, is a good dream and is said to indicate that the person will get animals during a chase with comparative ease. The long tail of the *lini* bird symbolizes the long horns of an animal, and seeing it in a dream indicates that the dreamer will shoot animals with long horns. On the other hand, it is a bad omen for a man to dream of going to a jungle and talking to his ancestor. Such a man will return from the jungle empty-handed. To dream of the closed door of a pigsty indicates that the man will not get any game.

The dreams related to the crops are also symbolic. A man holding the breasts of a woman in a dream can expect excellent crops. The excreta of pigs is another symbol of fertility, and a man crushing it with his feet will have a good millet crop. Another symbolic dream is a stork seen in a pond of water with abundant fish, for just as fish are in abundance for the stork, so shall the crops be for man. On the other hand, if a man dreams that, while returning from his fields he sees a dead man, it means that his fields will be destroyed by monkeys, mithuns and rats. Here a dead body symbolizes the dead crops. Another typical dream is a man who sees himself carrying a basket of maize. It is a bad dream,

for it indicates that the crops will go bad and he will have to borrow maize from another village. In times of food shortage, the borrowing of maize or rice is the commonest remedy to solve the problem of hunger. To sit in a granary in a dream indicates that Emo Wiyu is displeased and that the crops of the dreamer will go bad. But, alternatively, it may also mean that he will fall sick.

By far the most important dreams are those which indicate the death of someone. Death is the greatest of all calamities and a man will continue offering sacrifices to the Wiyus whose wrath is likely to cause his death. The old may die and the bereaved may mourn for one or two days, but the death of the eldest wife is considered a great mishap. Likewise, for a woman there is no greater sorrow than the death of her son or husband.

Seeing one's own private parts in a dream is always dreaded, for it indicates that the dreamer's last days are approaching. If the pubic hairs are seen, it means that the Wiyus intend tying him with a rope and carrying him to the Land of the Dead. The loss of the limbs, fingers and teeth, is equally bad. The loss of the front teeth indicates the death of a brother, and of the back teeth, the death of a wife. Dreams relating to the loss of fingers also mean death. The little finger denotes the youngest brother, the middle the eldest brother, and the index finger and thumb respectively stand for the middle brother and parents. To dream that you become lame and have to crawl means that your eldest wife will die, and that you will have to live in misery and pain.

Some of the phenomena of nature are also interpreted to mean death. Thus, a rising moon in a dream indicates that the dreamer will die and that his pale face will be seen by others. A setting sun is also bad, for it

indicates that the man's parents or the eldest wife will die. The dream of bright sunshine followed immediately by darkness also augurs death of the family members one by one. If a hill is seen with an opening or a cave, it means that the dreamer will see the grave of someone being dug. However, if it is seen breaking and falling down, it signifies that there will be an outbreak of epidemic and that many men in the village will die.

To see the articles of decoration in a dream is also a bad sign. 'I saw myself combing my hair in a dream,' said Bat Heli, 'I was horrified when I imagined what the dream indicated. I lost my ailing son after a couple of days in spite of several sacrifices.' A dream of giving one's beads to someone is an indication that the man's wife or child will die. To dream of the falling of a dao in the water, and the breaking of a bow string during the release of an arrow mean the loss of a son.

A dream of a dog-bite signifies that Soini Wiyu is offended and wants to kill the man by making him fall from a tree, by drowning, or by means of a landslide. Dojing Wiyu is believed to be offended when a white monkey is seen in a dream. The dreamer must perform sacrifices to him lest he is killed by the malicious Wiyu. One of the commonest dreams is to dream of constructing a new house and to live there. Among the tribes of the Subansiri region, this dream appears to have a wide distribution. It indicates that the man's soul has selected the place in the next world to live in. A man seeing such a dream, therefore, invariably thinks that his last days are approaching, and he is filled with the fear and anxiety of imminent death. The Apa Tanis and the Tagins also share this belief.

Another dream, which prognosticates death, is that of a man who dreams of holding ginger on his palm, an

indication that the dreamer will hold the pale palm of a dead man; however, if he dreams that he is eating it, then it simply means that he will fall ill. Dreaming of the sacrifices of a mithun indicates that someone in the family will die. Going to the Lakhimpur bazaar, a pleasure in day-to-day life, is very bad when seen in a dream, for it means that somebody will die and the man will have to bathe in the river. A dream of drowning is dangerous and, if in the dream a man drowns in spite of the help offered to him, it indicates that he cannot be saved from death in spite of the several sacrifices. The dreamer's death is also indicated when he dreams of a river full of red water; he must perform sacrifices to Lirri Wiyu to avert the danger.

A large number of dreams are indications of less serious calamities of various kinds. To dream of a stormy wind means that there will be a war. If a man dreams that he is carrying mithun horns, it indicates that he will be captured by an enemy and put into a stockade. A tiger coming to devour the dreamer signifies that he will be slain by an enemy. To dream that he is chasing birds forebodes the possibility of his being caught and put into a stockade. The carrying of boiled rice tied in leaves indicates that the man may not only be captured but also made into a slave.

A family quarrel may be indicated when a man dreams that he is beating a *talu* or pulling the strings of the scarecrows. Wearing of red cloth is also symbolic of quarrel and bloodshed. Again, when a man dreams of a stream coming out of a hill and disappearing in another, it is always taken to mean that there will be a quarrel in the village which may even result in bloodshed.

The occasional outbreak of fire is a great source of

trouble to tribal societies. Among the Daflas, this may be foreseen in a dream of snowfall, or of enormous flies seen coming out of the earth. A man, who dreams of collecting a lot of cotton, is always careful to guard his house against fire. Poverty and misery may be indicated when a man sees a dry stream, and if he dreams of putting a lot of beads round his neck, it means that the Wiyus are planning to put ropes around his neck, and that he will fall sick and die. The flesh of a mithun is another bad dream and indicates that the dreamer will be bitten by a snake.

Some of the dreams indicate the loss of mithuns, pigs or fowls, either through death or sacrifice. A man killing a snake in a dream always fears that one of his big mithuns may die; the same may happen, if the man dreams of removing leeches sticking to his legs. The probability of spending money on fowls and eggs for sacrifices is confirmed by a dream of a man bleeding, or of a woman killing lice with her nails. If a man dreams that his own mithun is charging him with horns, it signifies that Sotung Wiyu is offended and demands sacrifices. The gum for trapping birds is also significant in a dream, for it means that the dreamer will have to sacrifice chickens for the recovery from a sickness. Minor accidents may also be foreseen in a dream. Thus, if a man sees that he is looking for omens in an egg or a chicken liver, it means that he might cut his hand with a dao.

Most of the dreams described so far are bad dreams or what the people call *yuma mor;* but, some of the dreams are thought to be good and lucky, and are called *yuma mapt.* We have already referred to such dreams connected with the crops and hunting. We shall now describe some good dreams that are related to weather

phenomena and the prospects of amassing wealth.

A dream of a jungle burning simply means that there will be a lot of sunshine in the near future. It is not unusual for a man to dream of drinking a lot of beer. This indicates that there will be a heavy shower of rain.

When a person dreams of seeing some of the popular birds being killed, it purports that the person concerned will get riches. Thus *pup* and *pugu* birds indicate that the man will get a *mok maji*. The killing of a *pung* bird means the acquisition of the *ripi maji*, and of a hornbill, a *talu* or metal plate.

When a man sees that he is repairing a *nara* (cane ration-bag) it indicates that the dreamer will be able to argue out his case in the assembly and win it. The crescent moon seen in a dream signifies the arrival of some welcome guest. If a man dreams of a clean pool of water, he thinks that he will get the fine beer indicated in the dream and be happy. The sex dreams are not numerous among the Daflas. But certain dreams may either confirm the already existing doubt, or create suspicion in the man's mind. To dream of a pestle for pounding cereals falling down cautions the man against his wife, who may be thinking of running away with another man. A damaged gourd or a bamboo tube for measuring rice, or a damaged earthen pot, if seen in a dream, indicates that the dreamer's wife is having illicit relations with another man. Only two dreams are straightforward sexual acts of animals and are suggestive of their simplicity of interpretation. The first is seeing dogs in an act of sexual intercourse, and the other is a man dreaming of the sexual act of a bull with a cow-mithun. The first dream means that the man's wife or daughter shamelessly indulges in the sexual acts with someone, but the second dream goes further to indicate

that the man's wife is having sexual relations with a slave.

What do the Daflas do when they see a dream? The dream, be it good or bad, is discussed in the morning among elderly people. The interpretation is not difficult for it is made according to the traditional code. If the dream is bad, the priest must be called. The offended Wiyu must be discovered. It is, however, not always a simple matter. At times, it may take as long as a month to reveal him, and every day several little chicks may be sacrificed. It is only when the Wiyu has been discovered that the appropriate sacrifices are made to appease him. The danger of the possible misery may thus be averted. In the case of good dreams, nothing of the kind need be done. The dreamer will naturally be happy, and will follow the instructions of the dream. Thus, if a man's dream indicates that he will get a wild boar, he obviously goes to the jungle in search of one, and it is significant to mention that in all cases, where the people saw this dream, they declared having succeeded in getting the wild boars. Good dreams are a source of great cheer and encouragement to the people living in a world of Wiyus who are always eager to make human life miserable.

V. Death

Death due to old age, the Daflas think, is caused by the natural exhaustion of *lochang* or the life-material in the bones. But in other cases, especially when a man dies in the prime of his life, death is considered to be abnormal. All such deaths are the consequences of the malice of the unappeased Wiyus and the *orums* who beat the man to sickness, and so cause death. Complementary to this is the belief that Chene Mane Wiyu, while he is still in the mother's womb, decrees the manner

of death for man. He may die accordingly through a fall from a rock or a tree, or by a snake-bite. He may be drowned or devoured by a tiger. Yet, the immediate cause of sickness, accidents, or death is invariably ascribed to the Wiyus and *orums*. Death, not infrequently, is believed to be caused by witchcraft. Suicides however, are rare.

During sickness, when all attempts to cure a patient fail, death is accepted as a certainty. This fact does not remain concealed from the patient. In such a case, therefore, he resigns himself to his fate, often dying inch by inch in agony and helplessness. The sick man in his last hours is given only beer in little quantities. Apparently, many of them become too weak to ask for it or even to speak at all. Relatives and friends surround him, and every now and then feel the patient's pulse and epigastrium. As soon as they stop functioning and the body loses warmth, the people start mourning and lamenting.

Dafla mourning is very pathetic and anyone, who attends a death ceremony, finds it difficult to check his tears. Such a scene was witnessed by the author at Yaglo.

It is the sad morning of January 22 in the year 1957. The house is Likha Chada's, whose wife has died the previous night. The corpse is lying on a side by the family hearth with knees folded and palms joined together, placed close to the mouth. It is covered with an *endi* silk-cloth. A small gourd containing beer, and an earthen pot containing rice, with their mouths covered with leaves and tied with cane at the neck, are placed by the head of the corpse. They are provisions for the soul's journey to the next world. A priest, supported by his assistant, is busy in incantations, directing the way it

should follow while going to Neli Nyoku or the next world. Everyone's eyes are red through want of sleep and weeping. Chada uncovers the pallid face of his dead wife. Tears are streaming down his checks. He rubs his face to his wife's and starts lamenting.

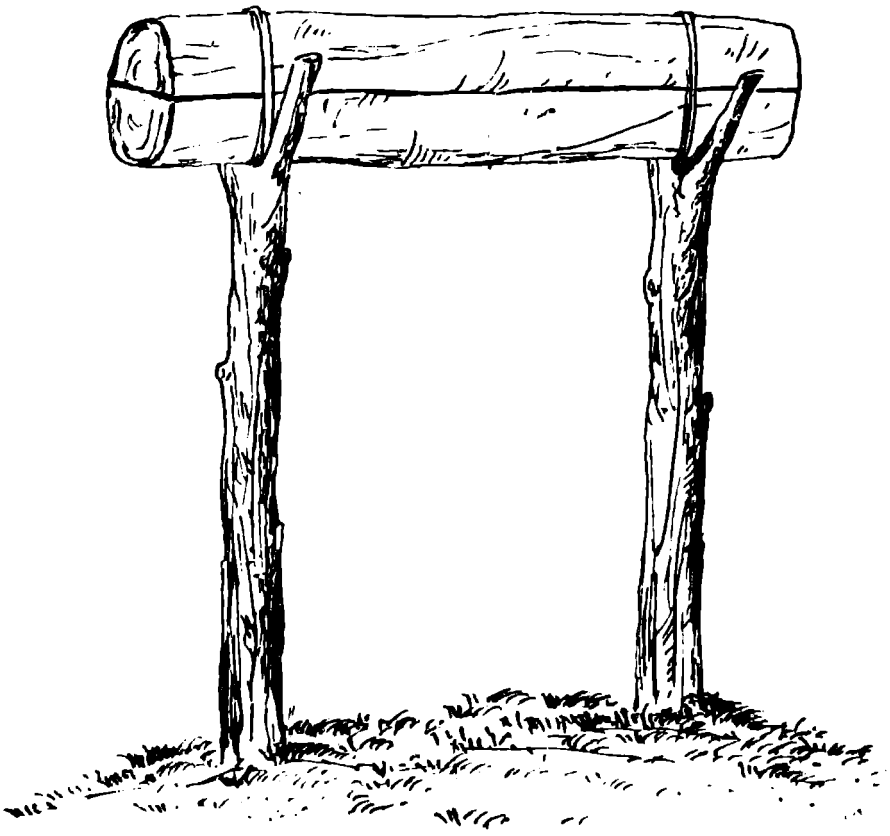
'Who took you away from me,' he cries, 'you were like my mother. You gave me food and beer. You kept me so well; but now you have left me for all time to come. I will see you no more. Who will give me food with her own hands? Who will take care of me and look after me? Who will sleep with me on this mat and love me as you did? Who will go to the fields with the basket and the stick? You were my hands and limbs. You are gone. I am without hands and without limbs. Oh! where shall I find you again? Why have you left me so soon? O Ane Duini, why have you given me this distress?'

But presently, he stops lamenting and calms down. Addressing the corpse he says, 'I will give you a mithun. I will give you a pig. You go to Neli Nyoku and live there well. Do not return to this land. Do not come to us. Do not give us any trouble.'

The reader should not be surprised at these two ambivalent attitudes. At one end is the strong and deep affection for the physical body, which will be seen no more after it has been buried, but at the other end lies the deep-rooted fear that the ghost of the dead may return to cause trouble, and hence the corpse should be buried as early as possible.

The Burial. The Daflas bury their dead in a very systematic manner near the house. At the burial place a tower of bamboo and wood is erected. It is profusely decorated with leaves, bamboo shaves, the horns of the sacrificed animals, and their neck-ropes. This appears to

be a common feature in the Panior region. In many villages of the Palin valley, however, this is replaced by a small enclosure of bamboo and wood. A trap for animals may also be found fixed to it to scare the Wiyus and *orums,* who may come to eat the corpse of the dead. Normally, for children and men of little significance such as slaves, the structures are small. A typical variation



A baby's coffin at Chebang

occurs in many villages around Nyapin in the case of infants. If the infant dies within a fortnight or so of its birth, a sort of a wooden coffin is made for it. Two

four-feet long pieces of a log are hollowed out except for a length of about one foot and a half at one end, and about six inches at the other. The body is placed in the hollow and the two pieces are tied securely with cane. The joints of the two pieces are pasted with clay to avoid leakage. The unhollowed longer end is inserted in the earth with the baby with its head upwards in the hollowed part above the surface. In certain villages, such as Hia and Pakba, the coffin may be seen tied to the house or, as in Chebang, placed on two forked posts. This is purely a device arising out of the deep affection of a mother for the child. It is not unusual to find a mother in her grief holding the burial structure and weeping over the lost child. Burial, however, is the normal rule, whether it is a man or a woman, young or old.

Ceremonies too vary in details. A rich man, with a large number of cattle heads, is usually given more mithuns and pigs for his last journey than a man of poorer means. The number depends on what the bereaved family can afford. Not long ago, it was a common practice in the Panior region to keep the body of a rich man for two to three days within the house. This enabled all his relatives and friends to come from far and near to attend the funeral rites. The feastings, which form part of the ceremonial, were then on a much larger scale than an average man could afford. But now this is growing rare and the corpse is buried the next day. The mithun heads, suspended from the burial structure, however, are still taken to be a measure of a man's status and wealth. To give a detailed picture of a Dafla burial is beyond the compass of this little treatise. What is presented here is, therefore, only a brief sketch of events leading to the final burial.

The *yalo* or soul, known as *orum* after death,[1] does not leave the body at the time of death. It lingers in the corpse until a little earlier than the cock crows. When it leaves, the corpse shakes a little, but only a little. A sound, as if a rat is moving, is heard. This is because the *orum,* while going out of the house, sees and touches his things. The people of the house cry out '*sema bido bido*', the *orum* has gone out. Fires are lit immediately and the mourning starts.

But now the Wiyus and the *orums,* who have come and entered the house to eat the corpse, have to be driven out. Early, before sunrise, men assemble with their weapons of war and the chase. The door opening in the *batung* is closed, while the other in the *tumko* is kept open. From the side of the closed door, the inmates make a long humming sound and, coming towards the open door, make thrusts at every corner of the house with their spears and daos. Some of them shoot arrows into the thatch, and into the open air. The Wiyus and the *orums,* with so many people after them with formidable weapons, are believed to run for their lives from the back door. This rite is called *mengya abdo.*[2]

[1] Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf suggests that 'the part of man that goes to the Land of the Dead is called *yal,* but besides this *yal,* there is another element in man, which after death remains in touch with the living, and partakes of offerings. This element is called *orum* and its exact nature is still somewhat obscure.' The term *yal,* in fact, is more comprehensive with a wider signification than *orum. Orum* is the *yalo* after its separation from the body through death. So an *orum* may be, and often is referred to as a *yalo.* Moreover, *orum* carries with it a suggestion of a possibility of evil or harmfulness, whereas *yalo* denotes simply the inner essence which may be taken as equivalent to soul. See C. von Furer-Haimendorf, 'The After-Life in Indian Tribal Belief', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* Vol. 83, Part I, (January—June 1953), p. 43.

[2] The names of the ceremonies are those as recorded in the Panior region. Due to dialectic variations, some of these are known by different names and differ in details from village to village.

As the morning breaks, the first thing is to select the site for the burial. This does not take much time and a suitable site is found in front of the *tumko*. The husband (in case of a dead woman) comes with her walking stick, and digs a little earth with it. A square is made and more earth is dug up with a dao. Then he throws earth on all sides with both hands. He weeps and says, 'Who has taken you? Who has given me this distress? You (the *orum* of the dead) eat Doje's son. You eat Sotung's[1] son. This is called *chili bepa do*. After this, the friends and relatives engage themselves in digging up the grave in the slope in such a manner that the upper layer of the earth remains undisturbed and the corpse can be inserted from the side. While some of the people dig the grave, others erect the tower of bamboo and wood, and, within two hours, the grave with the superstructure is ready.

Within the house lamentations continue and beer is served to every one, including the relatives, who by now will have arrived from other villages. The priest continues his incantations. Now comes the turn of sacrifices. In case of Chada's wife, only two animals, a goat and a pig, were sacrificed. A stone was put near the corpse. The pig, with its legs tied in a pestle, was brought by two persons. Its head was placed on the stone and the priest addressing the corpse said, 'Take what we give you now. Do not demand more. Make your house in the Land of the Dead and live there. There are mithuns, pigs and fowls. Take them and do not return to this land. You have become *orum*. You have become big. You are rich. Give us good crops. Give us children. Keep our mithuns well. Do not return any

[1] These are names of the Wiyus. Sotung is the god of witchcraft.

more. Never trouble us and our children. We are giving you more than what we can afford. You go to Tugu Lepin and Si and Duini and demand from them what you need. But do not come here.' As the priest concluded, one of the male members came with another pestle and struck the pig hard on the head. It squealed in pain, bled, fell unconscious and was removed. This is called *romdi didin*. Presently, a rope was put in the right hand of the deceased. One end was tied to the neck of a goat which stood below the house. After the priest had prayed, the rope was thrown down underneath the house. The two animals were then killed, cut open and roasted outside. Among those gathered in the house, some wept, some busied in the preparation of beer, while others talked of trifles, and even laughed.

By now midday was approaching. The burial structure was ready and the pig and goat had been roasted. The women assembled near the corpse and wept loudly. The husband helped his mother-in-law with water and she washed her daughter's face and hands. The nails were pared with knife and two pieces of yellow thread were tied to thumbs. This was done with the purpose to send the dead with clean hands, without taking rice or beer in addition to what had been given. While this was in progress, the women prayed, 'Keep all of us well and help us when we fall sick. Give us good crops and be always good to us and our children.' The earrings were removed and two beads, strung in a thread, were put in each ear. The bead necklaces were removed and a string of a few beads was put around the neck. The ankle garters too were removed for the fear that they may change into serpents and bite the *orum*. Finally, the *endi* piece, with which the corpse was covered, was removed and a piece of old cloth was put in its place.

When the corpse was ready for burial, four of the women and the husband's father lifted the body in a sitting position, and took it out of the house. All wept. The place, where the dead body lay, was sprinkled with water. Everyone came out to the burial. A mat was spread within the grave. Then the husband and one other helped to place the body within the grave. The two pots, containing rice and beer, which were placed near the deceased, were opened and put inside the grave. The priest, who continued his incantations, now held in his hand a stump of elephant grass to which was tied a little stone in a string. After the body had been put in, the hole was covered with wooden pieces. A mat was spread and nailed to the wooden ends. The grave was covered with earth. A woman kept on sprinkling water on it. A menhir of stone was erected and a bamboo pole, with a miniature conical basket at the top, was put up near it. Another bamboo pole was set up and finally, the loose bamboos were tied with cane. A number of split-bamboo arches were fixed all around. The people, who lifted the body, bathed in the river.[1]

Everyone returned to the house and the meat was cut into pieces. The meat and beer were served to all who were present. The husband did not eat but took the food in his hand, raised it to his lips, and threw it away without eating it, saying, 'Eat whosoever has given me this distress.'

In the evening, fire was lit near the grave. Some food and beer were placed in the miniature basket. Once more the kinsmen assembled with their weapons and, making the hmmm noise, drove the Wiyus and the *orums* away by shooting arrows. Some of them climbed

[1] This is not common in all the Dafla areas. In this particular case, however, the people did have a wash.

up the structure and shouted loud at the spirits. Others threw burning sticks in the air to scare them.

The whole ritual concerned with death is pervaded with a fear of the return of the departed soul in the form of an *orum* from the next world to trouble the family. For this reason, the deceased is offered sacrifices and is begged not to return. But at the same time the *orum* is of a much higher order than human beings, and hence, it is asked to bestow good crops, children and happiness. Ornaments of value are brought out but substitutes are provided. After all, the dead are expected to be comfortable in the next world, for the Orum Land is a land of plenty. This leads us to consider what the Daflas think of the next world.

The Under World. An average Dafla will deny all knowledge of the next world, save that it lies below the earth and the *orums* live there. In fact, the mysteries of Neli Nyoku, or the Land of the Dead, are known only to the priests, who alone can give a vivid picture of it. It lies below the earth. The *orums* live there in houses like those on earth. They cultivate land, grow paddy, tubers of all kinds, and in fact all the articles of food that the people grow here. These grow there not only in abundance, but are also larger in size. The paddy stumps, for example, are tall enough for the nests of small birds. On the flat land live the *orums* who died a natural death. On the hills and their inaccessible summits live the *orums* of those people who died as a result of accidents.

The *orums* live there with their kinsmen. When a man dies and his *orum* goes there, he is received well. They offer him food and beer, and he lives with them or makes his own house. The paths leading to Neli Nyoku are varied and many. It is believed that the *orums* of the persons dying by accident have to go over difficult paths

full of mud, leeches, and thorny bushes. But all *orums* on the way meet a 'guardian of the underworld, who questions all new comers. Deeds of valour and enterprise find his approval, and a man who has killed many enemies, married many wives, and acquired great wealth in slaves and cattle is received with honour and entertained with food and drink for several days. The meek and the humble, on the other hand, are dismissed curtly as having achieved little of note in this world.'[1]

The Daflas have no clear idea of reincarnation. All that can be obtained from the old priests is that the *orums* die once more, and go to another world called Orum Kyulu. From there, they occasionally come to this world in the form of butterflies.

EPILOGUE

The Daflas are a proud and virile people. It is unfortunate that, in early times, they earned the disrepute of being raiders and treacherous. Yet the times have changed. With the coming of the Administration to these hills, they have received the lasting gift of peace. The dangers to life and property, which for centuries made the people live an uneasy life, have been brought to an end. A peaceful co-existence is the result. The suspicion of one towards the other, the feuds that lasted a man's life-time or even beyond, and the risk of being captured into slavery no longer exist. The people are co-operating with the Administration to improve their general well-being, while new avenues of life and prosperity are being opened to them.

The Dafla country is a difficult area. Visiting the land about 15 years ago, Dr C. von Furer-Haimendorf wrote in 1955: 'To build roads and bridges suitable for wheeled traffic would require such enormous resources that it can hardly be considered a practical solution' and added, 'there is little likelihood that the limited commerce of small tribal populations would justify the construction of motorable roads in one of the world's most difficult mountain countries.'[1] Thanks to the Military Engineers, a fair weather motorable road now links Ziro, the headquarters of the Subansiri Division, with the plains. This has led a large number of Daflas of the distant interior to visit the markets of the low country. A number of tracks have also been constructed from the headquarters to the Administrative Centres, not less than six of which

[1] C. von Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary* (London, 1955), p. 231.

have already been opened in the Dafla country. Each of them is a small unit not only for general administration but also for the development work. Of recent years, numerous villages have been linked to these units with tracks that may ultimately be widened. In many cases, the people have constructed roads on a self-help basis.

To make their living, the people continue to use their ancient technique of slash-and-burn. However, they are taking to terrace cultivation wherever it is possible. There is a considerable demand for iron implements, improved seeds and fertilizers. Ploughing is difficult in this area but the zeal of the people, in one village at least, can be realized when we hear them demanding tractors for ploughing. Animal husbandry is only second to agriculture. In former times, the cattle died of foot-and-mouth disease. But now veterinary sections scattered in the Dafla country give relief to hundreds of animals.

The introduction of medicine has been a great boon. The people suffer from goitre, dysentery, sore eyes and various fevers. The traditional way of curing the sick has been to leave the patient to the priest. But when in certain cases, where the priest despaired of curing the patients, the doctors succeeded, the people realized that the modern doctor was also useful. Today the priests and doctors perform their functions side by side. Some of the patients also go to hospitals in the plains for treatment. A few of them even have some sort of ventilation in their houses, and keep them and their villages clean to prevent disease.

To spread literacy and education, the Administration has opened a number of schools. At the M. E. School in Ziro, a number of Dafla boys are now receiving education. The people are not, however, in favour of sending girls to school for their domain is held to be the home. A

few Dafla girls, nevertheless, are prosecuting their studies. The education is of a modified type. The boys are taught not only in the three R's but also given training in agriculture and some arts and crafts, so that instead of clamouring for the government jobs they may take up such avocations in their later life. Some of them have undertaken long educational tours to other parts of the country.

A Dafla game

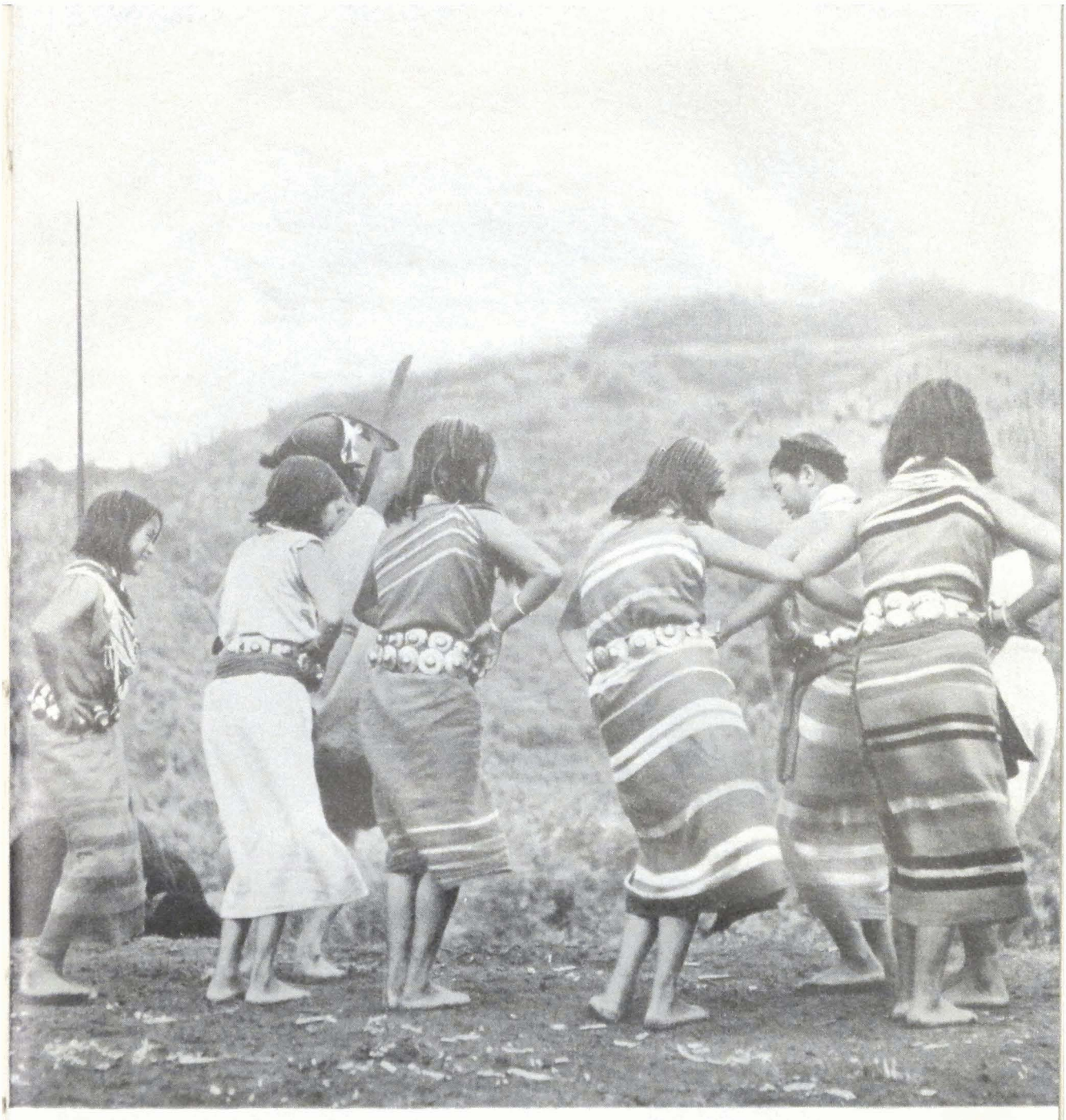
Apart from school training, great emphasis is given to recreational activities. This is not limited to the schoolboys only. There are a few games which are played by boys all over the Dafla country. These are

interesting and afford a lot of fun for all. Such games are being encouraged and the interest people take in them has led the boys play more and more.

Dancing among the Daflas is performed only during ceremonies. A wedding inspires dancers who, beating a metal plate, go through a number of movements and gestures. The Yulo ceremony is always marked by dancing in which the people, falling into two groups, stand erect and bend their bodies rhythmically, while they utter the names of the various Wiyus. Other occasions for dancing are after a harvest or a successful hunt. There is not, however, much dancing among the girls and women, and it is confined to the girls of a few villages in the Jorum-Talo area. The Administration is taking steps to promote this art.

The aim of the Administration is to make the people love their own arts and cultural things, to add colour and variety to their life. The weaving of textilies has been a matter of great concern and coloured yarn is now made available in large quantities at reasonable rates. This has promoted weaving to a considerable extent. The girls of the villages, that lie near the Administrative Centres, now weave beautiful textiles bearing the traditional designs in attractive colours.

The NEFA Administration has a definite philosophy to guide the destinies of these simple people. Nothing is to be imposed on them; they are persuaded to take pride in their own things and develop along the lines of their own genius. Today Dafla society is not faced with the danger of losing its traditional values. No doubt, in every part of the world contact has created problems. This is especially true of the tribes of central India, for example. The Gonds and Baigas are no longer what they were a century before. They took to the Hindu ways



A group of Dafla girls dancing

A Dafla youth with a cane band around his head

of life; their religion and social structure were changed. But the total outcome has been frustration. They lost their own cultural values without fully assimilating the values of the dominant culture. This problem, however, does not exist among the Daflas, at least for the present. Their religion, social institutions and etiquettes are respected; their arts are promoted and considered a matter of pride. Where an institution, such as slavery, is to be changed or discontinued, it is being done by persuasion and over a span of years rather than in haste. How far this planned contact and change will succeed, only time can determine, but there is great hope for the Daflas in the India of tomorrow.

GLOSSARY

Apong —The word for beer. It is often pronounced *opo* or *apo*.

Chukh —A pouch used for carrying tobacco and pipe.

Chunga —A piece of bamboo used as a liquid container or a drinking vessel.

Gam —A village chief or headman.

Hanyang —The word is used for shame.

Hidung —A bamboo *chunga* containing the blood of a sacrificed mithun. A priest hangs it in his house as a token of his distinction.

Id —The songs in which the origin of the sun, moon, earth and the clans is sung.

Koji —A bangle made of bronze or copper imported from Tibet. It is used by the Dafla women and prized by the people as a valuable.

Lochang —A substance within the bones, which keeps a man alive and active. The exhaustion of this material, according to the people, means death.

Maji —A Tibetan tongueless bell. The people believe that Abo Loma was the original smith who made these bells. He worked in the night and never slept. The genuine *majis* made by him are said to be limited in number.

Mithun —The *bos frontalis,* a species of Indian bison.

Nara —A rectangular bag of woven cane used by men for carrying food and other articles.

Neli —The Land of the Dead, also called Neli Nyoku. The term Nyoku means place.

Nube —A priest.

Omyo —The native poison for smearing arrow-heads.

Orum —An ancestral ghost, or the soul at its later existence after death.

Sotung —Witchcraft. It also signifies the God of witchcraft.

Tachur —A gum for trapping birds.

Tama —A kind of fibre used for weaving the cane rings worn by men round the waist. The term is also used for the cane ring itself.

Tamin —A creeper which gives a red dye, and is commonly used by the tribes of the Subansiri region.

Tangdung —A silver smoking-pipe made by the Daflas.

Wiyu —A god, demon, or spirit. The word is usually pronounced 'Ui' in Subansiri.

Yalo —The soul.

Yuging —A ceremonial structure of cane and bamboo representing the Wiyus and the *orums,* erected for a sacrifice. A Shrine.

Yulo —The ceremony of a mithun sacrifice performed after a marriage, or the recovery of a patient.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE SUBANSIRI AREA[1]

ALLEN, B. C., *Assam District Gazetteers: Lakhimpur* (Shillong, 1906). Contains a useful historical summary of Government's relations with some of the NEFA tribes.

BEAMES, J., *Outlines of Indian Philology* (Calcutta, 1867). An appendix gives Abor, Miri and Dafla numerals.

BETTS, U., 'The Village Duel in Apatani Society', *Man in India*, Vol. XXVIII (1948), pp. 163-9.

BETTS, U., 'The Daflas of the Subansiri Area', *R. Cent. Asian Journal*, Vol. XXXVI (1949), pp. 146-54.

BOR, E., *Adventures of a Botanist's Wife* (London, 1955).

BOR, N. L., 'The Daflas and their Oaths', *J. R. A. S. B.*, Vol. II (Third Series, 1936), pp. 27-39.

BOR, N. L., 'Yano Dafla Grammar and Vocabulary', *J. R. A. S. B.*, Vol. IV (Third Series, 1938), pp. 217-81.

BOWER, U. G., *The Hidden Land* (London, 1953).

BUTLER, JOHN, *A Sketch of Assam, with Some Account of the Hill Tribes, by an Officer* (London, 1847). Early description of Daflas.

CAMPBELL, G., *Specimens of the Languages of India, including those of the Aboriginal Tribes of Bengal, the Central Provinces and the Eastern Frontier* (Calcutta, 1874). Describes Dafla at p. 35, and gives vocabularies.

CHARI, M. V., (with B. D. Barua & D. Das), *Report on the Investigation of the 'Unknown Fever' in Kimin-Subansiri Area* (Shillong, 1953).

CROWE, H. M., *Mr Crowe's Account of Journey to the Apa Tanang Country* (Shillong, 1890).

DALTON, E. T., *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872; German edition: Berlin, 1875). Gives account of Daflas, pp. 35-7.

DALTON, E. T., 'Report of his visit to the Hills in the Neighbourhood of the Soobanshiri River', *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. XIV, Pt. 1 (1845), pp. 150-267.

DUFF, B., *Report on the Miri Country and the Operations of Miri Mission* (Simla, 1912).

DUN, G. W., *Preliminary Notes on Daphlas* (Simla, 1896).

[1] Extracted from Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay, 1959).

DUN, G. W., *Preliminary Notes on Miris* (Simla, 1896). The authorship of this and the preceding item is uncertain, but it is generally attributed to G. W. Dun, sometimes spelt Dunne.

DUNBAR, G., (Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar), *Other Men's Lives. A Study of Primitive Peoples* (London, 1938). Includes a popular account of Daflas and Abors at pp. 230-4.

ELWIN, VERRIER, 'The North-East Frontier Agency of India', *The Geographical Magazine,* Vol. XXIX (1956), pp. 405-16.

ELWIN, VERRIER, *A Philosophy for NEFA* (Shillong, 1957; 2nd edition 1959).

ELWIN, VERRIER, *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* (Shillong, 1958).

ELWIN, VEERIER, *India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay, 1959).

FORBES, C. J. F. S., 'On Tibet-Burman Languages', *J. R. A. S.* 1878), pp. 210-27.

FURER-HAIMENDORF, C. VON, 'Agriculture and Land Tenure Among the Apa Tanis', Man in India, Vol. XXVI (1946), pp. 20-49.

FURER-HAIMENDORF, C. VON, 'Culture Types in the Assame Himalayas', *Ind. Geog. Journal,* Vol. XXI (1946), pp. 1-9. Discusses the Sulungs, Daflas and Apa Tanis.

FURER-HAIMENDORF, C. VON, *Ethnographic Notes on the Tribes of the Subansiri Region* (Shillong, 1947).

FURER-HAIMENDORF, C. VON, 'The After-Life in Indian Tribal Belief', *J. R. A. I.*, Vol. LXXXIII (1953), Pt. I, pp. 37-49. Discusses the eschatological ideas of Daflas, Apa Tanis and Konyaks among others.

FURER-HAIMENDORF, C. VON, *Himalayan Barbary* (London, 1955). On the author's travels in the Subansiri area.

FURER-HAIMENDORF, C. VON & E. VON, 'Notes on Tribal Justice among the Apa Tanis', *Man in India,* Vol. XXVI (1946), pp. 181-95.

GODWIN-AUSTEN, H. H., 'Notes on the Geology of part of the Dafla Hills, Assam', *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. I (1875), pp. 35 & 139.

GODWIN-AUSTEN, H. H., 'List of the Birds collected on the expedition into the Dafla Hills, Assam, together with those obtained in the adjacent Darrang Terai', *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. II (1876), p. 64.

GRIERSON, G. A., *Linguistic Survey of India,* Vol. III, Tibeto-Burman Family, Pt. I (Calcutta, 1909). Accounts of the Miri and Dafla languages.

HAMILTON, R. C., *An Outline Grammar of the Dafla Language, as spoken by the Tribes Immediately South of the Apa Tanang Country* (Shillong, 1900).

HARMAN, H. J., 'Narrative Report of Lt. H. J. Harman in charge Daphla Military Expeditionary Survey', *General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India for the Season 1874-5* (Calcutta, 1876).

IZZARD, R., *The Hunt for the Buru* (London, 1951).

KONOW, STEN, 'Notes on the languages spoken between the Assam Valley and Tibet', *J. R. A. S.*, 1902, pp. 127-37. Notes on Dafla.

LLOYD, G. & HUTTON, J. H., *Report on the Census of Assam, 1921* (Shillong, 1923). Contains notes on the Frontier tribes by G. A. Nevill on Apa Tanis and Daflas.

MACKENZIE, A., *History of the relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1884). Contains in Pt. I a historical account of the dealings of Government with the Daflas (pp. 27-32) and Appendix J (pp. 537-50) consists of extracts from the Assam Census Report of 1881; this gives some brief notes on the Hill Miris, Abors and Daflas.

PUGH, M., *Games of NEFA* (Shillong, 1958).

ROBINSON, W., 'Notes on the Dophlas and the peculiarities of their Language', *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. XX (1851), pp. 126-37.

STACK, E., 'Miris, Daphlas and Abors', *Report on the Census of India, 1881, Assam* (Calcutta, 1883), p. 86.

Ten Years of Progress in NEFA (Shillong, 1957).

INDEX

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY