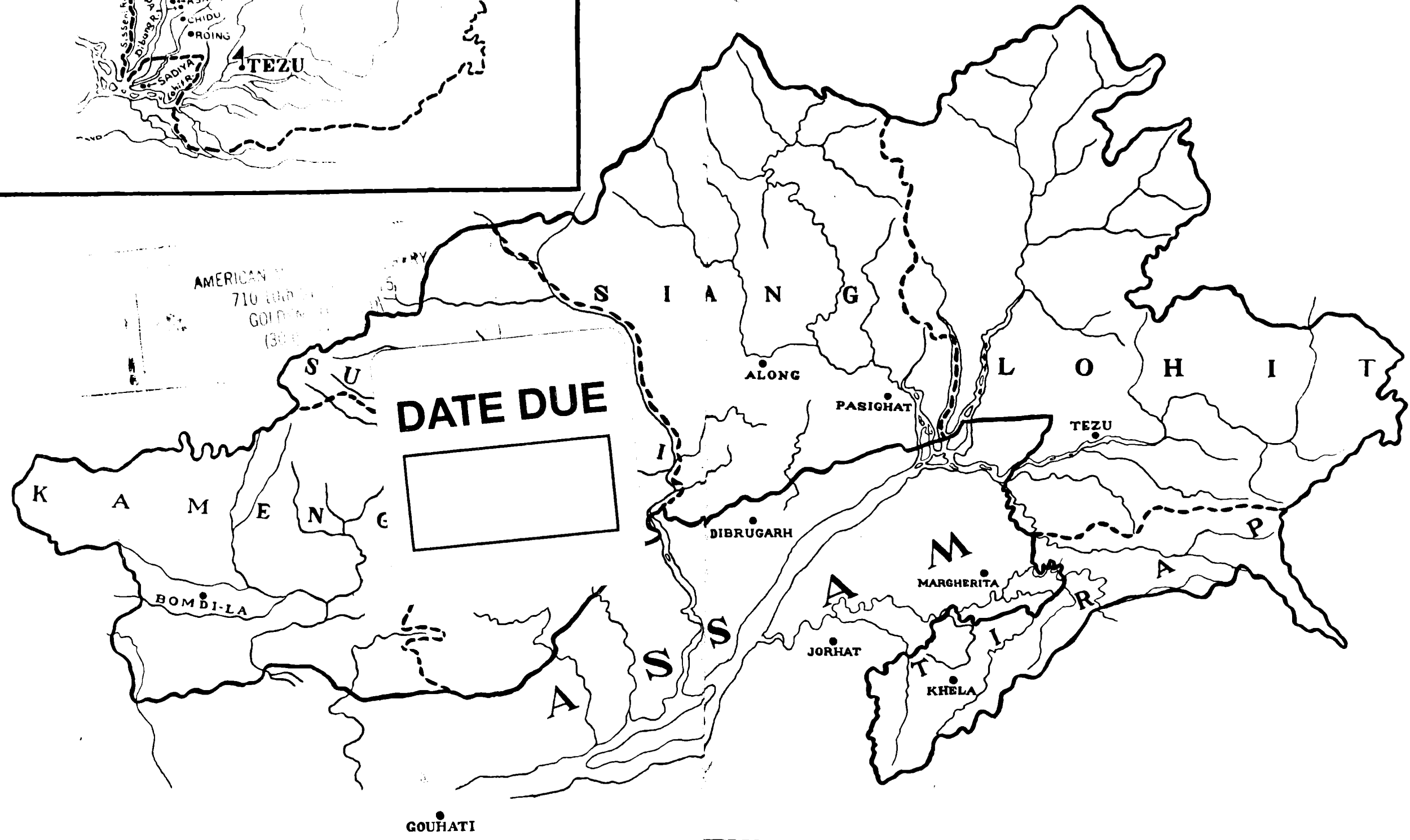


The IDU MISHMIS



TAPAN KUMAR M. BARUAH

NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY



THE PEOPLE OF NEFA

THE
IDU MISHMIS

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SHILLONG

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To

DR VERRIER ELWIN

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P R E F A C E

It is a common practice for writers to add a chapter by way of a preface, where they reveal to the readers matters which though relevant to the main theme yet do not fit in with the objective character of the main body of the book, on account of their personal nature. I am also following the same path for the same reason.

My acquaintance with the Idus dates back from the first day of my joining the NEFA Administration. I have known them from the day I arrived at the headquarters of the Lohit Frontier Division in 1952. But at that time I knew them only in my official capacity. My first real peep into their soul, the first warm and living touch of their heart, was during a tour in the Dibang Valley, undertaken by me in the early part of the year 1957. I went up to Mihunda, a village beyond one of our remote outpost at Anini. This was the land of the Idus—still new—almost unknown—and all alone but for a small batch of porters I travelled through it—far away from all the familiar and the known. It was a new experience, and I felt—what any one of my age and in my condition would have felt—a doubt and a trepidation, doubt about the outcome of my mission and trepidation for the fate that awaited me in the strange land where I felt forlorn even in a crowd because I was not one of the people. This feeling obsessed me up to Kronli. Beyond that, it gradually left me, yielding place to another, a homely feeling—a sense of oneness with

the people. This magical transformation was caused by the people themselves, who took this lonely traveller journeying through their land into their hearts and into their homes—with such a sincerity and openness as never to let him feel that he was a stranger there. Come whatever may in the life to come, the warmth, the affection—the kindly feeling of these people will ever remain a cherished memory with me to the end.

And there is another fact I wish to record. While struggling at writing out this booklet, an image came to my succour whenever I felt wavering and weak in spirit. The image was that of a tall man unkempt, and with dishevelled golden hair, wandering alone in the most desolate parts of a very difficult country in the Central India, among peoples who had been neglected through ages and left to themselves, ignored, and looked down upon. For twenty long years he did move about them, mixed with them, loved them, lived among them as one of them—forgetful of all comforts, amenities, civilization and even of himself. This was a ‘Tapasya’ a sacrifice that reminded one of the Mahatma whose heart went out to the outcaste—to the depressed. And his mission succeeded. The tribes of that part of India are now a subject of admiring love all over the globe, through his writings.

This is an ideal too high and difficult to attain, yet it is an inspiration that has enabled me to do whatever I have done. And for it, all credit to this inspiring presence—but all failings mine.

In conclusion, it is my pleasant duty to acknowledge the assistance which I received while pre-

paring the book—assistance in shape of guidance and advice from Dr Verrier Elwin, and assistance in preparing the manuscript from Shri Sachin Roy, Shri B. Das Shastri, and Shri J. N. Choudhuri. I am very much indebted to Shri Das Shastri and Shri Choudhuri for the inspiration they gave me. My thanks are also due to Shri R. N. Bagchi and Shri U. P. Chakravorty, artists, for the cover design and the line drawings for my book.

August 15, 1960

TAPAN KUMAR M. BARUAH

NEFA, the North-East Frontier Agency, is a wild and mountainous tract of about 30,000 sq. miles in the Assam Himalaya bounded by Bhutan, Tibet, Burma and, valley of the Brahmaputra. It is divided for the purpose of administration into five Frontier Divisions—Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap—with their headquarters at Bomdi La, Ziro, Along, Tezu and Khonsa respectively. It is inhabited by a large number of Indo-Mongoloid tribes, speaking some fifty different dialects. This book describes, Idu Mishmis, an important tribe living in the Dibang Valley in the western part of the Lohit Frontier Division.



A group of Idu dancers



A typical Idu house

LAND AND PEOPLE

I. THE COUNTRY

The Dibang Valley is a Sub-Division of the Lohit Frontier Division which is made up of the mountainous regions lying between the Siang Frontier Division on the west, and Lohit Valley Sub-Division on



A group of Idu Mishmis. (After Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*)

the east. To the north, the Dibang Valley is bounded by the international frontier and the Himalayan ranges. To the south, it extends right down to the

confluence of the Lohit and Dibang rivers. The vast tract towards the north provides the eye with grandiose sceneries in every direction of open grassy hillsides and lofty peaks covered with snow.

Almost the whole of the area of the Dibang Valley consists of continuous chains of hills, which along the northern boundary are perpetually covered with snow. Towards the south, they are lower, and the outer hills are not more than four to six thousand feet high. The soil of the Dibang Valley is mostly sandy and unstable, as a result of which land-slides are very frequent. The great 1950 Earthquake severely affected the Dibang Valley region, and at places the land-slides completely obliterated the old peaks. The land-slides introduced a vicious cycle of ever-increasing erosion as the slopes were very much disturbed, and therefore, less able to withstand the rain and wind. Further, the hill slopes have become bare due to the removal of whatever thin soil and vegetation had covered them before the earthquake.

The principal river of the valley is the Dibang or the Tallan, as the people call it, which rises far beyond the northern boundary. It first flows towards the west from its source, and then taking a southward course, finally joins the Lohit. The Dri and Ithun are its largest tributaries. In the hills, the Dibang flows down at a tremendous speed through deep gorges, but when it enters the plains, it stretches out in reaches of still green water. The Idus, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Dibang Valley, have names for their rivers, which are different from those which were given them by the inhabitants of the foot-hills region. Thus the

local name for the Dibang is Tallan, for the Lohit, it is Ilyu, for the Deo-pani, Ejjen, and the confluence of the Lohit and the Dibang is called Ilyuthobruru. As a rule, the inhabitants take the name of the river near which they dwell ; thus there are the Midri (the people of the Dri) and the Mithun (the people of the Ithun). The Dibang changes its course every now and then in the foot-hills region and thus erodes its banks whenever it is in spate.

In the Dibang Valley, wild animals such as the sambhar, wart-hog, tiger, and black panther were plentiful in the past, and you could see many peacocks and wild ducks during the cold season. Today, wild life is a rarity, except in the most inaccessible regions of the upper Dri and Ithun Valleys. The Idus have no idea of the value of protecting their wild life. The liberal issue of licences for shot-guns in the last decade has brought a new standard of sportmanship to them. The musk-deer is being wiped out, since trade in musk is a lucrative business. The only animal that is generally found in all the areas is the black bear.

The foot-hills of the Dibang Valley are clad by evergreen forest which has a bewildering number of trees such as the *bola* (*Morus laevigata*), *khokan* (*Duabanga sonnerioides*), *mekahi* (*Phobele-cooperiana*), and *simul* (*Bombex malabaricum*). In the higher altitudes, there are pines (*Coniferous-species*), *hingori* (*Castanopsis species*), and *makari sal* (*Schima wallichii*). Bamboos of the varieties *Deudrocalamus hamiltonii*, *Pseudostachyum polymorphum* and *Teinostachyum-dulloo*, and cane (*Calamus species*) grow in abun-

dance throughout the valley. People living in the higher altitudes use the leaves of the *jhengu* (*Calamus species*), and *tako* (*Livistonia jenkinsiansiana*) for roofing. Rhododendrons, primulas, willows, honeysuckle, and a species of *Viburnum* are the common flowers.

The climate of the Dibang Valley, by virtue of its constant high humidity, is not extreme in temperature during the summer. The general climate ranges from tropical heat to arctic cold. The climate of the foot-hills of the Dibang Valley is the same as in the plains areas of Assam, and the rainfall ranges from 120" to 200" per year. In the higher altitudes snow usually begins to fall from November, and lasts up to April.

II. THE IDUS

The Idus have a Mongolian type of countenance. Those of the northern and north-eastern regions near the frontier are fairer and taller, and more energetic physically and mentally than those living in the lower regions. E. T. Dalton described the Idus in 1872 as follows—‘The colour of the Midhi [Idu] varies from dark brown to the fairness equalling that of a European brunette. Some amongst them have rich red lips and ruddy complexions, and I have seen Midhi girls that were decidedly good-looking, but their beauty is terribly marred by their peculiar method of cropping the hair.’¹ He stated further—‘Their features are in fact of a coarse Mongolian type.

1. Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier in the 19th Century* (Bombay, 1959), p. 336.



An Idu Mishmi Chief in full dress.
(After E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*)

The faces flat and broad, the nostrils wide and round, and the eyes small and oblique, but these characteristics, though stronger in the Midhi than the Tain Mishmi [Taraon] are less marked in the former than they are in the faces of their neighbours—the Abors [Adis]. It has always struck me that the Midhi women are comparatively taller and finer creatures than the men.’¹ Living in the midst of the picturesque serenity of the high hills and nature’s primeval forests, the Idus have preserved their peculiar characteristics—an in-born simplicity and a sense of beauty and their own cultural heritage, unaffected by the touch of civilization.

The Idus are distinguished from their neighbours, the Adis and the Taraon Mishmis, by a peculiar way of dressing the hair. Both men and women shave the hair at the sides of the head, and wear it long at the back, tying it up in a knot at the back. The hair in the front is cut short and hangs over the forehead.

The Idus tell the following story to explain their style of hair-cut :

‘The Supreme God Inni, desired that there should be human beings on the earth, and created four men Mesa, Ami, Mosa and Idu. When they arrived on the earth they felt hungry, and asked Inni what they should eat.’ He replied, “‘Hunt whatever animal you get in the forest; and depend on its meat.’”

Accordingly, they all went to the forest and finding a python, killed it, and with great rejoicing cooked it together. When it was ready, they sat in a row, and

1. *ibid.*, p. 336.

Mesa being the eldest, served them the cooked meat on their plates, giving to each as much as he could eat. But, as Idu sat at the end of the row, and was shy of his elders, he did not ask for sufficient amount and hence his portion was smaller than those of his brothers.

When Mesa came to know of this, he felt sorry for Idu, and calling him, said, "You sat in the corner and ate your meat with your eyes lowered, and I could not recognize you. Henceforth you must put a mark on your head, so that I can recognize you even from a distance."

After this the Idus began to cut the hair in their characteristic manner.

III. ORIGIN OF THE IDUS

According to Idu tradition, gods and women appeared first on the earth ; men came afterwards. The gods sowed the seed of mankind in the womb of the first woman.

'In the beginning, there was no man on the earth. There was a woman, and the gods of the sun, the moon, the wind and the fire. The gods had no knowledge of sex, and were busy with their own affairs. The woman and the gods lived completely naked, for they did not know the use of clothes.

In the course of her wanderings, one day the woman felt desire. Not knowing what to do, she sat with legs apart on the hill where the wind-god Amaya Khinyu lived. The wind-god, out of curiosity, went into her womb. Her belly gradually became large, and after some time, she bore a male child.

When he grew up, he became the father of the Idu Mishmis.'

Another story claims the Idus as descendants of the god Nyu-anjuru and his consort Ludu who hailed from the plains.

'In the olden days, there were only evil gods on the earth. Woman came into being after them. The gods were cruel and lascivious, and made it impossible for other creatures to live on the earth. When the god Nyu-anjuru saw the evil they did, he decided to destroy his whole creation and set fire to the earth. Inni Anjemo, the god of the wind, opened his wings, and spread the fire. The earth was enveloped in it for several days, and when it subsided, only a few women remained alive.

Then Nyu-anjuru realized that without any living being the earth would look barren, and he desired to create lives anew.

Nyu-anjuru kept Arru Maseng as his wife, and she bore him a child named Emmo. Emmo was a blockhead and, whenever he wished, he made others dull and half-witted too. His younger brother was Amroho, and when he grew up, he went to live in the forest, and whenever he was angry, he set fire to the human dwellings.

After this, Nyu-anjuru kept Inni Asige as his wife, and had eight sons by her. The eldest son was Adde, who was the demon of fever and jaundice. The second son was Enna or the leech-god. The third son was Anna, the demon of pain and suffering. The fifth son was Arramo, the wind-god who hurled thunder-bolts and guided the winds. After him came

Siddi, the prodigious demon whose very appearance frightened human beings to death. The youngest of all was Ayajon, who was not as ferocious as his brothers.

Being dissatisfied with his second wife, Nyu-anjuru kept Uini Arru instead. From her he had three sons, Trummi, Gallan and Aja. Gallan liked solitude, and went to stay in the forest. With full cheeks and a tall figure, Aja was majestic in his behaviour, and it was from him the Sahibs originated.

Later on, Nyu-anjuru became fascinated with Inni-o-mago, a girl from the plains, and kept her as his wife. She first gave birth to a child who went away to the south-eastern region while still a boy. His descendants were the Khamptis. Her second son was Mesa or Cuili, whose descendants were the Assamese.

Nyu-anjuru brought yet another girl, Ludu, from the plains, and she bore him two sons. The second son was named Idu, and it was from him that the Idu Mishmis originated.'

All the Idu clans claim lineal relationship with the tiger and monkey, and it is taboo to kill them. This is illustrated by the following story :

'The common ancestor of human beings and tigers was the god Ekammo. Ekammo fell in love with the beauty of his daughter Erraye, and asked her to live with him as his wife.

Erraye blushed with shame, and to save herself from her father's desire, climbed a tree and took shelter in it. But Ekammo would not leave her. He ordered a rat to cut the tree down with his

sharp teeth. The rat nibbled at the roots of the tree for several days, and at last it fell. Erraye had to submit to her fate, and thenceforth she and her father lived as husband and wife.

After some years Erraye gave birth prematurely to a misshapen creature, a tiger, with black stripes on its body. She was frightened when she saw it, and asked Ekammo to take it into the forest and leave it there.

Erraye next bore a very lovely human child.'

Another story describes how men and monkeys have a common ancestor :

'Once the earth was devastated by a terrible fire which burnt all the living creatures in it. The Supreme God Inni was sorry to see the earth empty and deserted. So he decided to repopulate it with living beings and entrusted Inni-Macelan and Ela Amide with the task.

In course of time, Ela Amide gave birth to two children. The younger was a monkey. As time passed, the monkey grew very wicked, and whenever he got a chance, used to destroy the crops in the fields.

Thus Inni Macelan grew weary of the conduct of his younger child, and his love for him changed into hatred. He decided to get rid of him by a trick. He heated a stone, and made the monkey sit upon it. The monkey's back side got burnt and he ran away to the jungle.

After that the monkey and his descendants started living in the forest.'

On the north, the Dibang Valley is bordered by Tibet, and on the east by the Taraon Mishmi

country. The Bebejias who inhabit the Ithun Valley, speak a language closely akin to the Idu. Idu tradition is that they formerly came from the north. The origin of the Idu, and the progress of their migration to their present habitat is wrapped in obscurity. In giving their course of migration, they very often name some places which cannot be identified with anything recorded on the maps. Thus, the Melen clan who live in the Anini area, say that they had their origin in a place called Inni-la-pon to the north. In the course of their southward migration from Inni-la-pon, they settled for some time at a place called Kabbui-bui-anda, which actually means, 'a place where the river flows backward'. So also, they name a place Jahiwi, which means in the Idu language, 'a place where the water-snakes live'. According to the legend of their original home Inni-la-pon is situated somewhere to the north in Tibet.

The Taraon Polo and the Idu Pulu clans originally had a common ancestor, who had his home at Amriti far away. From their original habitat, they moved towards the south, following the course of the Ilyu or Lohit river, and settled in the area neighbouring Panga village of the Lohit Valley. From here, a group migrated towards the south-west and ultimately settled in the Dibang Valley region ; later on, they came to be known as the Pulu people. The Kesen clan originally came from the north, following the course of the Lohit river. They have their relations in the Lohit Valley who are Taraons and speak the Taraon dialect. The Idu Mitayu, Ompo and Malan clans are of the same family as the Taraon Tayi, Muipo and Mala



An Idu Mishmi a hundred years ago.
(After Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*)

clans. Some of the Taraon clans such as the Buili, Momba, Catam and others were originally Idus, who by their long association with the Taraons, have been assimilated by them. These clans, whose main habitat is in the Lohit Valley, originated, they say, at Amriti whence they came down following the course of the Ilyu river. Some sections of the above clans moved further west, and finally settled in the Dibang Valley region. These traditions suggest that they came to the parts they now occupy from the north, following the course of the Lohit river in very remote times.

Wherever the Idus may have had their original home there is reason to believe that their migrations took them through Tibet. The majority of the Idu clan names begin with the word, *mi* or *me* which means 'man'. Mili is an Idu clan. Here *mi* means 'man', and *li* means 'life'. There is another clan called Mega; in the Tibetan spoken at the northern fringes of the Lohit Frontier Division, *me* means 'man', and *ga* means 'lowland'.

IV. HISTORY

Before the British took possession of the province of Assam, all the Mishmi groups were obedient to the orders of the then Assam Government, and paid tribute to its representatives at Sadiya. They also gave allegiance to the Khamptis and Singphos even as late as 1835. The Singpho Dafa Gam received assistance from the Mishmis in erecting stockades.

The Mishmi Hills, in spite of their formidable character, attracted many explorers even in the earliest days. A British Officer, Captain Bedford, went up

the Dibang Valley in 1826 to visit the villages between Bomjur and Mebo. But at this time, these villages were at war with their neighbours, the Taraon Mishmis, and he was turned back by the Idu Mishmis in anything but a friendly manner ; they may have thought that as Bedford was friendly with the Taraons, he must be an enemy.

The policy of the British with regard to the hill people when they took charge of Assam, was in the nature of a loose political control having as its object minimum interference compatible with unprovoked acts of oppression by other tribes, checking the violation of British territory, and, while leaving the people as much as possible to themselves, to abstain from any line of action which would tend to instil in their minds an overdue sense of independence.

In 1839, some Idus joined the Khamptis in their attack on Sadiya. In the year after the defeat of the Khamptis, their chief, Tao Gohain, fled to the Mishmi village of Etalian, north of the junction of the Ithun and Dibang rivers, where he was murdered.

In 1842, the Idus are mentioned in Captain Vetch's report as having cordial relations with the Khamptis, and as paying them tribute.

In 1853, a Political Officer reported that, 'most amicable relations have been maintained with the Chulikatas [Idus] and other Mishmis. The Mishmis on their annual trading visits frequent all the stations of Assam.' He goes on to say : 'The Chulikatas [Idus] are more savage and warlike than other Mishmis, and some year ago, were never seen on the plains

of Assam except as marauders. Now they find an honest trade, a more profitable occupation, and in the cold season they regularly attend the bazaar at Saikhowa, and are very keen barterers.

‘They are ever at feud with the Bor-Abors and this somewhat interrupts their communication with the plains as their trading parties consisting of women as well as men have to make considerable detour to avoid the Bor-Abor ambushade. For the same reason, they do not like to be long absent from their home, and we have not yet been able to induce them to proceed into the District beyond Sadiya.’

In 1855, the Idus made a sudden attack upon a village near Sadiya, killing two persons and carrying off other villagers as prisoners.

In 1857, the Idus attacked another village within sight of Sadiya, and massacred the inhabitants, and in October and November, committed two other raids. They murdered all the women and children of the Khampti village of Chauken Gohain. This outrage roused the Khamptis, and during this and the following years, they would not allow the Idus to enter the plains.

In 1865, the Idus again attacked the Khampti village of Chauken Gohain. One Khampti woman was killed and three wounded. Endeavours were made to get the Idus to enter into an agreement by which they were not to attack the British territory. But this arrangement fell through.

In 1877-78, since the conduct of the Idus toward the Government was satisfactory, a Survey Party was sent into their hills. But the old feud with the Taraons

continued, and some of the Taraons were slaughtered near the border area. In this year, Colonel Woodthorpe penetrated into the Dibang Valley by way of Nizamghat.

In 1879-80, Kalidoi, an Idu chief, made a profession of alliance with the British, and was given five muskets.

In November 1893, three British sepoy were killed near Bomjur out-post, and the rifles of the sepoy were recovered from a Bebejiya Mishmi village. For this reason, a blockade of all the Chulikata Mishmis was ordered, to be withdrawn in 1897-98, on the representation of F. J. Needham, that the Chulikatas were not badly behaved and that a policy of blockade was not effective.

In May 1899, Needham sent a report of an outrage committed by the Idus on the inhabitants of a Khampti hamlet at Mitaigaon, some 16 miles north-east of Sadiya. He believed that the crime was committed by the Bebejiya Mishmis, and recommended that the tribe, and not the individuals, should be punished; he also mentioned that the Bebejiyas had never been punished for the murder of the three British sepoy in 1893.

The Chief Commissioner recommended a punitive expedition to arrest and punish the perpetrators of the Mitaigaon massacre, to recover the guns and children; to arrest the headmen of Aiyu Mimi's village who were guilty of the 1893 outrage and to acquire information on the Dibang Valley region. On December 28, F. J. Needham, with a party of 290 men under Colonel Molesworth crossed the Maiyu

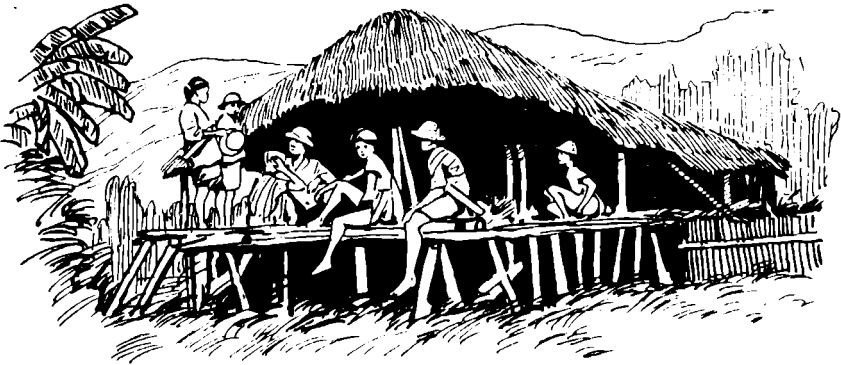
Pass, and reached Hunli early in the new year. During his halt there, Needham recovered two children kept as captives by the Bebejiyas and one of the missing guns. He burnt Pika and two other villages. Leaving Hunli on January 22, the party marched first towards the north-west on the left bank of the Ithun via Abrangon, Elanpu, Ethama and other villages, and then south down the left bank of the Dibang, reaching Nizamghat on February 5th. They destroyed Aiyu Mimi's village on February 1, 1900.

After his tour Needham admitted that the Bebejiyas were far from deserving the description of being a bloodthirsty and dangerous race. Nor were they as numerous as he thought. He put them now at 3,000 to 4,000 souls of whom 1,500 would be fighting men, whom he considered to be a well-behaved and inoffensive tribe eager to be on friendly terms with the Administration.

In 1910, the then Lieutenant-Governor felt the necessity of sending a Mission into the Dibang and Lohit Valleys to make it clear to the Mishmis that they were under British control, to enter into friendly relations with them, to demand loyalty to the orders of the Administration, to bring to an end their raids into the plains, and to stop inter-tribal feuds. The Mission was eventually sent under the command of Captain Bailey who toured the Valleys north-west to the Sessiri and Ithun Rivers, and went as far as Ichigu on the right bank of the Ithun.

A Survey and Exploration Expedition was organized in 1912-13, with the sanction of the Government of India, to discover the course of the Dibang river ;

to fix the main range of the Himalayas north of the Dibang river basin ; to visit as many villages as possible in the areas over which loose political control was to be imposed. This party, headed by Captain G. A. Nevill, visited the Sessiri, Matun, Emra, Upper Tangon and Ahui Valleys.



Captain F. M. Bailey, Asstt. Political Officer, Mishmi Mission, interviewing Mishmi tribesmen at Nizamghat

(After Angus Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles*)

In May 1928, the Governor-in-Council with the previous sanction of the Governor-General prescribed a boundary known as the 'Inner Line' for the Sadiya Frontier Tract which started from Siplumukh on the Subansiri and ran east along the ridge of the outer ranges to the Jiya Dhol river, and proceeded across the Dihang river along the track via Mebo, Dapui, Mimesipo, Bomjur, Meka and Kronli villages along the Tipu river in the Dibang Valley. From this point it followed the right bank of the western channel of the Balijan river to its confluence with the Lohit. The Inner Line demarcated the southern boundary of the Dibang Valley.

In November 1933, the Idu Mishmis committed an outrage by killing four children and injuring others in a village in the British territory at a distance of one day's march from Nizamghat. J. H. Crace, the Political Officer, was authorized to make a 'promenade' in the Sessiri Valley, which he carried out in February and March 1934. The expedition was successful and friendly relations were maintained throughout.

The period from 1934 to 1944 was uneventful in the history of the Dibang Valley. In December 1945, B. S. Routledge, the Political Officer, undertook a tour into the Dibang Valley. In course of his visit in the interior areas he went up to the Mathun and Upper Dri Valleys and visited many of the villages of those areas. With regard to the Idus he observed that 'those living on the Dri and Mathun rivers were definitely superior. The people from the Dri and Mathun were well proportioned but they were taller, and one would say of greater intelligence and pleasanter character than those living lower down. Although I noticed the copper tinge in the hair of the Idu of the northern parts as did Mr Crace, I am assured that there are not two races of different origin in the Valley.'

In 1951, a separate Administrative Centre for the Dibang Valley was established at Nizamghat. But as the flood which followed the great 1950 Earthquake played a havoc in that area, the Headquarters at Nizamghat had to be shifted to Roing in April 1952. In the same year an outpost was opened at Kronli.

With a view to introduce a better administration in the areas of the Dibang Valley, an administrative

change was brought about in 1956, by which, the Dibang Valley was recognized as a separate Subdivision and its charge was entrusted to an Additional Political Officer with his Headquarters at Roing.

DOMESTIC LIFE

I. THE IDU VILLAGE

Availability of arable land, sufficient water supply throughout the year, plenty of forest in the vicinity, and good climatic conditions, determine the location of a village site. Level land in the Dibang Valley region is so scarce, that there is seldom any space to build a village in a symmetrical and regular manner. The choice of a site for a house depends on the convenience and preference of the individual builder, and the houses are therefore, scattered over a considerable area.

Before shifting a village to a new site, omens are usually consulted. To do this, an elderly person goes to the selected site, digs a hole in the earth, and puts a folded bow-string in it. On the sixth day, he again visits the place, and if he finds the string lying intact, the omen is considered good. But if any part of the string is found lying visible on the ground, it is a bad omen, and another site must be found.

A village is usually named after the stream or the river near which it is situated. Each village has its own territorial boundaries marked either by a stream or a hill, or by any other natural object.

The forest provides the Idus with nearly all their needs, wood for fuel, timber for building houses, cane and bamboo for ropes, baskets and mats, bark and

nettle for making rough cloth, and many wild plants and roots for food.

II. THE HOUSE AND ITS CONSTRUCTION

The Idu houses are all of the same pattern, although they vary in length according to the social position and the size of the family. With a long passage, having a considerable number of rooms all on one side, an Idu house looks like a corridor train. On the other side are hung the skulls of the mithuns, buffaloes, deer and boars, all arranged in rows. The floor of the house, made of split bamboos, is raised from the ground on wooden posts, three to five feet in length. The roof is thatched either with palm or *jengu* (*Calamus erectus*) leaves which are laid over and fastened to strips of bamboo matting. The roof of the front veranda is semicircular and slopes down a little below the post-plates of the house.

The house of a family consisting of parents, married sons, unmarried daughters, and other relatives including the married brothers of the owner of the house, has several rooms, one for every married couple. The outer room is exclusively meant for guests and other relatives. Generally the adolescent boys sleep in the outer room, and when guests come, they too share it with them. The unmarried girls sleep together in a special room set apart for them. A bridegroom visiting the house, or a slave, if there is one, sleeps in the outer room. A fire place situated at the centre of every room serves for cooking, and when cold, the occupants sleep close to it.

III. DOMESTIC ARTICLES

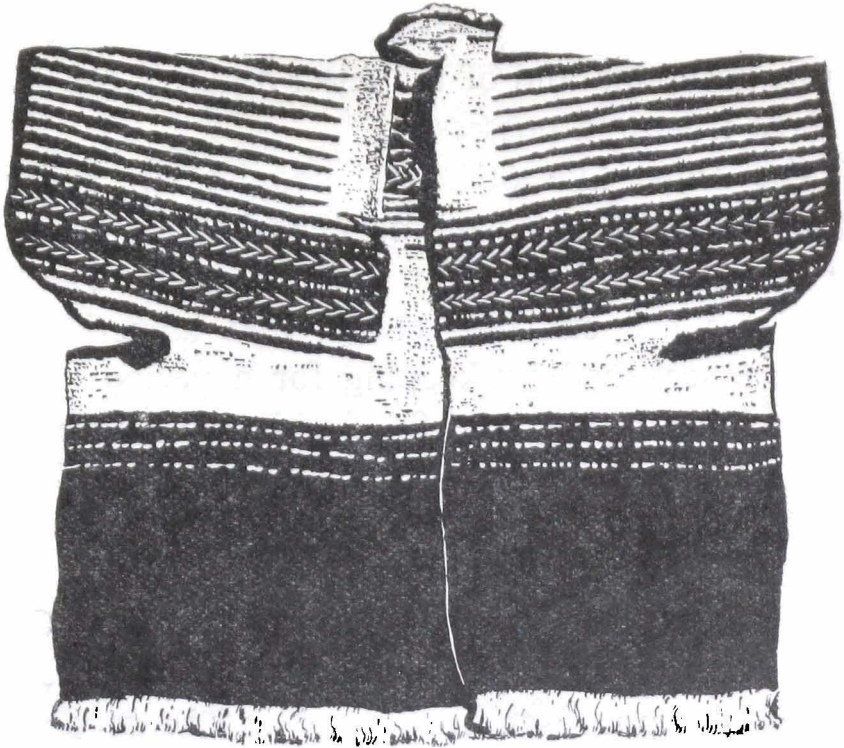
Whatever valuable articles an Idu has, he carries on his person. The skulls of animals sacrificed in the past, agricultural and weaving implements, few brass utensils and one or two tin suit-cases bought from the plains, are the usual household articles found in an Idu house. He also possesses bead ornaments and hunting weapons and of the latter a gun is considered the most treasured possession.

The Idus, like other hill peoples, are skilful in making different kinds of mats, baskets, and utensils with bamboo and cane for domestic use. The bamboo pieces are cut into strips, and sometimes the strips are seasoned by keeping for a period either in the sunshine or over the fire inside the house. The baskets may broadly be classified into the following groups: baskets for daily use, carrying baskets, heversacks, and baskets for storing food. Mats made with bamboo are used for drying paddy. Gourd vessels are usually used for storing salt and rice-beer. For cooking purposes, iron pans and brass pots are usually used. The Idus have no knowledge of pottery. For keeping articles such as ornaments, cash and clothes, they use a box called *agu* made of cane and bamboo. The most common utensil used as a plate is the *aruku*, which is made of bamboo.

IV. DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Idu art expresses itself in weaving and work in cane and bamboo, and the people have an unerring eye for colour and design. Only the women weave, using a small tension loom which is simple, portable,

and inexpensive. They have a special attraction for black, red, yellow and dark green colours which they utilize for bags and women's skirts. Usually they prefer to weave in black, with patterns done in red, white and yellow colours.



Idu war-coat made of bark fibre

Idu dress is picturesque, colourful, and adequate. The men wear a sleeveless black coat with embroidered borders, and a piece of cloth which is passed between the legs. A portion of the cloth hangs in front, and serves as a sort of covering. It is retained in its position by a cotton girdle, two inches in breadth. The men wear thick coats, black with white pattern made of nettle fibre and human hair, which serves as a defensive covering against the thrust of a



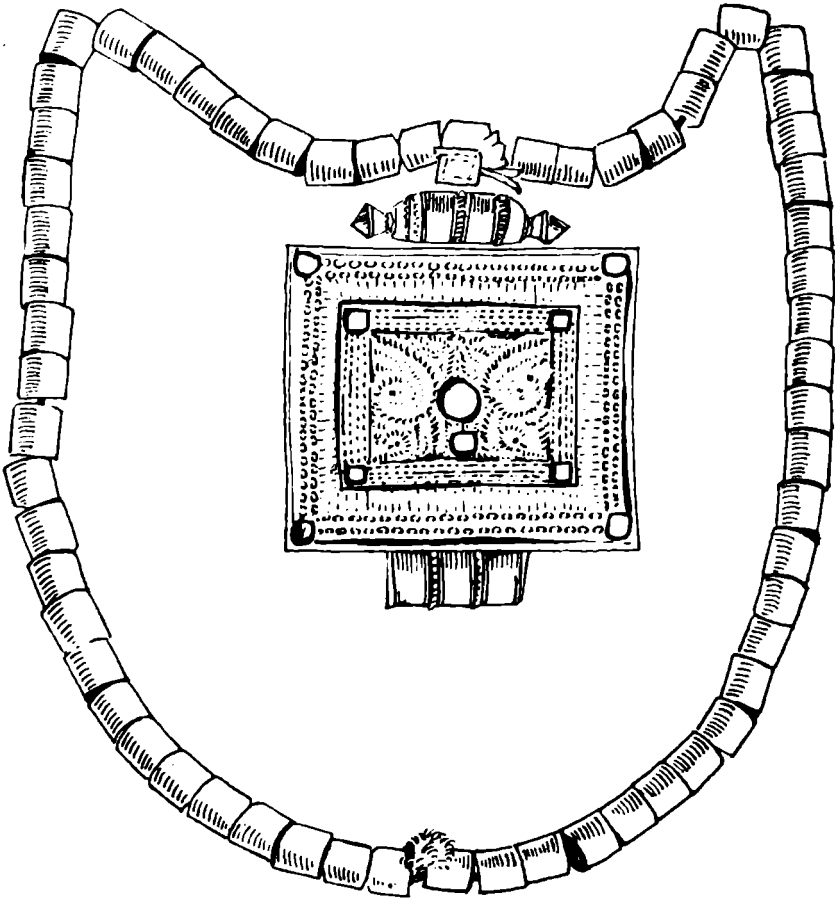
An Idu girl at her loom

hostile arrow. E. T. Dalton said of the Idus in 1872 that :

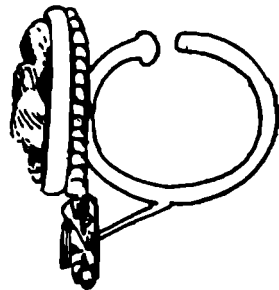
‘They were probably the first people on this side of the Himalayas to discover the valuable properties of the *Rhea nivea*, and many others of the nettle tribe ; with the fibre of one of these nettles they weave a cloth so strong and stiff that, made



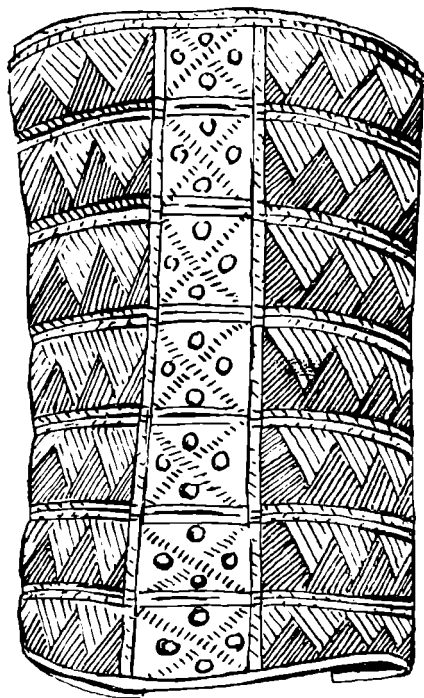
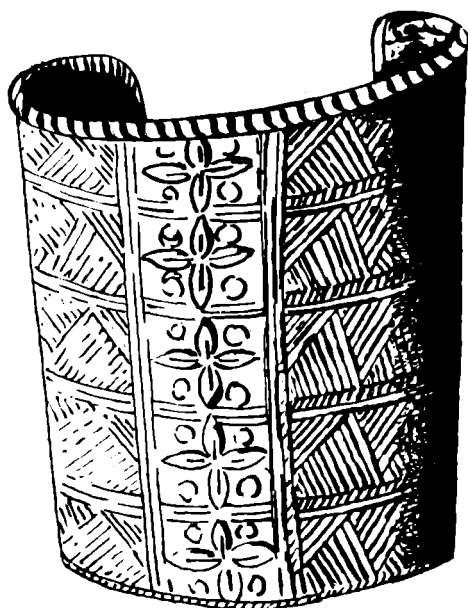
An Idu girl with characteristic ornaments



Arulya, bead necklace with a silver charm-box



Silver ornaments that adorn the ears of Idu men and women



Idu brass bangles

into jackets, it is used by themselves and by the Abors as a sort of armour.¹

A woollen coat imported from Tibet, with stripes of different colours and cross marks on it, is often worn by both sexes. In all weather the men wear hats called *ap tala* which are woven in cane, and are so strongly made as to be sword-proof.

The dress of the women consists of a loose-fitting bodice, and a striped or coloured cloth fastened round the waist, which extends to the knees.

The ornaments of the Idus are few and simple. The men and women wear necklaces of various kinds of beads. The commonest necklace is the *arulya* which consists of forty to sixty white beads strung together. Another kind of necklace is the *lekapon* made of small white beads, twenty strands of which make up the necklace. This is sometimes worth two mithuns, and is obtained from Tibet.

Usually both men and women wear a cylindrical piece of bamboo in the extended lobe of the ear : some wear silver rings adorned with either silver coins or beads of red and blue. *Akakhre* are earrings made of thin silver-plate, which are worn by the women, and usually bought from the plains.

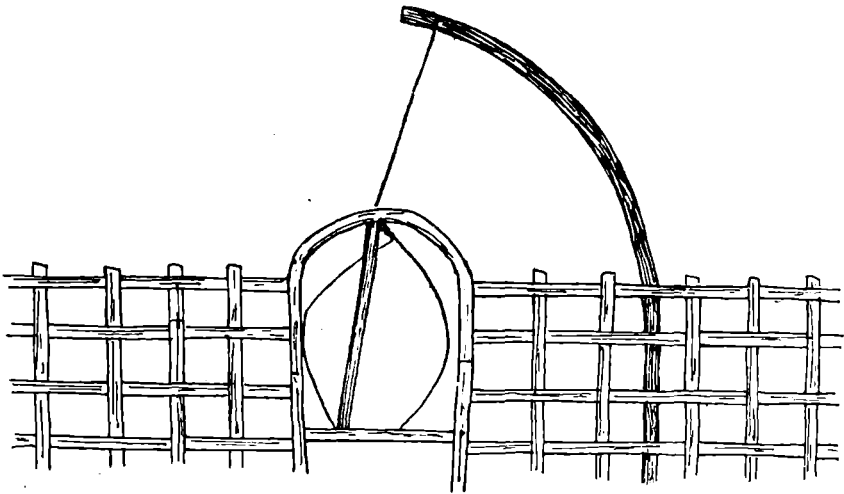
V. HUNTING

Like other hill peoples, the Idus are very fond of hunting. The weapons that are usually used for hunting are bows and arrows, and guns. Spears are usually used for the purpose of self-protection only.

1. Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier in the 19th Century* (Bombay, 1959), p. 337.

In the months of December and January, men enjoy a great deal of leisure which they usually devote to hunting excursions. They may track the game and stalk it, or sit near salt-licks or wait in the fields for animals that come to feed on the crops.

The Idus hunt all kinds of birds and animals. If two or three men are out shooting together, the man who draws blood first is entitled to the animal. When a man shoots an animal with a borrowed gun, he has to give the owner of the gun a major share of the animal shot. For mishandling and any kind of damage to the gun the borrower is held responsible, and in such cases the owner is entitled to compensation.

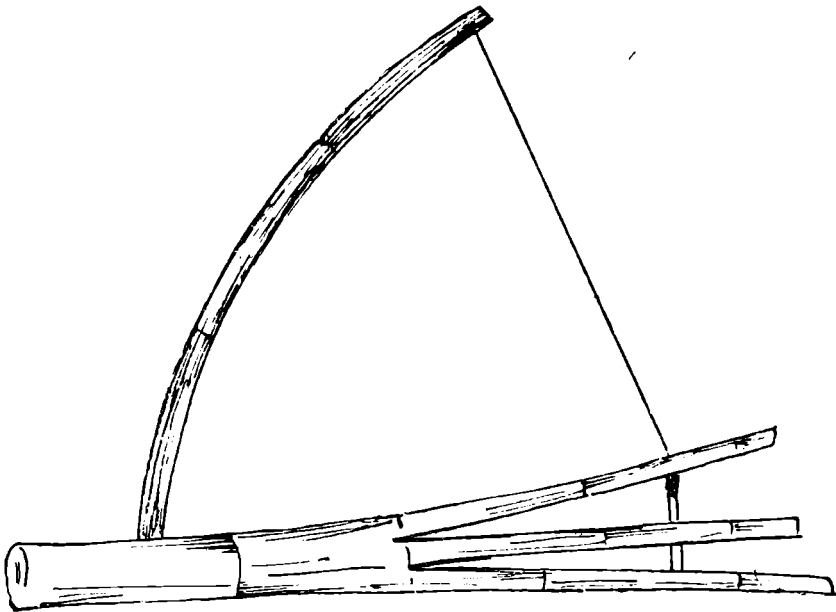


An Idu trap

In addition to hunting with bows and arrows and guns, the Idus have some ingenious ways of snaring and trapping animals and birds. In a commonly used trap, a bamboo fence is erected which may stretch for a considerable distance through a part of

the jungle that is frequented by boars and deer. Openings made by hoops of split bamboo are left at intervals in the fence. A noose is placed at each gap, and one of its ends is tied at the tip of a bamboo which is bent over, and its root fixed tightly near the fence. The noose fits in the gap, and is kept extended by a small piece of stick tied to its upper end, the other end of the stick pressing against the lower end of the hoop.

When an animal enters the gap, it pushes the stick out of position, the hoop is released, and flies up tightening the noose around its neck.



A trap used for catching rats and small birds

Another trap which is often used for catching rats and birds is made of a piece of bamboo split into three at one end. A separate piece of bamboo is fixed horizontally to the unsplit end of the bamboo. A strip is tied to the upper end of the horizontal post

which is slightly bent over and the loose end of the string is attached to a small piece of stick which keeps the split strips apart. A little quantity of food is spread over the bamboo strips in between the gaps.

When a rat comes for the food, it causes the loose stick to fly off, and the strips close on it and press it to death.

VI. FISHING

The usual method followed by the Idus for catching fish is to make the stream-bed go dry at a convenient spot by diverting the course of the water higher up the stream. They construct a barrier of stone across the stream a little above the point where it bifurcates. In the barrier are left small gaps which are then filled in with leaves allowing the water through, while stopping the fish. Now a weir is built with stones and is covered by mud so as to make it water-tight, thus diverting the water into the main channel. As soon as the weir is completed, the river bed between it and the barrier is left dry, and since the fish are unable to escape they are left stranded, and are easily caught.

Another way of fishing is by poison. Leaves of a species of fern are tied up in bundles, beaten out on stones at the edge of the water, and the juice is allowed to mix with water. This kills the fish after a while, and they can be picked up.

VII. THE IDU CALENDAR

The Idu year starts with the month of Shi-la which corresponds roughly with September and Octo-

ber. A year consists of twelve months, and each month has thirty days. An Idu month is a lunar month, which begins with the appearance of the crescent moon. The Idus have no measure of time corresponding to our week, and the days have no names :

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Shi-la (September and October). | The maize ripens. Paddy is ready for harvest. |
| Masa-la (October and November). | The paddy of the <i>kepu</i> variety and maize are reaped. |
| Angra-la (November and December). | The paddy of the <i>ke-emra</i> variety is reaped. Heavy work in the field. |
| Ma-wa-la (December and January). | Cold season. Millet is reaped. |
| Lya-la (January and February). | The month when the harvest is over. House building materials are collected by some households. |
| Hra-la (February and March). | No work in the field. |
| Mu-la (March and April). | Clearing of the fields begins. Jungle is cut and the debris are allowed to dry. |
| Ena-la (April and May). | Fire is set to the debris, and the field is made ready for sowing. Sowing begins. |
| Syu-la (May and June). | Sowing of the maize and paddy of the <i>kepu</i> variety take place. |
| Tha-la (June and July). | Paddy of the <i>ke-emra</i> variety is sown. |
| Ashi-la (July and August). | Weeding of the crops begins. |
| Pui-la (August and September). | Weeding of the crops continues. |

VIII. AGRICULTURE

Among the Idus, the village forms the largest agricultural unit, each household having its own cultivation fields within the territorial boundary of the village, marked by such natural features as streams or

hills. People of each village regard the surrounding land as belonging to them for cultivation. As long as a man wishes to use the land which has been cleared



Idu method of sowing seed

by him, no one can take it from him. Each patch of land is commonly used for a period of three to five years on a single rotation. The forest within the

village boundaries provides the villagers with nearly all their needs—bamboo and thatch for building houses, wood for fire, cane for making mats, baskets and other household articles.

Most of the work in the clearing is done by the husband and the wife and their children as well as other members of the household. When a new field is to be cleared for cultivation, the man cuts down the trees with his dao and leaves them to dry before setting fire to them. In old fields, the work is done largely by the womenfolk.

The Dibang Valley has long been cursed by its lack of arable land. The crops are usually grown on the hill sides, and the fields are not irrigated. Flat lands that lie at the foot of the mountains, are themselves strewn with rocks and the hills themselves are mighty accumulations of strangely shaped boulders. The peasant traditionally struggles hard clearing patches of jungle between one boulder and another. Yet at the end, out of the cultivated patches comes only a thin harvest.

Thus the Idu invariably depends on jhum cultivation. He has as tools a dao and a small hand-worked hoe. During the first year he usually grows arum, tapioca, millet and maize. Then for two to three years, he leaves the field fallow to allow nature to recuperate. He may come round to the same plot of land, though there is no fixed period of returning to it. The commonest vegetables grown are different kinds of arums, country beans, gourd and *lai* (Spanish-pui).

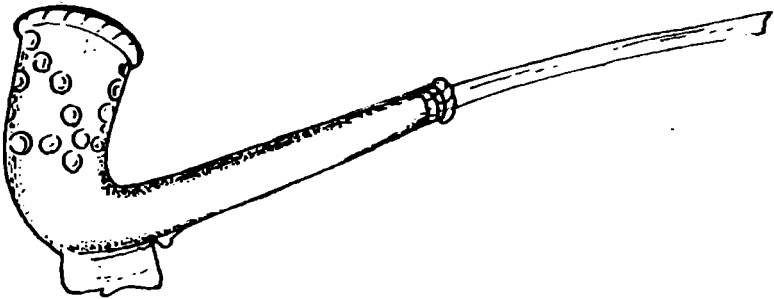
Like the Adis and other groups of Mishmis, the Idus do not store the crops in their houses, but in

granaries built some distance away. This method saves the food stuff, should the house get burnt.

A large family may enjoy with mutual understanding surplus lands belonging to others.

IX. FOOD AND DRINK

The staple cereal food of the Idus is rice and millet. A meal usually consists of boiled cereal, either rice or millet and some boiled green leaves seasoned with chillies and salt. After cooking the grain, the water, in which it is boiled, is not thrown away and the cover of the pot is kept tightly closed with a leaf. Leaves of many wild trees and vegetables are taken by



Idu silver tobacco-pipe

the Idus in large quantities. A favourite relish is young bamboo shoots called *apachu* which is pounded first, and then stored for eight to ten days in bamboo tubes till fermentation sets in. The *apachu* is sometimes prepared dry. In that case, the shoots are cut into small pieces, kept in large baskets covered on all sides and then allowed to dry in the sunshine for three to four months.

In seasons of scarcity or famine, the Idus usually depend on the roots of palm trees, maize, different

kinds of arums, and sweet potatoes. Tobacco is grown in all the areas of the Dibang Valley. When it is required for smoking, the piled up leaves are kept for sometime till they ferment ; then they are cut into pieces and dried in the sunshine. After a month or so, they are considered to be ready for use.

For their meat supply, the Idus rear pigs, mithuns, and chickens which are sacrificed on social and religious occasions. The Idus eat almost every kind of animal except the *hullu* (a species of black monkey) and tiger. They regard themselves as having lineal relation with the tiger and *hullu*, and therefore to eat their flesh is taboo. All kinds of meat are absolutely forbidden to the women, because it is believed that it renders them barren. A woman can, however, eat small birds, fish and wild rats with impunity. Meat is sometimes preserved for a long period by smoking it over the fire.

Yu or rice-beer is the national drink of the Idus. It is prepared either from rice or millet. In the interior where tea is unknown, it is taken by the people at all hours, sometimes even as a substitute for water. Usually, rice or millet is boiled for nearly half an hour, and then a substance composed of wild roots and leaves, is powdered and sprinkled over it. It is then allowed to ferment for two to four days, after which more water is added and the beer is then considered to be ready for drinking.

X. METHOD OF COUNTING

The Idu is a poor mathematician. If he wants to count the number of days, he usually makes a knot

for each day in a piece of string. A month is sometimes counted from his wife's menstrual period. There is an interesting story about how the God Inni taught the Idus to count :

In very ancient times, the earth was covered with complete darkness, as there was no sun and no moon. The god Inni-mega, first constructed a house ; he then performed the Rren ceremony. As there was no light, the python Beka, ate up Inni-mega. The *khinyus* (spirits) Ambrimbri and Arru killed Beka. There were two brothers named Apa-i-ju and Asa-i-ju who followed Inni-mega in performing the Rren ceremony. As there was no light, they offered eggs and rice-beer to the God Inni, and said, 'Let there be light in the hills'. Whereon the sun appeared. The brothers were delighted, and said again, 'Let there be more light,' whereon the moon appeared. Then Apa-i-ju and Asa-i-ju worshipped Inni by offering a fowl and rice-beer, and he said to them, 'Call it day when the sun appears in the sky; call it night when the moon appears.' The brothers said that they did not know how to count the days, and Inni replied 'Henceforth women will have a discharge of blood as red as the blood of this fowl. Once it occurs in a woman, it will continue throughout her life at definite intervals. Call each period a month.'

XI. LANGUAGE

Idu is one of the three dialects which have been grouped together under the common name Mishmi. The dialect has not received the attention it deserves, considering the importance of the tribe. It is, so

perhaps, because it is spoken through the nose as it were and is very indistinct and extremely difficult for a foreigner to follow. Naturally, therefore, it has been avoided as a difficult language and its study has been neglected. All that we have of it in an available form consists of rather inaccurate vocabularies mostly compiled in the eighties of the last century.

No dependable and important conclusion can be based on such scanty and defective data. Still however, the broad conclusion that Idu is very closely allied to Taraon is obvious from the correspondence that emerges from comparison of the basic words in these two dialects, as the following list of comparative words will show.

Relationship terms

| | <i>Idu</i> | <i>Taraon</i> |
|-------------|------------|---------------|
| Father | Naba | Naba |
| Grandfather | Nata | Nata |
| Son | A | A |
| Daughter | Aya | Aya |
| Sister | Athi | Mathi |

Nouns

| | <i>Idu</i> | <i>Taraon</i> |
|-------|------------|---------------|
| Man | Mei-a | Mei |
| Rice | Keku | Kyeku |
| House | Anka | Ang |
| Leech | Kapwe | Kape |
| Flesh | Tambre | Tanbre |
| Salt | Pra | Pla |
| Dream | Emo | Yamo |

| | <i>Verbs</i> | |
|-------|--------------|---------------|
| | <i>Idu</i> | <i>Taraon</i> |
| Cut | Cheka | Chega |
| Build | Jiga | Jiga |
| Die | Siga | Seiga |

Resemblance between Idu and Kaman is not so obvious and one would hesitate to insist on the same degree of relationship between these two as between Idu and Taraon.

Reserving our opinion regarding Kaman, though it has been grouped under the Mishmi language, it appears that Taraon and Idu are definitely a single group as distinguished from Adi and other neighbouring speech forms. It has, however, certain resemblances to Adi. The prefix *a*, for instance, plays a grammatical role both in Idu and Adi. The bases in the words for relation terms such as father and mother are almost identical. I have not been able to go into details, but it may be that a basic similarity exists between these two languages as well. From the practical point of view, however, they differ so widely in form, as to be quite unintelligible to each other.

Regarding its position in the general scheme of classification, it has been placed in the North Assam Group of the Tibeto-Burman languages.

SOCIAL LIFE

I. FAMILY

An Idu village is usually a collection of homesteads, each consisting of a simple family of parents and children as the smallest unit. The Idus practice polygamy and each wife has a separate apartment within the same homestead. Sometimes two or more lineally related kinsmen, their wives and children occupy a single homestead, and are jointly subject to the same authority. A domestic group may also include other persons related to the family, such as widows, orphans and infirm persons. The attitude towards the father, the father's brothers, and the grandfather is one of respect, and usually the father is considered to be the authoritative head, who has an effective say in all matters that concern the family. The mother's brother, is treated with a degree of intimacy and affection which would not be shown to the father or his brothers.

Kinship, social and economic ties hold together the members of the homestead. In ordinary activities such as fishing, collection of food, clearing of the jungle and cultivation, they act as a single unit. Properties such as land, livestock, foodstuff, house and forest trees are held jointly, by the family. But personal effects such as ornaments, clothing, cash and household and occupational equipments may belong to the individual separately.

II. KINSHIP SYSTEM

The Idus are patrilineal in descent, and count their relationship through the male line. Their kinship terminology may be called classificatory, as they use certain terms for the lineal relatives which are also used for some of the collateral relatives.

The term *nābā puiyā* is used to address one's own father's elder brother, and one's own father's younger brother is called *nābā lyiyā*. The same terms are also used to address all the members of the father's brother's age. Similarly, the term *ena* is applied to the wife of one's elder brother, as well as the wife of one's younger brother. Likewise, there are some other terms which are applied to both lineal and collateral relatives. The Idu term of address and relationship are these :

| <i>English Equivalent</i> | <i>Relationship Terms</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Father's father | nātā |
| Father | nātā |
| Son | ā |
| Son's son | alyiyā |
| Father's younger brother | nābā lyiyā |
| Father's elder brother | nābā puiyā |
| Father's elder sister | nāni |
| Father's younger sister | nāni |
| Mother's father | nāni-nābā or nātā |
| Mother's mother | nāyā |
| Mother | nāni |
| Daughter | āyā |

*English
equivalent*

*Relationship
Terms*

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Daughter's daughter | āyiyā |
| Elder brother | āpuiyā |
| Younger brother | ārumrā-lyia <i>or</i> ālyiyā |
| Elder sister | apuiya <i>or</i> āthi āpuiyā |
| Younger sister | athi ālyiā |
| Sister's husband | ema |
| Sister's son | āddu |
| Brother's wife | enā <i>or</i> iyu-āliyā |
| Brother's son | āpuiyā ā |
| Father's Elder brother's wife | nābā puiyā yā |
| Father's younger brother's wife | nābā ālyiyā yā |
| Mother's brother | embā <i>or</i> nau-u |
| Mother's brother's wife | embā yaku <i>or</i> embā yā |
| Mother's brother's son | āembā <i>or</i> embā ā |
| Wife's brother | ennā puiya <i>or</i> ennā lyiyā |
| Wife's elder brother's son | ennā ā <i>or</i> inu ā |
| Wife's younger brother's son | ennā ā <i>or</i> inu ā |
| Wife's elder brother's daughter | ennā āyā |
| Wife's younger brother's daughter | ennā āyā |
| Father's sister's husband | nāni ālyiyā ici |
| Father's elder sister's son | nāni ā |
| Father's younger sister's son | nāni ā |
| Daughter's husband | ema |
| Wife's father | ebra |
| Son's wife | ena |
| Husband | ici |
| Wife | yāku |

It is obligatory for the children to call their relatives by the relationship terms, whereas they themselves are addressed by name. The father, grandfather, and father's elder and younger brothers are treated with higher respect and with a greater diffidence than any other relation. The mother and mother's brothers come next in order of respect. Then come the wife's father and mother. A man should always be polite to his elders such as father's sister, father's sister's husband, mother's sister, mother's sister's husband and so on. The behaviour between brother and sister is as between companions or economic partners, but a strict formal relation is observed ; no exchange of light remark is permitted and any direct or indirect hint at a sexual subject is scrupulously avoided. Young men usually call one another by name. Married persons with children address their partners by the name of their eldest children, such as *Khunge Nābā* (Khunge's father), *Khunge Nāni* (Khunge's mother).

III. THE CLAN

The Idus are divided into a number of clans, which are believed to have descended from a common ancestor, *Ānya*, of whom they are the collateral descendants. The term *anna* is used by the members of one clan to address other members of it. The whole of the Dibang Valley may be divided into several clan areas, each of which is claimed as the property of a particular clan. Thus, the Misa clan which is in the majority in the Ithun Valley, claims the areas adjoining Karra, Denge and Challi villages as its own. Similarly, the Melen clan claims the areas comprising Endali and

Aruju villages. Kronli and its surrounding areas are claimed by the people of the Ompe clan. Ranga, Kana, Esali and Enaya villages are inhabited by the Mimi clan which claims these areas as its own. The areas surrounding the confluence of Ithun and Dibang rivers are claimed by the Mega clan.

The tradition of one-clan-to-one-village system is no longer generally operative, the reason being the migratory habits of the people. When, with the growth of population, the land within the village proves insufficient for its needs, some migrate to a region where cultivable land available. Persons belonging to other clans may also join them, and thus form a new village. The exogamous nature of the clans has helped in this dispersal.

Idu society is not stratified into social classes conditioned by descent, wealth, occupation and habitual modes of living, and a clan is not headed by a chief. The only difference in social status is that between a free man and a slave. A slave cannot take a bride from a free man's family, for intermarriage between them is prohibited.

IV. DAILY LIFE

The rhythm of Idu life is slow and simple and follows the seasonal cycle. The people are astir shortly after the sunrise. A cock in the house, perhaps, announces the dawn of a new day. When there is a girl in the family, she is either called upon to take care of the children, while the mother prepares the morning meal; or she is asked to pound the rice required for the day, and do other household chores.

She may also have to plod down the hill with bamboo tubes to fetch water from the village water-point.

Cooking is usually done by the elder women of the family. If there is no rice or *kado* (millet) to cook, sweet potatoes, arum-roots or berries are boiled in water, and served instead. In the morning, pigs are fed with boiled arum leaves and broken rice.



An Idu girl bringing water in a bamboo tube

Both men and women work in the fields. Men cut the trees, clear the jungle, and set fire to it when sufficiently dry ; women attend to sowing, weeding and in due time, harvesting. During the months of July and August, women and children are kept busy guarding the crops from the ravages of birds and wild animals. Another daily task for the womenfolk is to



Idu mother with child



An Idu in his warrior's dress

collect fire-wood for the hearth. It is particularly a woman's duty to see that there is sufficient food for the family for the day, and if there is not enough, she must supplement it by collecting wild roots, berries, and other vegetables.

In the months of December and January, women enjoy a great deal of leisure, which they devote to weaving. Thatching and repairing of houses are usually done during the months of November and December, when men are free from work in the fields.

V. THE BIRTH OF AN IDU CHILD

The Idus do not believe that sexual relations alone are the cause of pregnancy in woman, for without divine intervention, even the natural process remains barren. 'With what passionate intensity,' they say, 'men long to have children of their own, to be proud of and to boast about ; how they envy the ease with which other men seem to sire children, but fate will always remain unkind unless the gods are favourable.' A woman married for years but without a child is very often treated with contemptuous disregard. A special ceremony called *abu-irru* is performed to lift the cause of barrenness from her.

In cases where signs of conception suddenly disappear, it is believed that the foetus has been stolen by a priest by magic. A pregnant woman must be careful to observe at least one taboo. She must on no account touch any of the antlers hanging on the wall of her house. Her husband has to refrain from eating venison. In cases of miscarriage the *abu-irru*

ceremony is performed to implore the protection of Asila-amide against a similar calamity in future.

When the labour pains start, the woman is attended by her female relatives and friends. The husband should not be present. If delivery is delayed, a ceremony called *eta-asi* is performed and a fowl is sacrificed.

On the day after the birth of the child the *iu-a-rru* ceremony is performed. After going through the prescribed ritual, the priest offers rice-beer and two fowls as sacrifice to the gods, Asa and Asila-amide, who watch over little children, begging them to look after the new-born child, and to ward off the evil spirits coming near it. He then takes the names of the child's dead ancestors, and offers them blood and rice-beer. He generally recites the following chant :

‘Had there been no gods, the rivers and the hills would not have existed. There are hills and rivers ; and men live on the hills. The gods protect mankind. Let them now be pleased, and take care of the new-born child and protect him. I am offering them rice-beer and fowls.’

The *nuhi* ceremony, which falls on the ninth day is a simple one. The priest invokes the household gods, Asu and Andra, and prays to them to look after the child.

The Idus do not like a woman to conceive again when one child is suckling, lest her breasts go dry and the next child be weak.

A Child's Upbringing. For the first few months, an Idu child gets all the warmth of affectionate care. It is never left alone. Even while going to the field or

Adolescent boys, on the other hand, are left very much to themselves, and receive no formal disciplinary education. They spend the major part of the day in small hunting excursions, wandering about with their bows and arrows in search of wild rats and birds. A boy may go about killing mice, lizards, squirrels and birds for himself, and his friends can make no claim on what he secures. The indifference or obvious neglect with which he is treated, is, perhaps, responsible for hardening his feelings towards others and breeding in him a sense of general suspicion and distrust towards his fellow-beings.

VI. MARRIAGE

The Idu method of courting is similar to that of the Taraon and Kaman Mishmis. The boy first initiates the negotiations by contacting the girl he intends to marry. Their wooing is passionate rather than romantic. When a girl captures the heart of a boy, he talks pleasantly to her, makes her small presents, such as tobacco, and if she gives signs of her approval, he goes ahead with the courting. There is always, however, the fear of detection and punishment, for the discovery of the affair may lead to a demand of compensation by the girl's relations, and the boy may even be manhandled if he is found out.

Usually, when a boy falls in love with a girl, he first obtains a mediator to find out whether a proposal of marriage has any chance of finding favour with her parents. The parents of the girl then consult their relations and the other villagers and at the same time sound the girl about her own reactions. With the

consent of the girl they then proceed to fix the marriage price through the mediator. As soon as the price is definitely fixed, the match is finally arranged.

The bride-price is called *yaku-bri*, and its amount varies according to circumstances. Generally, well-to-do families may claim up to five mithuns, while poorer families often actually pay only one or two.

The date for taking away the bride is fixed after the marriage-price has been paid to the bride's parents. When this is done, on the appointed day, the bridegroom, along with the mediator and some of his co-villagers proceed to the bride's village. The parents of the bridegroom generally do not accompany the party. Presents such as pigs, rice-beer, and three or four loads of dried fish, are taken along with the party for the bride's relations. The bridegroom's party is feasted on their arrival by the bride's people, and there follows a great deal of fun and merry-making.

The bride is usually escorted to the bride-groom's village by some of her kinsmen, but not by her parents. As a rule, the bride's party is supposed to stay and be entertained in the bridegroom's house at least for two days.

When an Idu girl marries, she is given a large dowry by her parents, and usually takes it all to her husband's house.

The Idus greatly value chastity, and a girl who is known to have gone astray usually finds it difficult to find a husband. Adultery is punished very severely. There have been instances where women have had their fingers chopped off as punishment for infidelity.

When a man takes a second wife, she means an additional helpful hand for him. On the death of the husband, a son may inherit any widow who is not his actual mother. In case there is no son, she goes to the brother of the deceased.

A man cannot marry a girl of his own clan, that is, when his father and the girl's father happen to be descendants from a common ancestor in the male line. A man also cannot marry a girl, if she is within the 13th degree in descent from the maternal grandfather in the male line. Such a marriage is considered incestuous, and also thought to have an evil effect on the clans to which the parties belong. Amongst the Idus, cross-cousin or parallel cousin marriage is considered immoral and unnatural. It is just as bad as marrying one's own sister. Boys usually marry between the ages of 16 and 22, and girls between 12 and 19, though sometimes one or both of them may be minors when the marriage is arranged by the parents.

VII. INHERITANCE

Idu descent is patrilineal, and is reckoned exclusively through the male line. The sons are rightful heirs to the property left by the father. When a man dies leaving no survivor, his property usually passes to his brothers. If there are no brothers, the property usually goes to the nearest agnatic relations. If a man dies leaving minor sons, his brothers are entitled to the custody of his estate on their behalf till they come of age. The wife or the wives of the deceased cannot inherit, nor can the

the daughters. An important condition for the inheritance of property by a rightful heir is that he should perform the ceremonies connected with death of the deceased and his wife.

Adoption. Among the Idus, adoption is rare. It sometimes happens that a childless man adopts a child who inherits his property when he dies.

POLITICAL LIFE

I. THE TRIBAL COUNCILS

Among the Idus, civil and criminal cases are settled by the *abbala*, or tribal council, which is usually composed of a few elderly villagers, reputed for their wisdom and soundness of judgement. Its jurisdiction is restricted to judicial matters only, and does not include village administration.

When any man brings a complaint to the *abbala*, the members first hear him and after a few days, go to the house of the accused. Witnesses are summoned to give evidence and their statements along with those of the accused are patiently heard. Villagers who are not immediately concerned may attend the case, if they wish to do so.

The members of the *abbala* have a great responsibility, because they are supposed to scrutinize the claims of both the parties and then to come to a provisional decision. They have a hard task in persuading the parties about the justness of their decision and to bring about a settlement. This naturally entails long discussions and endless comings and goings to the houses of the plaintiff and the defendant, till at length the decision is accepted by both the parties. The members of the *abbala* are entitled to a portion of the compensation demanded from the accused,

and they get a remuneration from the complainant for their services.

The principle behind the Idu sense of justice is that a person who has made others suffer unjustly should himself be made to suffer in return. The man who gratifies his own passion by insulting another should himself be shamefully humiliated. No hard and fast rules seem to be laid down as to the severity of punishments, which depend upon the nature and seriousness of individual transgression in each case. Although the punishment is proportionate to the seriousness of the offence, extenuating circumstances are always taken into consideration. Murder, robbery, and mutilation are as a rule, considered to be serious offences, but a man who commits such acts unwittingly is not usually held guilty. For instance, *A* before going to sleep lighted a fire to keep the room warm, which severely burnt *B* who was sleeping by side of the hearth. In such a case, *A* is not be held responsible for the misfortune of *B*.

II. CUSTOMARY LAW AND JUSTICE

The Dibang Valley has traditionally been regarded as a land of wild savages, who are unfriendly and deceitful and who, at the slightest provocation, do not hesitate to perpetrate most ghastly crimes. Major C. Bliss, who headed the Dibang Survey and Exploration Mission, writing in 1912-13, describes the Idus as 'a very debased form of humanity...all are lazy and dirty. They have a gruesome custom of burning the lunatics, or those with deformities, alive on the death of their guardians or parents—

a drastic method of dealing with unemployment.’¹ The Idus had a bad reputation for being short-tempered and uncompromising. J. Butler describes them in 1847 as ‘a wild roaming race of people constantly engaged in petty wars among themselves and their neighbours, the Abors and Singphos, when the most remorseless reprisals and massacres are committed.’² They are distinguished from their neighbours by their aggressiveness. ‘The Midis [Idus],’ says E. J. Dalton, ‘are greatly detested and mistrusted by their neighbours, the Abors and Tains [Taraon Mishmis], and they are much dreaded by the Sadiya population in consequence of the growing expeditions to kidnap women and children.’³

It is true that there are many quarrels among the Idus, and these develop sometimes into bloodfeuds. But they hardly justify a sweeping categorization of them as criminals ‘belonging to the tartar race.’

A deeper acquaintance with the people will tear away the fog of preconceived prejudices against them and will reveal them in a truer light. We will then see that they are just the same as other human beings, a mixture of both dark and good qualities. The Idus have the sterling qualities of frankness, courage and truthfulness. They may show themselves quick-tempered or even cruel at times. But they have not

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1. Major C. Bliss, *Report on the Debang Survey and Exploration Mission* (1912–13), p. 12.
 2. John Butler, *A Sketch of Assam, with some Account of the Hill Tribes, by an Officer* (London, 1847). Early description of the Mishmis.
 3. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872), pp. 13-21.

learnt to cheat, steal or hide a lie, or to circumvent truth by deceitful protestations. An Idu is a proud person, with a sense of his own superiority. If sometimes he gives the impression of being haughty and arrogant, it is often due to an overzealous sense of his own pride. When he forms an opinion about a thing it is hard to persuade him to change his mind about it.

But like any other people, he suffers from the limitations of his own culture. He does not see beyond his own society, and passionately believes in what he has been taught to be right within it.

Suicide. Among the Idus, suicide seems to be very rare. It is said that, during the last thirty years in the history of the Dibang Valley, there have been only four cases. In two cases, of which I have detailed information, the reason for suicide was prolonged sickness. The method followed in both the cases was hanging.

In the Ahui Valley in 1948, Pietyi Mepo, an old man, having suffered from an incurable disease for a very long time, decided to end his miseries. He called all his near relations to a feast in order to see them once for the last time. When they had all departed, he confined himself among big boulders and starved himself to death.

On another occasion the reason leading to suicide was a sort of nervous breakdown ; it was a case of psychological delusion. The Idus have a strong and deep-rooted belief that any breach of taboo connected with the Rren ceremony and even the slightest inadvertence in observing the prescribed ritual is sure

to bring disaster to the officiating priest, and also to the household performing it. Only the most experienced and aged priests are, therefore, invited to officiate in this particular ceremony.

For a long time, Janga Lingi, Political Interpreter, of Ephianga village, had intended to perform the Rren ceremony in his house. By March 1956, he had collected all the articles and animals to be sacrificed. As Munda Empo of Kronli, who usually officiated as priest in important ceremonies of this kind, had by then died, Janga Lingi requested Langa Menda, an inexperienced priest to officiate.

Generally, an Idu priest is supposed to observe a rather strict way of life compared to the common people, specially before presiding over a major ceremony. He must abstain for some days from sexual intercourse. He should not drink rice-beer prepared by a woman in her period. Before the ceremony, he must invoke his *drawn* (tutelary spirit) and offer him a sacrifice, so that the tutelary spirit will come to assist him in his duties. He should not enter a house where the inmates are engaged in dyeing cloth.

On being requested by Janga, Langa Menda agreed to conduct the Rren ceremony at Janga's house. He had all along been apprehensive that he might not be able to conduct the ceremony properly, due to his inexperience. Under the tension of this psychological delusion, Langa was taken ill. His eyes looked red, and he said that he could not conduct the ceremony any longer as he was suffering from fever. He fell into a trance, and declared that a particular woman, in her monthly course, had deceived him by giving

him rice-beer. He further suffered from the delusion that he had offended his tutelary spirit by unknowingly offering him the same rice-beer.

This idea possessed him so completely that it drove him mad. On March 14, 1956, at about 8 p.m., Janda, Langa's wife was suddenly roused from sleep by the sound of something heavy falling on the floor. She got up immediately, and lighted the fire. In the light, she saw Langa thrusting a dao into his stomach and stirring his intestines with it. She tried to stop him, but failed, and Langa died shortly afterwards.

Homicide. In some cases of homicide, although drunkenness is not generally common, alcohol appears to be the direct cause of the crime. Alcohol has varied effects on people. With some, it leads, to acts of violence and incites others to use abusive language.

Arrati Melen and Dirru Mimi, for example, with some other villagers were constructing a house at Anaya village in 1956. One night, they got very drunk. Arrati accused Dirru of cutting a bamboo, belonging to him. Dirru became furious, and abused Arrati in return. Arrati in his drunken rage, opened his dao and stabbed Dirru. Dirru succumbed to the injury. The case was taken up by an *abbala*, and Arrati had to pay a compensation of one hundred rupees.

Another case of the same kind, which occurred three years ago, was that of Gane Elepra and his wife Labbari Mimi of Rangma village. One day, they got very drunk on rice-beer, and Labbari Mimi in a drunken temper hit Gane on his head with a dao. Gane died of the injury the following morning.

Murder. Murders arising from disputes about land are very common. In such disputes, people often fly into a rage and sometimes come to a bad end. In 1954 Euruba Mimi and Shiuhu Mimi of Kanu village cleared a field and cultivated it jointly. Two years later, Euruba demanded part of the land. Shiuhu was not in favour of partition, and told Euruba that they would divide the crops between them after the harvest. But when the harvesting season came, he demanded a larger share of the crops on the ground that he had put in more labour in clearing the field. This infuriated Euruba, and he resolved to take revenge. The following day, when Shiuhu was in the field, Euruba shot him with a poisoned arrow.

A man who commits adultery even with the consent of the woman is severely punished. Sometimes he has to pay compensation to the husband. Within a family, a younger brother, in accordance with a well-established custom, can and does naturally claim his elder brother's wife, should the latter die prematurely and there are not a few instances of murder which have been motivated by the desire of the younger brother for his elder brother's wife. Nine years ago, Grane Mega of Rangma village suspected his wife of having sexual relations with his younger brother, Errati. One day Errati was flirting with her, when Grane suddenly came home, and having observed the scene went mad with anger, and struck Errati on his neck with a dao, killing him instantly.

Some twenty years ago, Guili Lingi, along with his wife Sasia, was living in the same house with his

younger brother, Jamude Lingi. Jamude was in love with Sasia. One day, when Guili went to a neighbouring village, Jamude followed him, and while the former was crossing a rope bridge, Jamude cut the ropes. Jamude thought his brother had drowned and ran away. Guili, however, fortunately fell only on the big boulders below and, though he sustained several severe injuries, returned home after a week,



A cane suspension bridge in the Dibang Valley

where he found his wife and brother living together. When Jamude saw Guili, he was frightened and tried to run away. But Guili caught hold of him, and inflicted a severe wound on Jamude's thigh with his dao, and Jamude died of the injury sometime afterwards.

The Idu practice of polygamy creates all sorts of problems within a household—petty jealousies, frictions, quarrels and sometimes even murder. Chauka Keche of Dali village, for example, had two wives, Asiya

and Asawe Misa. Asiya, the senior wife, was jealous of Asawe, because she believed that Chauka loved her more. One day, she prepared some rice-beer and called Chauka to have a drink in her room, to which he gave a rude reply. Asiya afterwards went to look for Chauka and found him lying in Asawe's room. This exasperated her, and she hit him over the head with a bamboo tube. Chauka, in a furious rage, struck Asiya with his dao, and she died instantaneously.

A twelve-year old case of a similar nature is that of a woman named Enjame Mile, Nali Mega's wife, of Rrali village. Nali had an affair with Eminda Mega, widow of Kulu Ompe of the same village. Enjame was aware of this, and often quarrelled with Eminda about it. One day, Eminda being severely reproached by Enjame, not only retorted angrily, but stabbed her to death. Nali had to pay compensation of two mithuns, one slave, and two hundred rupees to Diba Mega, Enajame's brother, as he was held responsible for the death of his wife.

In some cases, the motive for murder is a clan vendetta which persists through several generations, members of one clan killing a member of another clan in revenge and vice versa.

Akke Mili of Amali village killed Gane Mundi of Atara village some twenty-seven years ago. Abbuyu Pulu, cousin of Gane Mundi, retaliated by killing Suihu Miku, a nephew of Akke Mili. Akke Mili avenged his nephew's death by killing Abuyu Pulu. Lekanga Melen, a fellow villager of Akke Mili, took Kati Mindi of Atara village as captive and sold him to Kata Melen of Apruni village.

Premeditated and deliberately planned murder through malice is considered to be the most serious offence, and whoever commits it is punished with death. It is usually found that the motive behind many a murder is the desire for revenge. Once a man has been killed, his kinsmen, on principle, avenge the death by killing either the accused, or one of the members of his family, and this spirit of revenge, on both sides, continues for several generations.

Sometimes it so happens that the people of one of the hostile clans, with the intention of freeing themselves of any possible danger of being attacked by the other clan, attempt a compromise. In such cases, an envoy from a friendly village is usually employed to negotiate the matter, and to settle the amount of indemnity.

The following incident took place, when R. W. Godfrey was the Political Officer at Sadiya.

Masesa Lingi of Akaka village had two wives, Ejasi and Suiya Mena. Ejasi was quick-tempered, and was jealous of Suiya Mena. One day, when the two women were working in the field, Suiya scolded Ejasi for some reason, and the latter lost her temper and struck Suiya on the head with the blunt edge of her dao and killed her. Taka Mena, a brother of Suiya, retaliated by killing Asana Menda, Ejasi's father. This developed into a regular vendetta between the Mena and Menda clan. But fortunately, Taka Mena, with the intention of putting an end to this senseless killing, sued for peace. He paid an indemnity of three mithuns, two pigs, and ninety rupees in cash to the relations of Asana Menda.

the stipulated compensation, forfeits all claim to possess her children. This payment releases the second husband of any obligation for any payment by way of bride-price to the parents of the woman.

Asinji, wife of Khusu Melen of Sali village, went away with one Aba Lingi of the Sissiri Valley. Aba Lingi had to pay double the value of the bride-price, which Khusu had paid for Asinji to her parents.

Offences Caused without Intention. Death or some other injury caused by accident, without any criminal intention, design or knowledge on the part of one who becomes an instrument of it while carrying on his normal pursuits, is not considered an important offence.

Some ten years back, Esadu Metan of Enali village laid a trap for big game. He made a fence with a passage in the middle, and placed horizontally along the fence a spear which was held back by a bamboo spring. Across the passage in the fence, a rope was placed, so that the intruding animal would trip over it to release the spear. A man, Guili Melambra by name, who went to the jungle to collect thatch, passed through the passage quite unawares and was pierced by the spear. The case was put before an *abbala*, but as the death so caused was not the result of any criminal intention the accused was forgiven.

Act of a Lunatic. Nothing is an offence which is done by a person who, at the time of committing it, is of unsound mind, and is, therefore, incapable of realizing the nature and the consequences of the act.

Theft. A person convicted by an *abbala* of theft has to pay compensation double the value of the articles stolen. If however, a servant or minor commits theft, he only brings dishonour to his master or guardian and is only liable to corporal punishment (whipping or imprisonment).

Defamation. Defamation or abuse depends on the relationship of the parties concerned and the occasion when it is used. If used for deliberate defamation, the offender is liable to pay compensation which may be as high as fifty rupees.

The most common abusive words used in everyday life are *iku* (dog), *epa* (slave), *akhuya-nani* (eater of the anus), *gallan-me-i-u-taya* (victim of Gallan). These expressions, however, are so commonly used in ordinary conversation that they do not usually offend.

Three years ago, Langa Menda of Apuli village had to pay fifty rupees for using defamatory words against a girl of Chiddu village.

III. TABOOS AND ETIQUETTE

The animal skulls that are generally seen in an Idu house are considered to be a sacred possession of the household. It is believed that the household god Andrangallan resides in the skulls. No one should sit near the skulls, nor use them as pegs to hang anything on.

No one should sit on the *akamba* or the wooden slab, which the principal member of a household uses as a support for his head. Such an act is believed to be sacrilegious and causes premature death to the owner of the slab.

When B. H. Routledge was the Political Officer, one Ratane Mimi killed Muba Elepra. The relatives of Muba Elepra reported the case to the Government, and Ratane was sentenced to two years imprisonment. On his release, Ratane returned to his village and killed Siba Lingi, nephew of Muba Elepra. Two brothers of Siba Lingi, in turn avenged Siba's murder by killing Ratane Mimi. The relatives of Ratane Mimi finally retaliated by killing Sisa Elepra, the Gaonbura of Ishima village in January 1957.

Infanticide. Infanticide is not very common among the Idus. But a few cases have occurred. Adultery, as I have said, is viewed with great abhorrence, and a woman is severely punished for it. It is considered a dishonour for a girl to have an illegitimate child. So to avoid social castigation and disgrace, the child is put to death immediately it is born. Of the four infanticide cases of the last twelve years, about which I have detailed information, one child was strangled, one buried alive, the third was abandoned in the jungle. The fourth child was killed with drugs in the womb.

Punishment. Idu law prescribes the following punishments for various offences : death, confinement, compensation and beating. Punishment by death is for the gravest offences such as murder, mutilation and robbery. An insolvent or a debtor, who fails to repay his debt, due to extreme poverty is sometimes taken into confinement by the creditor, and is made to suffer all sorts of social indignities, and is also penalised legally. Punishment by the payment of compensation is usually considered appropriate for all kinds of

offences. In demanding compensation due regard is paid to the offender's wealth as also to the type and magnitude of the offence. In theory there is no limit to the amount of compensation to which the offender is liable, but in practice it is not excessive. Corporal punishment such as whipping is inflicted only on minors and female offenders.

Hurt. Causing intentional hurt to a person is compensated with a minimum of fifty rupees. If a person hurts another under the false pretence that he has been guilty of an offence against him, he is liable to pay goods to the extent of 160 rupees. For inflicting hurt, which cripples a person for life, the offender is liable to pay compensation equivalent to the cost of two mithuns.

Rape. A man, who rapes a woman is liable to pay compensation in kind ranging in value from fifty to three hundred rupees, or even up to as much as the cost of one mithun according to the circumstances under which the crime is committed.

In 1950, a man of Enali village was convicted of rape by the *abbala* which ordered him to pay fifty rupees.

Abduction. Whoever abducts a married woman with the intention of having illicit relations with her may have to pay an amount double the value of her bride price. A married woman is considered the property of the husband, and even the death of the husband does not render her free to marry any one other than her husband's own brother. A married woman with children, who runs away with another man, and continues to live with him after he had paid

the stipulated compensation, forfeits all claim to possess her children. This payment releases the second husband of any obligation for any payment by way of bride-price to the parents of the woman.

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The post-plates of the house are considered as the guardian of the household. It is forbidden to strike the post-plates with anything, or put sticks, umbrellas, and any other things on them.

A man should not enter a house immediately after felling a big tree in the jungle.

After a death has taken place in a house, for five days following the burial, the household abstains from going outside. Nor should outsiders enter the house during this period.

An Idu house has a room meant for the senior members of the family. An outsider or a guest should not enter this all on a sudden.



Cutting up a sacrificed mithun



Idu girls pounding rice

RELIGION AND CEREMONIES

I. GENERAL CHARACTER OF POPULAR BELIEF

Idu religion may be defined as a system of magico-religious beliefs. On the one hand, the people have developed the conception of a high god whom they regard as the Supreme Creator. On the other hand, there is a host of both benevolent and malevolent spirits who, for all practical purposes, have a more direct influence on human lives. Sacrifices are specially made to propitiate them.

The Supreme God Inni, embodies the highest ethical conception reached by the Idus. Besides being the Supreme Creator of all things, he is the impersonal principle of justice, and the upholder of the moral order of creation. The highest conception of Idu justice is reflected in the story which tells how Inni punished his own brother Ela for his oppression of human beings.

In the beginning there was only a vast mass of water, from under which the hills emerged. The god Anya created human beings and other species at the direction of the Supreme God Inni. Inni had a younger brother named Ela. Unlike his elder brother, Ela was evil, and used to oppress the living beings on earth by giving out excessive heat from his body. Inni warned him not to do this, but he paid little heed to his advice. When the misery of the people became acute, they reported the matter to Inni, and asked him

to save them from Ela's oppression. Inni, in terrible anger, caught hold of Ela, and threw him into a pool of mud. Ela received many injuries and lost the glamour of his face. Since then, he would never come out as long as his elder brother remained in the sky.

Having created the world, Inni has left it to run its own course and, on the whole, has remained indifferent to it. The world of the Idus is, however, full of very powerful spirits, whose relations with the Supreme God are not well defined, though they are regarded as, in a vague way, subordinate to him. Now, these spirits are classed under two categories, namely those who are kindly disposed towards men, and those who are, in the main, evil, quick-tempered, and uncertain in mood. They are supposed to be behind every misfortune that befalls mankind and, unless properly propitiated, bring all kinds of ill-luck to them. The Idus have, therefore, elaborated a system of rites, magical formulas, and prayers to keep them in check.

Even spirits who have more positive powers of doing good, such as bestowing plentiful harvests, will not, it seems, do this unless they have their share of the sacrifices. A typical Idu prayer runs as follows :

‘O Ilikhri Khinyu (Spirit of Earth), give us bounteous crops ; we are offering you rice-beer.

‘O Malo (Spirit of Agriculture) give us good fortune, let our seed produce many seedlings.

‘Let the climate be favourable during the cultivation season. We are offering you an egg.

‘May Apeisa (Spirit of Wealth) provide us with sufficient food and wealth.’

Like any other people who have remained simple in their beliefs, the Idus have an anthropomorphic view of nature and natural happenings. They explain every occurrence as caused by an agent which, to the Idu mind, is a spirit, either benevolent or malicious. Nature is alive and activated by innumerable spirits who hold the powers of good and evil over human destiny. An Idu is, therefore, constantly under emotional pressure to please the spirits who are regarded as dispensers of worldly fortune and to appease those spirits who are essentially ill-tempered and capable of bringing misfortune to mankind. It may appear that, by an extension of the same anthropomorphic world-view, the Idus have arrived ultimately at the conception of a Supreme God, infinitely more powerful, whom they regard as the creator of both the spirit-world and lesser mortals. This is also, perhaps, the reason why this Supreme Being is considered as beyond human supplication. No special sacrifices or offerings are prescribed for him, but his name is invariably invoked on all sacrificial and ritualistic occasions.

Idu religion prescribes various codes of ritual to govern the conduct of man with the spirits. It has devised a way of life that man should follow in order to fulfil his true nature, and carry out his moral and social responsibilities. Some actions are intrinsically evil or inexpedient, and religion condemns them. The Idu cannot bear to see his kinsmen killed, and his heart is never at peace until their death is avenged. He conceives it as his obligation and duty, and accepts the dogma 'Life for life' as his moral right. And yet, in marked contrast, he is normally compassionate to

his fellow beings and responsive to their needs and demands. He regards it as one of his chief duties to maintain his parents and other relations in their old age.

II. THE PRIESTHOOD

All sacrificial ritual is conducted by priests, of whom the Idus recognize two classes, the Igu or Igu-Meme and the Igu-A. The former is a person of experience and dignity who officiates at a wide variety of ceremonies. The Igu-A is a trainee, not yet fully qualified, who is concerned with lesser rituals such as ascertaining the cause and cure of diseases. He is simply a medicine-man, but capable of falling into trance. An Igu-A can become an Igu, if by his association with other experienced Igus or, through initiation by the spirits, he gains sufficient knowledge and proves himself capable of dealing with the powerful and malicious spirits.

The priesthood is not hereditary, and a son of a priest cannot become a priest simply by virtue of his birth. In fact, it is more common for the priestly office to descend to someone who is not related to a priest in any way. A man first gets his first inspiration to become a priest in dreams. Then he serves a period of apprenticeship under an experienced Igu. Every priest has a tutelary spirit, called *drawn*, who guides him in the performance of rituals and in the diagnosis of diseases. During trance, the priest invokes his *drawn* who comes in response to his prayer, and guides him along the right course.

I have not been able to obtain detailed information about the exact nature of the relationship between

a priest and his tutelary spirit, as even intimate friends do not dare to discuss the subject among themselves, lest, by doing so, they offend the spirits. I have been told that the tutelary spirit of a male priest is generally male, but occasionally, he may have a female tutelary also. Rukhu Meme of Aonli village, for example, told me that his tutelary spirit was female, who visited him in trance when he presided over the more important sacrifices. A female shaman on the other hand always has a male tutelary spirit.



Skirt worn by a priest while conducting ceremonies

Generally, an Igu is supposed to observe a stricter way of life than ordinary people, and has to observe many taboos. Before presiding over a major ceremony, he must abstain from sexual intercourse for a couple of days. He must not enter a house where the people are engaged in dyeing cloth or yarn. Before attending a ceremony, he must invoke his tutelary spirit and offer him a sacrifice, in order to persuade him to come and assist him in his duties. He should

never drink rice-beer prepared by a woman in her menstrual period.

Not everyone can be a priest. A man so destined should be born with certain signs, such as the umbilical chord around his neck at birth. Sometimes, the mother gets a prediction in her dreams that her child will be a priest. A pregnant woman, who dreams of caressing a child lying in a basket which is hung in the *egamba* or *iu-amba* tree expects that her child will be an important priest. So does a woman who dreams of the bird *praerru* making its nest on the roof of the house. In such cases, when the child attains maturity, or sometimes even at an earlier age, he falls into a trance, and his soul travels to the spirit-world. There it becomes acquainted with the spirits and lives with them for a long time, thus becoming capable of conducting various ceremonies. Very often a man destined to be a priest leaves his home at the beginning of a long trance, and stays in the jungle for several days till his soul comes back to him. At this stage he loses his senses, and does unusual things. He may eat human excreta and regard the most delicious food as dirt.

The life story of Hayablyum Lingi, a prominent Igu, who has settled at Masima village, illustrates the strange life of an Idu priest :

‘My ancestors originally came from the Upper Dibang Valley. Neither I nor my parents knew that I would be a priest. When I was twelve years old, I went out of my mind. Human excreta appeared to me as delicious food ; and ordinary cooked food seemed to me as human excreta. I fled to the jungle

and stayed there for nearly a month. There I fell into a trance, and my soul went towards the east until it met the spirit Kapa-mura. Very often I wanted to tear open my stomach and throw out the intestine. Very often I thought that I could pierce my chest with a *dao*. My soul stayed with Kapa-mura, and learnt the knowledge of the spirits.

‘After a month I returned home and regained my lost senses. Then I performed a sacrifice, and became competent to officiate as a priest.

‘The spirit Kapa-mura is very tall, as tall as a palm tree. He has thick hair on his body and four fingers on each hand. He has a black complexion and a massive head with two fierce eyes.

‘Kapa-mura comes to me in my trances, and answers all my questions. Sometimes, he also takes me to the under-world.’

I once heard an interesting account given by Tango Mili, a very old priest of Mihunda village, in the Upper Dri Valley, who is believed to have the power of causing land-slides, and to be able to fly like an ‘air vehicle’ (aeroplane) from place to place.

‘My father married my mother in his old age. Very often he reproached her for her passionate sexual nature, for he himself was old, and could not satisfy her. To his surprise, however, she conceived, and after five months, before I was born, she had a dream that Ini Anjeru, resting upon my father, had intercourse with her, as a result of which she conceived.

‘The knowledge of the duties of a priest came to me while I was a little child, one and a half years old. I did not learn from anybody, not even by imitating

other priests. I once fought the mighty *khinyu* Gallan and drove him into the jungle. The name of my tutelary spirit is Ini Anjeru.'

Another account was given to me by Rukhu Meme, a priest of Aolin village :

'My parents did not have any idea that I would be a priest. When I was thirteen years old, I dreamt that I was sitting in the centre of the house, and giving advice to some of my friends. This convinced me that I was destined to be a priest. I began to associate with two Igus at that time and learnt many forms of ritual and duties from them.

'My tutelary is a female spirit who visits me during my trances when I perform important rituals. She sits beside me, and answers my questions. If she disapproves of anything, she gives me a push.'

A rather similar account was given to me by another priest Nayi Tayu of Amuli village, who stated that he learnt his duties by associating with other experienced priests. He got his first impetus to become a priest through a dream which he saw while he was yet a child.

Although I have not heard of an actual incident, there is a general impression that the priests are conversant with black magic ; that they can give all sorts of trouble to individuals with whom they are displeased, and can make them ill, or even cause their premature death. This they do by sending their tutelary spirits to the person they intend to harm. A deep fear of punishment in the under-world, however, generally makes a priest abstain from practising black magic.

III. SPIRITS AND DEITIES

The Idu word for spirit is *khinyu*. Most of the *khinyus* have permanent homes ; some live in the underworld, some on the earth, some in the air, and others in human dwellings. They get easily offended with human behaviour of omission and commission, and are always on the look-out to do them harm. The following are some of the Idu spirits :

Abruli. The Idu word for lightning is *Abruli*. *Abruli* is a female spirit who does no harm to man.

Ali. A spirit who guards the household and bestows wealth. His departure from the house is believed to cause poverty.

Andra. A spirit who is not as harmful as other spirits. But when he is offended by some one, he hands him over to the evil spirits.

Arru-sudu. He is known as the controller of wind. He is a great friend of *Arrasu*, the spirit of fire, and with his assistance sets fire to human dwellings.

Arruya. A very wicked spirit who breeds contention among men and prompts them to quarrel, fight and murder.

Asa. An evil spirit who lives under the earth. When he is offended with a man, he visits him with dysentery, high fever and other sicknesses.

Asila-amide. A spirit who gives people children. He looks after the children, and protects them from the attacks of other evil spirits.

Asu. A good spirit who gives wealth to men. He is worshipped with sacrifice of animal blood.

Athu. A very wicked spirit who gives pain to women during delivery. He kills small children.

Beika. A snake spirit, who lives in water. When he gets an opportunity, he takes away men and women into the river and drown them.

Brerru. The Idu name for thunder is Brerru. Brerru is considered as a spirit who hurls thunderbolts when he gets angry.

Errasur. An evil spirit who lives in the sky. He is the owner of fire, and is peevish in temperament. He sets fire to human dwellings when he gets angry.

Ithri. He causes tuberculosis ; and makes people vomit blood. He is very much dreaded by the Idus.

IV. SICKNESS AND CURE

Ai-i is a ceremony solely intended to ward off evil spirits causing sickness. An *Igu* is called, and after his arrival, takes the history of the sickness of the patient. He then holds a piece of turmeric in his right hand, and invokes his tutelary spirit as follows :—

‘You have been receiving sacrifices from the days of my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Whenever I have summoned you, you have been helpful to me. When a tree grows big, if it is not wanted, it is to be cut ; if dirt accumulates on the body, it is to be removed. So also, if a man falls sick, he is to be cured. So and so has fallen sick. Let this piece of turmeric prove a good medicine, and cure the patient from his ailment. Be satisfied with the fowl which I am offering you as sacrifice.’

After finishing the chant, the priest blows on the piece of turmeric three times, and gives it to the patient. After eating it the patient remains inside a room for some hours. Other members of the house-

hold must not enter his room immediately the ceremony is over.

The *Amrasa* ceremony is performed to cure anyone suffering from serious illness. Before leaving his house, the priest offers a sacrifice to his tutelary spirit (*drawn*), to ensure his presence and his assistance.



A structure, on which offerings are made to the spirits in time of sickness and on other ceremonial occasions

He also requests his tutelary spirit to go ahead of him, and attend the patient.

When the priest arrives at the patient's house, he takes the history of the illness. Then he falls into a trance, during which he ascertains which particular *khinyu* is responsible for the illness.

For this ceremony, a large number of sacrificial offerings such as fowls, pigs, rice-beer, and sometimes, *mithuns* are needed. The priest asks his tutelary spirit to drive away the evil spirit. The tutelary spirit is believed to be almost half-witted, and thus requires to have everything explained, such as whether the illness was caused for breaking some taboo, or by the malice of an evil spirit. Usually, the priest has to give a detailed explanation of this, before he can persuade the tutelary spirit to ward off the powerful spirit causing the illness.

Sometimes, the tutelary spirit becomes adamant and refuses to cure the patient. He may demand or even extort a bigger sacrifice such as a *mithun* or a buffalo. He may say, 'Look ! I have come a long way, and I am tired. This household has a number of *mithuns*. Can they not offer me a *mithun* for the service I will do them ?' Then the tutelary spirit has to be flattered by praising his powers, and won over by the priest. The priest will say, 'You are the guardian of all of us. Not only I and the household of the patient, but one and all know about your great power. To whom shall we go, if you turn your face away, when we crave your help and support ? Such and such a spirit has caused this illness to the patient. Look at his eyes, they are pale like the colour of the

turmeric. The patient's relations have given such and such articles as sacrificial offerings. They are only for you, I do not require them. So accept the articles and drive away the spirit who is troubling the patient.'

The priest may sometimes have to threaten his tutelary spirit with loss of his good name, should he fail to cure the sick. He will say, 'The relations of the sick are depending on your power. If you can drive away the evil spirit, and cure the patient, it will bring you credit. But if you fail, every one will laugh at you.' A bargain follows, in which the priest demands the service of his tutelary spirit in return for the sacrifices he will give to him. After a settlement is made, the priest asks the tutelary spirit not to deceive him, but to fulfil the contract by curing the patient.

Medicine. The Idus use various herbal remedies, some of which have been found effective for curing many diseases. Although they live in the far-off mountain ranges, they recognize the value and efficacy of medicine. They have rarely in the past had a chance to consult a modern physician for the treatment of their ailments. On one occasion, I was told about an instance, where a man was cured of snake-bite by the application of indigenous medicine.

The Idus, who believe in numerous evil spirits, naturally have faith in witchcraft and the performance of rituals connected with the healing of diseases. In fact, when ill, they prefer to take recourse to sacrifices and regard medicine as complementary to it.

The following are some of the medicines in common use for various diseases :—

For cough, the leaf of a plant called *thipa* is used.

The fat of the python is said to cure chronic dysentery and intestinal trouble.

For bleeding, the milky juice of a parasitic plant, *illirumbra*, is used. Another effective remedy for this is a mixture of soot and tobacco.

The leaf of a plant called *alekana* is said to be effective in toothache.

For stomach-ache, the leaf of a plant known as *lamba* is made into a paste and taken with hot water.

The dried flesh of *ebraju* (a kind of wild rat) is an effective antidote for poisoning and snake-bite.

For a cold, the mashed up leaves of a plant called *drukhumu* is heated, and taken with water.

Musk is said to be a tonic for physical weakness. It is also taken in cases of chronic cough.

The gall of the bear is said to cure dysentery, jaundice and other intestinal troubles.

The well-known *mishmi-tita* is the commonest remedy for fever.

V. RITES AND CEREMONIES

An Idu usually attributes his sickness to the malice of the *khinyus* or evil spirits. The *khinyus* live everywhere, above the earth, below the earth, beneath the sky, in the water, on the hills and in the mountain ravines. Peevish by temperament, they are easily offended at the slightest omission and commission of mankind. Sometimes a dead ancestor comes to the living world, and expresses his displeasure at not receiving the proper sacrifice by making one of his descendants sick. The spirits have different tastes, some are fond of fowls, some of pigs and *mithuns*,

while some are omnivorous. Thus, most ailments can be averted if the spirits responsible for them are propitiated by means of sacrifice.

Field Ceremony. A sacrifice is usually performed before the sowing of seeds, to ensure a good crop. A fowl is put on the stump of a tree, and as soon as the fowl is sacrificed, it is set free, so that the blood smears the field. This ceremony is performed in honour of the god Malo, who is believed to give good crops. After the fowl is killed, the sacrificer utters the following chant :

‘Let the god Malo be pleased with this fowl. From today onwards, may the field produce rich crops. The bird Ipri brought the seed from *Apeisa*, and gave them to men. I have planted those seeds. I have offered the blood to the earth-spirit to quench his thirst. Let the earth be fertile and produce more crops.’

The Rren ceremony. The Rren is the most important ceremony of the Idus. This ceremony may be performed by an individual at any time during his life, for the welfare of his family. The aim of the various rites, which run in a series, is to obtain riches and good crops, and to ward off the evil spirits. But above all, these are performed to seek sympathy and kindness from the greater and powerful spirits.

The general course of the ceremony is as follows :

FIRST DAY

Lanruti. This is the usual preliminary of the ceremony. The priest invokes the spirits who are

good to human beings, and asks them to look after the family members of the performer.

Andrupu. A small quantity of the rice-beer is poured on the beak of a fowl, and then it is killed by smashing its head on the pole (*Abrantan*) on which the skulls of *mithuns* and buffaloes are hung. The head of the fowl is cut off, and packed in a leaf along with a few grains of maize, paddy and *kado* (millet). The packet is then tied on the post-plate of the house of the performer of the ceremony.

Naya. With the rite *Andrupu*, the priest's work for the day is over. The guests are feasted, and the young boys make merriments.

SECOND DAY

Sayathu. This rite starts the following morning. If the performer can afford to it, a few *mithuns* are killed. The priest invites the dead ancestors, and also the various spirits, and offering them the blood of the sacrificed animals, says :—

‘O ancestors, O fathers, O grandfathers, all of you come, and share the blood. Bring with you all the old ones, those who live with you, and whose names I cannot remember. Let not the bad spirits come. May all of you be pleased with the offerings, and protect the family of the performer.’

Ca-ca. The priest falls into trance ; he then asks his tutelary spirit to take the sacrificial offerings to a place called *innumra*, and to preserve them within a fence.

Saruila. The priest prays to Asan, saying, 'As long there are human beings, they will produce children. They will rear pigs and *mithuns*, and accumulate property. May Asan be pleased and bestow plenty of wealth, domestic animals and children on the performer.'

THIRD DAY

Iyuthu. The priest invokes the dead ancestors in these words :

'Human blood flows uninterrupted from one individual to the other, from father to his sons, and on and on. Let not the continuous flow of blood come to an end. Let the married couple of the performer's family have more children.'

Lapa Ithu. The priest relates the myth of creation, and also how the human beings learnt agriculture. Lastly, he bids farewell with the words, 'May not the human beings forget divine instructions.'

Iurusu. The priest prays to Inni Asan to protect the property of the performer of the ceremony.

Endapra. This rite begins with the dance of the priest, followed by four male persons. The priest invokes the various spirits and asks them not to destroy, but to preserve the property and the domestic animals of the household.

Ipuci. The priest dances all over the house for about eight times, and afterwards, offers a fowl to the gods that live outside the house. The fowl is placed under a big boulder which is raised above the ground and kept outside the house.

Dungunga. The rites come to an end for the day. The young and grown up boys make bubbling sounds with their lips.

FOURTH DAY

Iy-u-runa. The priest dances holding two fowls, then cuts their heads. One head is offered to the god Inni, and he is called upon to be kind to the household. This head is put on a bamboo spike outside the house.

Apana. Apana is linked with the rite Iy-u-runa. The priest gives the second fowl's head to the performer of the ceremony to eat. The body of the fowl is given to the co-villagers of the performer to eat after two-days.

Addeka. The bark is removed from the branch of a tree called *amu*. Then the priest ties the top of the branch with boar's teeth, and puts it up above the fireplace. It is believed that the branch serves as a magic rod to ward off the evil spirits.

Ya-ya-thu. The priest calls upon Allari Khinyu, and the other spirits, who preside over the village, and the water source, and offers rice-beer in their names.

Immediately the ceremony is over, the members of the household and their visitors are free to go in and out of the house as they choose.

Sacrifice. The motive behind the majority of the Idu sacrifices is to persuade the evil spirits not to take away a person, who through ignorance, either breaks a taboo or incurs displeasure of the spirits through some wrongful acts. In all the rites, a portion of the sacrificed animal's meat is kept apart for the spirit in whose honour the rite is performed. The Idus eat

almost all kinds of animals and birds except the black gibbon and the tiger, as these are related to their ancestors. But all animals cannot be offered as sacrifices, because some are either considered impure, or are disliked by the spirits. There is no record of the Idus practising human sacrifice.

Only domesticated animals are used for sacrificial purposes. Thus, usually *mithuns*, buffaloes, pigs and fowls are sacrificed at the different ceremonies and festivals. There are a few stories behind the selection of animals for sacrifice :

Man could not domesticate the birds that live in the trees. Once, *Ini-la-briri*, a spirit, laid a few eggs. A man named Apa-i-ju came across the eggs, stole one, and kept it in his house. After sometimes, a hen came out of the egg. Apa-i-ju then performed the Rren ceremony, and offered the hen to the god Inni as sacrifice. Inni was pleased with the sacrifice and returning the hen to Apa-i-ju, said, 'Keep the hen for yourself. When it lays eggs, give it to me as sacrifice.'

Since then the fowl began to be domesticated by man.

Another story describes how the *mithun* was domesticated by human beings. After men were born, Anya created the animals, and asked them to live in the forest, over which Gallan presided. He domesticated the elephant, tiger, deer, and other animals, but drove the *mithun* away out of the forest as it possessed big horns. Since then the *mithun* came to live with human beings.

Another story relates how the pig came into man's possession :

Ini-ala-dikri had a son named Danda-briri. Danda-briri had a son Illi, a pig. As Illi was odd looking, his father left him with the human beings.

VI. DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

The Idus believe that dreams are the means by which the spirits communicate with man. When a man is asleep his soul roams about, and whatever it sees or does appears to its owner in a dream. Like many other people, the Idus believe that dreams foretell the future. Many of the dreams are creative, and purposive ; they encourage man to action.

To dream of one's front teeth falling out, indicates that the dreamer will lose his maternal uncle. A man who dreams of losing his side teeth will lose his own brother.

If a pregnant woman dreams of carrying a stone, she expects a male child.

Killing a big snake in a dream predicts success in hunting.

The dream of crossing a river predicts all-round success.

The dream of entering into a cavity of a tree predicts longevity.

The dream of killing a snake predicts victory over one's enemies.

If a person dreams of bridging a river, it is good ; and predicts his victory in the council.

To dream of felling a tree indicates gain in hunting.

The dream of catching the sun or the moon predicts that the dreamer will soon receive some property.

The sight of a naked woman in a dream portends an accident.

The dream of sexual intercourse with one's mother forebodes misfortune and family trouble.

The dream of having intercourse with one's wife is also bad ; it portends loss to the dreamer ; so does a dream in which one sees a poor neighbour sick. Equally ominous is a dream of an enemy approaching the house.

Flying in a dream indicates the death of some member of the household.

If a man dreams of kicking a boulder, it forebodes that his generation will come to an end.

A priest who dreams of killing a tiger, expects his own death within a very short time.

The dream of accumulating money or wealth forebodes a serious illness.

The sight of slaughtering *mithuns* and buffaloes in a dream portends death of a member of the household.

The dream of seeing a house consumed by fire predicts continuous dry weather.

If a patient dreams of travelling, he will suffer from a lingering fever.

If a person dreams of distributing paddy or other crops to other persons, it predicts loss to him.

The dream of falling from a high place forebodes a critical time for the dreamer. He may experience monetary loss or fall in the estimation of others.

If a person meets a spirit in his dream, it indicates that ill luck awaits him in the near future.

All dreams, in fact, relating to evil spirits are usually considered as expressive of evil forebodings.

Nightmares are distinct from ordinary dreams. A dream may be ignored, but not a nightmare ; for it is more distressing, and casts its shadow for a long period. A nightmare has a motif behind it ; it is believed to be caused by the visit of an angry spirit. The majority of the night-terrors of a child are ascribed to the visits of dead relations during sleep which produce a sense of dread in his mind.

The following nightmare of a sexual experience illustrates how nightmares are interpreted :

A man had sexual relations with his own cousin, a twenty-one year old widow of his village whom he used to visit very often at night. For a couple of days, he could not meet her, as some of her female relations came to the house, and two of them slept with her. So one day, he made an engagement with her, asking her to meet him under a granary in the night. The man waited for several hours at the appointed place, but to his disappointment, the girl did not come. So he got annoyed with her and went to sleep, disturbed in mind. In his nightmare, he saw her dead husband, mercilessly thrashing him and pressing his throat in a furious rage.

The shock of this experience was so great that on the next day he fell ill. He attributed the cause of his illness to his forbidden sexual relations with the widow, and to pacify the wrath of her husband's ghost, he offered a sacrifice of three pigs. But it was no use : three days later he died.

VII. DEATH

The Idus are an affectionate and sensitive people and their sorrow for the dead is profound and genuine. Their attitude towards death may be judged from one of their sayings.

‘Let the body of the deceased be kept inside the house. If the body decomposes, the skeleton will remain in our sight. If the bones decay, they will turn into dust. But once the body is buried, nothing of it will remain for us to see.’

An Idu legend describes the reason why a corpse should be buried :

‘Formerly, men did not die. When they grew old, their bodies decayed and began to smell. There was a priest, Ci-anneru by name, whose mother was very very old. Her age had made her a cripple, and no one liked her for she had worms in her mouth. So one day her daughter-in-law pushed her into a ditch, and, placing a boulder upon it, said, ‘You will not come out of this ditch till the boulder melts, and gives way to you.’

But as boulders never melt, the dead never came out of the graves.

The Idus bury and do not burn their dead. When someone dies, the relations are informed as soon as possible, and the body is usually kept in the house for two to three days, till all the relatives living at a distance have arrived to join the mourning.

A priest is summoned immediately to ascertain the cause of the death. On his arrival, he falls into a trance, and tries to discover whether, for example, the

death was premature or unnatural, and if so what spirit was responsible.

Usually, the relatives bring some gifts to be offered in the name of the deceased.

The burial takes place in the afternoon. The priest first touches the body, and then asks the relations to take it out of the house. The grave is dug by the villagers and relations of the deceased, outside the village perimeter. There is no ceremony for the actual burial. But there is plenty to be done later.

The Idus call the soul *megra* or *arra*, and have ideas about its function and location. The soul is the vital principle which sustains the life of the body, and has its seat beneath the breast-bone. When a woman is with child, it is the soul which enters the womb and kindle the foetus into life. The soul is invisible and can, therefore, never be perceived or felt. When the soul withdraws, the body falls dead.

The Idu concept of the transmigration of the soul is not very clear. It is believed that when a child dies, its soul lingers on the earth for a certain period, roaming aimlessly, and feeding on the sap of little trees and bushes, for it is still subject to hunger and thirst. After a time, it dissolves into the air.

Like the human body, the soul can be hurt and injured. Diseases are believed to be caused by the influence of evil spirits. When an individual is under the spell of an evil spirit, his *megra* also suffers with the body till the spirit is driven away by the magical power of a priest. In case the magic fails to subdue the spirit, the *megra* leaves the body, and the individual dies.

The dead come back. The souls of those who die an unnatural death do not get sufficient food in the underworld, and sometimes manage to return to earth in the shape of a bird called *puijiko* to demand food from their relatives. Very often too they visit them in dreams. It is considered very dangerous to disregard a hungry soul coming from the underworld for food.

When, therefore, any one dreams of a soul asking for food, the household prepares for a ceremony called *Braffi* within the next two or three days. Pigs and fowls are offered and the soul is invited to the feast. Being offered food, drink, and new clothes, it is finally begged to go back to its place in the underworld forever. After the ceremony, the sacrificial offerings are buried.

VIII. THE UNDERWORLD

The ideas of the *Idus* of the underworld are very interesting. When the *megra* or soul leaves the body at death, it becomes incorporeal like the air. It wanders on the earth for a few days, and as soon the burial of the body is over, goes to live in the underworld.

The *Idus* speak of five different places to which the soul goes after its departure from the human body. They are classified in different grades, according to the amount of comfort they offer to the soul, and are called *megra-mra*, *aru-mra* or *makui-mra*, *jahi-u*, *ijjinga* or *etenta*, and *etadi-epappa*.

The road to all these places start from the same point. It is called *Adde*, and is guarded by a spirit

named Jahirru. Here the soul goes first of all, and the spirit Jahirru asks for an account of his past deeds. If the soul belongs to an honest and virtuous man, Jahirru directs him along the path leading to *megra-mra*. Those who die of drowning go to *jahi-u*, which is situated on the bank of a river. The soul of a person who dies of accident is sent to *ijjinga*. Cohabitation with a female slave is considered a sinful act. The soul of such a person goes to *etadi-eppapa*. The souls of the wicked people are sent to *aru-mra*.

The *megra-mra* is similar to this world, where the sun rises, nights fall, and there is a pleasant climate, neither too hot nor too cold. It is the abode of the ancestors who led virtuous lives while on earth. There is always enough food, and the land is very fertile. The ancestors enjoy peaceful family lives; they never quarrel nor fight each other. The *aru-mra*, on the other hand, is very hot; it is devoid of vegetation and the land is full of sandy soil which produces poor crops. It is situated among hills from where one can see many things of the earth. The ancestors live here in acute distress, as they do not get sufficient food to eat. Very often, they live on leaves and wild roots. At *jahi-u* the soul does not get anything to eat. Driven by hunger, sometimes it attempts to cook food in the shells of eggs. But the chill wind which constantly blows through the place always puts out the fire. So, the soul has to subsist on arums and the roots of wild trees.

The Idu conception of the other world suggests that the tribe has developed some sort of rudimentary theory of *Karma*. Admittedly, it has never attained

the metaphysical heights, which the theory of *Karma* attained in the Buddhist and Hindu systems of philosophy. Nevertheless, it will perhaps be wrong to deny an ethical basis to it. The Idus do have a very strong ethical bias which is adequately reflected in their idea of moral retribution awaiting the soul after death.

But the Idus have never passed beyond an anthropomorphic view of life and nature. The Idu gods are inflated versions of human beings, only infinitely more powerful. They are conceived in man's own image, credited with the same human emotions and passions. Similarly, their conception of the other world is no more than a picture in reverse of the same life as it is lived on earth.

To the Idus, therefore, death means merely a transition to a new life ; a passing hence to be born on a new plane of existence, not very different from the life we know.

EPILOGUE

The Idus are culturally and linguistically a homogeneous people inhabiting a compact area. As a tribe, they are easily distinguishable from their neighbours—the Padams and others in the west, the Tibetans in the north and the Mijus, Taraons and the Khamptis in the east and south-east. Yet it is strange that before coming into contact with outsiders they had no common name for themselves to distinguish them from their neighbours. The word Idu, which is used for this purpose at present, is most probably a distortion of the word Midu which means ‘inhabitants of the Idu valley’ and is the name for only one section of the people. Whatever may be the reason of the absence of such a general name, the people are conscious of their distinctiveness as a tribe and have adopted Idu as a common designation for all their sub-groups. Though sharing the broader name of Mishmi with the Taraons and Mijus, they still preserve a tradition which brings them closer to the Adis with whom they believe they moved southwards from Tibet.

Now we find them settled peacefully in villages in the valleys of the seven rivers which have given the names to their seven sections and they are no longer migrating in quest of fresh land. In former days when they were still spreading they moved by clans and we still find areas which are claimed as belonging to particular clans. In those days, therefore, the clans had an important political function, for new lands were occupied in their names. But now that expansion has ceased and the people have settled in more or less

permanent villages, this function of the clan has also come to an end. The importance of the clan lingers only in social functions, mainly marriages.

Idus are gradually becoming alive to the advantages of the Administration, but in comparison with the other hill people, they are yet slow to come forward to extend their fullest co-operation to it. Like other simple people who are just coming out of their isolation, they are naturally conservative and passionately stick to their own pattern of culture which they developed through many centuries. The taboos and beliefs which dictate their ethical code and social behaviour through generations have sunk too deep into their minds. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that inter-village feuds occasionally crop up and clan vendetta is still pursued, though the incidence of such socially motivated crimes is going down from year to year. It is however, important to bear in mind that the Idus do not lack the sense of justice, but they have a different way of dealing with it in consonance with their own culture.

There have been many changes in recent years, but before trying to give a picture of them it will be better to mention the difficulties that face the administration in its efforts. The first obstacle is the difficulty of communications. The terrain of this area is far more difficult and the obstacles are even more formidable than the Dafla hills, for example. The mountains are steeper and more tortuous and the rivers and torrents more uncertain and turbulent than anywhere else in NEFA. To make the matter worse this area received the rudest

shock of the great earthquake of 1950. The administration, therefore, has taken the opening up of communications as its foremost duty and already within a year the Engineering Department has shown extraordinary zeal in building roads under great difficulty : an Assistant Engineer, N. K. Munshi, with his whole party recently met with a tragic death from a landslide in carrying out this mission. Despite this difficulty, Medical, Agriculture and Education and other Departments are reaching the remotest areas with their humanitarian activities.

The second obstacle, which is not so obvious but which is more deep-rooted and is more difficult to tackle, is the psychology of the people. The Idus are a very individualistic folk. The co-operative and community spirit which dominates the Adi society is totally absent among them. The *abbalas*, their councils, are formed only when there are disputes to be settled and at present have no permanent standing. The Administration is now trying to strengthen and build up the tribal councils as administrative and judicial bodies for the development of the area.

The records of achievement in this area have to be considered in the light of the limitations imposed by the individualism of the people and the difficulty of communications.

The first and foremost benefit that the Administration has bestowed on the land is peace. Before its advent, Idu individualism manifested itself in protracted feuds, which started with individuals and ended with inter-clan feuds. Raids, assaults and murders were the result. These have stopped and

day by day settlement of disputes by peaceful negotiation through the *abbalas* is becoming common.

Disease is the enemy that the Administration fights first. Already a number of mobile units are moving around healing and bringing a healthier life to the people. They are working in collaboration with the priests and sustaining the spiritual efforts of the latter with the aid of modern medicine. The people are appreciating this gift of science, and ideas of sanitation and health are gradually spreading among them.

Improved methods of agriculture are also being introduced and permanent cultivation with improved seeds and the use of chemical fertilizers has already started wherever the terrain is suitable, and promises to progress well.

Thus while hunger and disease—the two chronic evils that haunted the people's life in the past—are being gradually fought, education is trying to enlarge their horizon and their arts and crafts are being encouraged to add beauty and grace to it. With an inter-village school at Roing, the Headquarters of the Dibang Valley, as the nucleus, education is extending its orbit of operation through a network of schools at convenient distances. In the primary stage the boys and girls get their education through the medium of their own mother tongue, in which text books have been specially prepared by the Administration.

The Idu are expert weavers and the coats woven by Idu women are well known to the lovers of the textile art. This art is being encouraged and yarn is supplied to the people through Co-operative

Societies at economical rates. This has given an impetus to the craft of weaving.

The NEFA administration in this way is administering to the needs of the people and with caution, imagination and sympathy is helping them to develop along the path -of their own genius. And there is every reason to believe that it will succeed in this noble undertaking, here as in other parts of the North-East Frontier.

GLOSSARY

- Abbala* — A tribal council.
- Abors* — The Adis.
- Adde* — A place which is believed to be situated on the way to the underworld.
- Agu* — A box made of cane and bamboo.
- Aja* — Aja was the son of Nyu-anjuru and his wife Uini-arru, and it is believed that from him the Sahibs originated. It is also a term used for addressing high dignitaries.
- Akamba* — A wooden slab which is used as a support for the head while reclining.
- Akakhre* — Ear-rings made of thin silver plate.
- Amaya khinyu* — The wind-god.
- Ami* — The God Anya created Ami (also called Amri) with a view to increase human beings on the earth. His successors were the Tibetans.
- Amriti* — The name of a place believed to be situated in Tibet.
- Amroho* — Spirit of fire.
- Amu* — A kind of tree with thick bark on its trunk.
- Anna* — The demon of wound and sores.
- Apeisa* — A mythical place whence various seeds and metals like brass and silver came.
- Apatala* — A hat made of cane. This hat is said to be sword-proof.
- Arramo* — The evil spirit who lives in the wind and hurls thunderbolts to the earth.
- Arru maseng* — First wife of the God Nyu-anjuru.
- Arrumra* — A place in the underworld.

- Arruralla* — The evil spirit who is believed to give fever to young children.
- Arulya* — A common type of necklace used by the Idus which consists of forty to sixty beads strung together.
- Asila-amide* — A household god who watches over the young children.
- Athu* — The evil spirit who kills young children.
- Bebejiyas* — The inhabitants of the Ithun Valley.
- Buili* — An Idu clan.
- Catam* — An Idu clan.
- Drawn* — A tutelary spirit.
- Egamba* — A tree.
- Ejjen* — The local name for the river Deo-pani.
- Ekamo* — The common ancestor of men and tigers.
- Ela* — The moon-god and the younger brother of Inni.
- Ela-amide* — Wife of the god Inni-macelan.
- Emba* — A relationship term used for addressing one's father's elder brother.
- Emmo* — A spirit who makes human beings fools and blockheads.
- Erraye* — Wife of the god Ekamo.
- Etadi-epaapa* — A place in the underworld. The soul of a person who commits adultery with a slave girl is believed to go to this place.
- Gallan* — A spirit who kills people by giving serious diseases.
- Ijjinga* — A place in the underworld. The soul of a person who dies of an accident goes there.
- Ilyu* — The local name for the Lohit river.
- Ilyuthobruru* — The local name for the confluence of the Dibang and the Lohit.

- Ini asige* — Nyu Anjuru's second wife.
- Ini Anjemo* — The spirit of the whirlwind.
- Inni* — The Supreme God of the Idu.
- Inni-la-pon* — A place believed to be situated in Tibet.
- Inni-o-mago* — Nyu Anjuru's fourth wife.
- Innu mra* — A mythical place which is believed to be the store house of food stuff for the spirits.
- Iu-amba* — A tree.
- Iyu* — Rice-beer.
- Jahirru* — A spirit who shows the path to a soul coming to the underworld.
- Jahi-u* — The soul of a person who dies of drowning goes to this place. *Jahi-u* is believed to be situated in the underworld.
- Jahiwi* — The name of a place which means— 'where the water-snakes live.'
- Jengu* — A kind of leaf used for roofing.
- Kabbuibyuu Anda* — The name of a place which means 'where the river flows backward.'
- Kado* — Millet.
- Kalidoi* — An Idu chief who made a profession of alliance with the British in 1879-80.
- Kaman* — A group of Mishmis who inhabit in the Kamlang, Dav and Upper Lohit Valleys.
- Ke-emra* — A variety of paddy.
- Kepu* — A variety of paddy.
- Kesen* — An Idu clan.
- Khepa* — An evil spirit who kills young children.
- Khinyu* — An evil spirit.
- Lekapon* — A bead necklace.
- Ludu* — A girl from the plains whom the god Nyu Anjuru married.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>Malan</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Mega</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Megra</i> | — The human soul. |
| <i>Megra Mra</i> | — The land of the dead where the soul goes after it leaves the human body. |
| <i>Mesa</i> | — According to the Idu legend, the forefather of the Assamese was Mesa. |
| <i>Mili</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Momba</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Muipo</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Nyu Anjuru</i> | — The god from whom the spirits and human beings originated. |
| <i>Ompo</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Panga</i> | — The name of a village in the Lohit Valley. |
| <i>Polo</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Praerru</i> | — A small bird. |
| <i>Puijiko</i> | — A small bird. |
| <i>Pulu</i> | — An Idu clan. |
| <i>Rren</i> | — An important ceremony of the Idus. |
| <i>Siddi</i> | — A demon whose very appearance strikes terror into the human mind and brings about death. |
| <i>Trummi</i> | — Son of Nyu Anjuru and his wife Uini Arru. |
| <i>Uini Arru</i> | — Nyu Anjuru's third wife. |
| <i>Yu</i> | — Beer made of rice or millet. |
| <i>Yakubri</i> | — Bride-price. |

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NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

