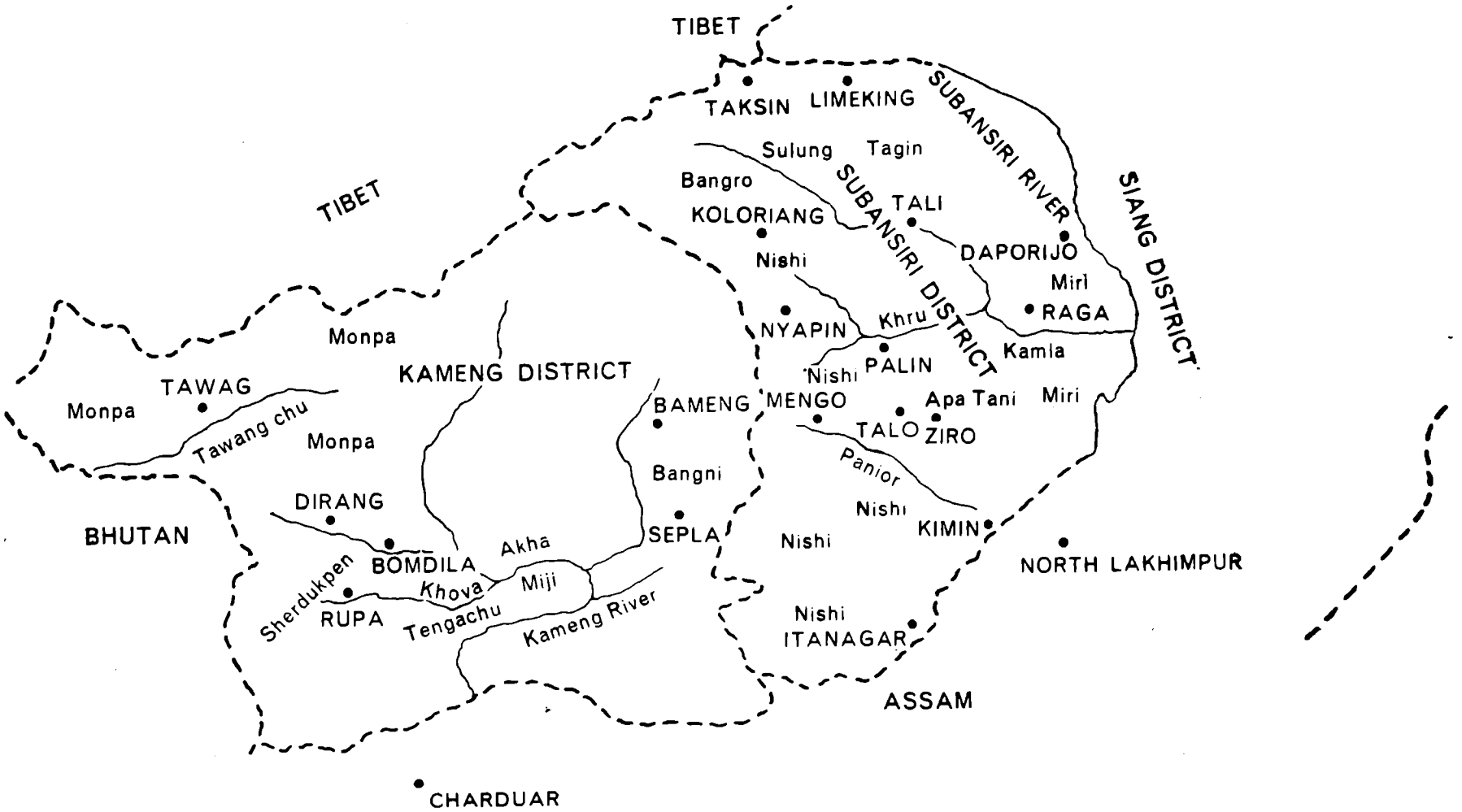
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
KAMENG AND SUBANSIRI DISTRICTS



HIGHLANDERS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Anthropological Research in North-East India

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf

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To

R.N. Haldipur

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Preface

This volume is the last of three books dealing with recent social and economic change among the hill tribes of India's northeastern borderlands. In the final chapters of *Return to the Naked Nagas* I discussed the development of Konyak society over a span of thirty-four years and in *A Himalayan Tribe: From Cattle to Cash* I described the dramatic transformation which the Apa Tanis have undergone between 1944 and 1978. In the present book I have extended the study of change to a wider range of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, including the Apa Tanis' immediate neighbours as well as some of the populations in the westernmost district of the Union Territory. Like my recent study of the Apa Tanis it formed part of a comprehensive project of anthropological research among Indian tribal populations in which I was engaged from 1976 until the end of 1980. This project, which involved also intensive work among the tribes of Andhra Pradesh, was financed by the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain and benefited moreover from the sponsorship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research and a grant of the Wanner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

In the pursuance of my investigations in Arunachal Pradesh I enjoyed the continuous support of the Administration, and there can be no doubt that without the many facilities afforded to me by the local officials it would have been impossible to complete in a relatively short time a programme of Research comprising a wide area of tribal country. It is a pleasant duty to express my appreciation to all those who assisted me and my wife with hospitality and information. While it is not possible to thank each of them individually, those who befriended us on our extensive travels can be assured that they are remembered with genuine gratitude.

Outstanding in its effectiveness was the support of Mr R.N. Haldipur, Lieutenant Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, to whom this book is dedicated in recognition of his longstanding association with the hill people of the territory, where he began his work in the first phases of the modern development policy. I am also deeply grateful

for the assistance of Mr L. Sharma, Deputy Commissioner of Subansiri District, and of Mr O. Kelkar who held the corresponding position in Kameng District. Most of those who helped me in 1978 with my work among the Apa Tanis are mentioned by name in the Preface to *A Himalayan Tribe*, and it was a pleasure to meet them once more in 1980. A special word of thanks is due for the companionship of Mr B.B. Pande, who accompanied us on our travels both in 1978 and 1980 and was most successful in solving all practical problems. Most important for the success of my work, however, was the friendliness and trust of the local tribesmen, many of whom remembered our visit thirty-six years earlier and who welcomed us with the most touching cordiality.

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Contents

Introduction

Northeast India is a part of the world where numerous radically different racial and ethnic groups dovetail and merge, distinct ideologies coexist, often within a narrow space, and a multitude of mutually incomprehensible languages are spoken. The geographical character of the area is equally uneven, for the broad and almost completely level Brahmaputra valley is surrounded horseshoe-like by rugged highlands comprising hills covered by tropical forests as well as snow-crowned mountains whose alpine slopes offer pasture-land for yak and Tibetan sheep. Two of humanity's principal racial groups meet and sometimes intermingle on the soil of Northeast India, peoples of Mongoloid stock occupying most of the highlands and members of the Indian branch of the Caucasoid race dwelling in the villages and towns of the plains of Assam. The ideological pattern is equally kaleidoscopic. Adherents of Mahayana Buddhism occupy some of the peripheral hill-regions, while Hindu populations have long been established in the lowlands. There, they were subjected first to martial incursions and later the gradual infiltration of Muslims who constitute now a substantial part of the inhabitants of Assam. In more recent times Christian missions made many converts, the majority of whom are members of hill-tribes who traditionally practised tribal cults lacking any links with any of the great historic religions of Asia.

In view of so heterogeneous a racial, linguistic and religious pattern, it is not surprising that Northeast India and particularly many of the remote and isolated hill-regions harbour a confusing accumulation of distinct cultural styles some of which are undoubtedly of a very archaic type, pre-dating probably most of the historic civilizations of India. The Mongoloid populations of the highlands are part of the cultural sphere of Southeast Asia rather than of South Asia, and this explains why several anthropological compendia deal with tribes such as Nagas, Khasis and Garos together with the pre-literate tribal societies of mainland Southeast Asia. Cultural parallels extend even further into the island world of Indonesia, and much suggests that in the tribal cultures of Northeast

India there are elements of an extremely ancient stratum which in prehistoric times may have been spread over a large part of South-east Asia. They certainly represent a life-style which in the greater part of Asia had long given way to much more advanced forms of civilization, and in an age of improved communications and the resulting levelling of cultural differences, it is unlikely to survive for much longer.

The Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh, which adjoins the plains of Assam to the north and east and has common frontiers with Bhutan, the Tibetan region of China, and Burma, includes within its boundaries many of the least known and most archaic tribal societies of Northeast India. There are several reasons for their long isolation in remote hill-tracts difficult of access from any direction. For the peoples of the Brahmaputra plain, itself sparsely populated until recent centuries, there were no incentives to struggle through precipitous gorges and pathless tropical forests of the rugged foothills in order to reach the less forbidding country of the middle-ranges, for there too they could neither expect to find fertile cultivable land nor any other resources attractive to lowlanders. Other parts of the Himalayas, which form a natural barrier between the civilizations of India and the peoples and cultures of the winds-wept plateaux of Inner Asia, were traversed by a number of trade-routes along which caravans of pack-animals maintained a trickle of trade between India, Nepal and Tibet, and along these trade-routes Buddhist as well as Hindu ideas and forms of life seeped into many of the intervening highlands and brought about a gradual transformation of the indigenous tribal life-style of the local people. But in Arunachal Pradesh, until 1972 known as the North East Frontier Agency, often abbreviated to NEFA, there have never been caravan routes except in its westernmost part adjoining Bhutan. For everywhere else the rocky gorges of rivers which break through the Great Himalayan range and turn during the monsoon into unfordable torrents made travelling hazardous and prevented the development of trade depending on animal transport. Rainfall many times heavier than that of the Central Himalayas sustains thorny thickets and dripping forests which discourage all except the most intrepid travellers. Difficulties of communication rather than the nature of the neighbouring regions of Tibet and India seem to be responsible for the fact that the tribal populations which inhabit the mountainous tracts extending between Assam and China have re-

mained for centuries untouched by Hindu as well as Buddhist civilization.

Isolation, initially caused by physical factors, persisted as late as the middle of the twentieth century because of political decisions taken by the Government of India in the days of British rule. When the British first extended their dominion into Upper Assam they were interested mainly in the development of a tea-industry, for which the hot and humid climate of the Brahmaputra plain offered excellent conditions. By the middle of the nineteenth century tea-gardens extended in many areas right up to the edge of the foothills, and to ensure the safety of the tea-planters and their labour-forces, largely recruited in other parts of India, it was necessary to resist incursions of hillmen tempted to raid settlements established in areas of the plains which they had considered their traditional hunting grounds. An accommodation with most of those hillmen whose villages lay in the outer ranges was usually reached and their rights to old hunting-grounds were bought off by payment of a kind of annual tribute known as *posa* (see pp. 26-27), but there was no attempt to bring the highlands under any kind of administrative control. A few expeditions of British officers into the interior of the hills had little success, because difficulties of transport and the resistance of local tribesmen prevented any deep penetration, and the costs and hazards of such excursions seemed disproportionate to their usefulness.

While control over the martial tribesmen of the Northwest Frontier seemed essential for the defence of India against potential expansive tendencies of Russia, the Northeast Frontier did not figure in the power-game of the nineteenth century, and the Government of India saw no advantage in adding a vast and thinly populated mountain-tract without obvious resources to its far-stretched dominions, and spending large sums on the administration of its tribal population described by most officials and residents in Assam with such unflattering adjectives as "savage", "barbarian" and "treacherous". Anthropological interest was then minimal and with a few honourable exceptions, among whom E.T. Dalton[1] is the most outstanding example, observers evinced no real understanding of the inhabitants of the hill-country, adjoining the plains of Assam.

As late as the beginning of the twentieth century, the Government

[1]Author of *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta, 1872.

of India seemed content to leave a political no-man's land, unmapped and largely unknown, on its northeastern border, and it was not until 1914 that for reasons unconnected with conditions in the hills between Assam and the Himalayan main range the British government decided to engage in negotiations with Tibet and China aimed at defining the Indo-Tibetan boundary east of Bhutan. These talks resulted in a convention drawn up by the British representative Sir Henry McMahon and initialled by the delegates of Tibet and China which designated the ridge line of the Great Himalayan range as the international frontier, implying thereby that the entire sub-montane tract lying to the south of this national line (which no one had been able to inspect on the ground) belonged to india. This convention however, was never ratified, and though official Indian documents have ever since referred to the proposed border as the McMahon line, no attempt was made to demarcate the frontier. While Tibet took no steps either to implement or to repudiate the convention, China never renounced her earlier claim to the sub-montane tract. Indeed China continued to publish maps according to which a large part of the present Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh was included within the borders of China.

It was not until the years of the Second World War when Japanese armies overran Burma and invaded the Naga Hills, that the Northeast Frontier assumed the role of a strategically important area, and the Government of India embarked on the exploration of the hill-regions between the plains of Assam and Himalayan main range. In pursuance of this belated endeavour to obtain firsthand information on conditions in the area in question and to establish friendly relation with the tribesmen inhabiting the highlands, I was offered an appointment as Special Officer Subansiri[2] and Assistant Political Officer. In early March 1944 I entered the Subansiri region from North Lakhimpur in Assam, and until the end of May 1945 I spent most of the time among tribesmen and undertook extensive exploratory tours some of which took me to areas never before visited by outsiders. For several months I concentrated on the study of the Apa Tanis, a tribe of some 15,000 souls, inhabiting a large valley situated at an altitude of 1,500 metres and surrounded by wooded mountains rising to heights of more than 2,400 metres.

[2]Subansiri is one of the main rivers of Arunachal Pradesh and has given its name to the present Subansiri District.

The Apa Tanis who live in compact villages of many hundreds of houses and have transformed their valley into an intensively cultivated oasis in the wilderness of sparsely inhabited hills, are in many respects the most remarkable of the Subansiri tribes, but as I have described them in detail in my books *The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours* (London, 1962) and *A Himalayan Tribe: From Cattle to Cash* (Delhi, 1980) they will not figure prominently in this book except by providing data for comparisons with neighbouring tribesmen who differ from the settled and disciplined Apa Tanis by their instability, aggressivness and lack of any tribal authority system.

Nishis and Hill Miris are the most immediate neighbours of the Apa Tanis, but the former numbering more than 51,000 are spread over a very large area, and extend under the name Bangni also into the Kameng District to the west of the Subansiri District. It was fortunate that I came to know the Nishis at a time when no outside control had as yet been imposed on the tribes, and the Nishis persisted in their traditional lawless state. Instances of tribal societies studied before they had become subject to the administrative system of a centralized government are getting increasingly rare, and today, 36 years after my first acquaintance with Nishis, it would no longer be possible to observe the way in which they conducted their social life without any interference by outside forces.

While I had an opportunity to renew my acquaintance with Nishis and Hill Miris in 1978 and 1980, and the changes which I observed will be described and analyzed, my main purpose of writing this book is to record Nishi social life as I observed it in 1944 and 1945, and thus present the picture of an archaic, preliterate tribal society in its pristine state, unaffected by any contact with economically more advanced and politically more powerful populations. What I saw then is today largely history, but there are occasions when anthropologists must take on the task of recording data which belong to a past age if they had the chance of living in such an age which many tribesmen of the present generation may not remember. The developments which occurred in the 36 years which separate my first and my last stay among Nishis were of such magnitude that in the more normal course of evolution even two centuries might not have brought about comparable changes. Indeed I am convinced that Nishi life as I saw it in the early 1940s resembled more closely the condition of Nishis in 1740 than that which prevails today among the Nishis of the Subansiri District. Not only was their mate-

rial equipment in 1944 much the same as it must have been in the eighteenth century, but their social organization and the manner in which individuals and families ordered their life and dealt with the strain and stresses inevitable in a society lacking any institutionalized system of authority and administration of justice are unlikely to have been modified to any great extent. The great transformation of the Nishi style of life came only after 1944, and I am aware of the fact that in a minor way I myself was instrumental in bringing about such changes when I engaged dozens of Nishis from the interior highlands as porters, paid them in silver rupees and taught them that with such cash they could purchase goods from a small trading depot in the Apa Tani village which I had set up there in order to encourage the tribesmen to earn wages by working for government. In the same way I unconsciously helped to replace the traditional way of settling disputes by raiding and the taking of hostages, when I persuaded opposing parties to meet each other face to face and negotiate indemnities for injuries suffered. At that time neither I nor other government officers had effective coercive power, but as in the following years a regular administration was set up and the influence of government rapidly increased Nishis learnt that there were other ways to right a wrong than by waging war on their opponents. Today peace prevails among the tribesmen whose fathers and grandfathers had prided themselves on their martial exploits and regarded raiding as an enterprise capable of earning rich profits in the shape of loot and ransoms.

My notes from the years 1944 and 1945 contain sufficient data on the conduct of feuds and raids to draw a picture of the constant insecurity in which Nishis had to lead their lives, and such historic sketches may be of interest to the younger Nishis of the present generation who now enjoy the advantages of peace but were undoubtedly brought up on stories of their forefathers' heroic exploits, while they may have heard less of the sufferings caused to the victims of raids who were often separated from their families and sold into slavery to men of distant villages.

While anthropologists are often inclined to speak of "the good old days", when the people whom they had befriended were able to live within the orbit of their traditional culture, and I often adopted this same attitude when I saw the erosion of old values and a noticeable diminishment of the quality of life in tribal areas which I revisited after several decades. Finding myself once again among Nishis and

Hill Miris, however, I tended to recall rather "the bad old days", and was happy to notice the very obvious improvements in the people's prospects to lead peaceful lives no longer darkened by the fear of being raided, captured and held for months and possibly years as hostages in an enemy's house.

I hope that educated Nishis reading the following accounts of the violence that prevailed among their immediate forebears will consider that phase as part of their tribe's history, and apperciate all the more the present reign of peace which the administration brought about surprisingly rapidly and without the employment of more than minimal force.

While an ethnographic account of the traditional social and cultural life of Nishis and Hill Miris will be the centre piece of this book, there will also be notes on other tribal groups, and a separate chapter dealing with my observations during a recent visit to the regions of high altitude in Kameng District. There I had the opportunity of getting to know Sherdukpens and Monpas, two ethnic groups strongly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and hence fundamentally different from the great majority of tribal populations of Arunachal Pradesh. My previous contact with these communities had been confined to encounters with men visiting the foothills of the Balipara Frontier Tract, and the time I spent in 1980 in the areas of Tawang, Dirang Dzong and Rupa was not long enough to go deeply into the problem of change which had been foremost in my mind in areas I knew well in the 1940s. Yet, so little information on Monpas and Sherdukpens is available in print, that even the limited information I was able to obtain may be of interest to anthropologists, and illuminate the extent of the contrast between tribes which had for centuries lived in isolation and those exposed to the influence of Tibetan Buddhist civilization.

1

Tribal Groups and Their Structure

Arunachal Pradesh covers an area of 81,424 square kilometres and had in 1971, the year of the last census, a population of 467,511. This means that the average density of population is 6 persons per square kilometre. In view of the fact that the average density of population of India on the whole is 178 persons per square kilometre, Arunachal Pradesh represents the least densely populated area of the country. There are five districts in Arunachal Pradesh and their population figures are as follows: Tirap 97,470; Lohit 62,865; Siang 111,936; Subansiri 99,239; and Kameng 86,001, and for administrative purposes each of these is divided into sub-divisions and circles. The boundaries of administrative units and ethnic groups do not necessarily coincide, but most of the individual tribes are contained within the limits of one district.

One of the results of the long isolation of many parts of Arunachal Pradesh and the scantiness of information on the inhabitants is the confusion in the appellation of the various tribal groups. In the early days of British contact with the hill-people the only names applied to inhabitants of the various tracts were those used by the Assamese of the adjoining parts of the Brahmaputra plains. Thus the term Dafla was used to describe the majority of the hillmen of the western part of the present Subansiri District and the adjoining eastern region of Rameng District. Similarly the Assamese used the blanket term Abor for virtually all the hillmen of the Siang District. Both terms have a somewhat derogatory flavour, meaning "wild man" or "barbarian", but nevertheless were widely used in official reports, census returns, and also in the entire ethnographic literature. Thus they were used by E.T. Dalton in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872), G. Dunbar's *Abors and Gallongs* (Calcutta, 1915), and as recently as 1959 in the title of B.K. Shukla's book *The Daflas* (Shillong, 1959). It is not surprising, however, that with the spread of modern education the old derogatory designations became unac-

ceptable to the tribes concerned, and were hence displaced by terms based on tribal languages. Thus the tribesmen previously known as Dafla want to be called Nishi or Nishang, both of these terms being derived from the word *ni* which means "human being". Yet not all those until recently referred to as Dafla are now called Nishi, for those in the Kameng District refer to themselves as Bangni, and this term is used in the census reports. Similarly the term Abor has been replaced by Adi, and the wish of the tribesmen for an identity relating to a group larger than a localized tribe has led to the addition of the term Adi as a prefix to the tribal name. Thus Minyongs who were previously classified as Minyong Abors refer to themselves now as Adi Minyong and Gallongs as Adi Gallong. Yet among the list of Scheduled Tribes both these groups are listed simply as Minyong and Gallong, the prefix Adi being omitted.

There is seldom a neat delimitation between two adjoining groups normally referred to by different names. An example for the blurring of boundaries and occasional overlapping of groups is provided by the case of the Hill Miris. This group inhabits a tract of country including the hills lying west of the Subansiri and south of the Kamla river as well as a strip of hilly country between the Kamla and the Sipi river. Their habitat extends as far as the border between the Subansiri District and the Lakhimpur District of Assam, and in the past they used to migrate in the winter to hunting and fishing grounds lying in lowlands subsequently incorporated into the better districts. The Assamese who encountered them there called them Hill Miris because of an assumed connection with the Miris, a tribal group dwelling in the lowlands next to the foothills.

At the beginning of my work in the Subansiri District in 1944 I took the distinction between Daflas, as the Nishis were then called and the Hill Miris for granted, and initial encounters with some Hill Miris who came to meet me in the Apa Tani valley strengthened my belief that Hill Miris could indeed be distinguished from Daflas. The validity of the name Hill Miri was also confirmed by the members of the Miri Mission of 1912 who extended its use even to the hillmen of the upper Kamla valley. Yet, on my first visit to some Hill Miri villages south of the Kamla I began to doubt the possibility of drawing a neat line separating Miris from Daflas. Coming from the Apa Tanis I first camped in a small village called Bua, which lay close to a line which I had imagined to be the boundary between Tapo (Chemir), an undisputed Miri village, and a group

of "Dafla" villages, i.e. Takhe, Pemir and Linia. Were the people of Bua Miris or Daflas? They could not answer that question, neither term making much sense to them. But I discovered that they intermarried both with the people of Tapo (Chemir) as with those of Rakhe, Pemir and Linia. The fact that Tapo maintained similar marriage relations with the people on the north bank of the Kamla and Linia intermarried with villages well inside Dafla—or as we now would say Nishi—territory shook my confidence in the possibility of distinguishing clearly between Miris and Daflas, and I came to the conclusion that the two groups merge and overlap, and may well be considered as local branches of an undifferentiated population which might be described as "Nishis", a term which by that time I had occasionally encountered. Thirty-six years later I once again came to the Bua area, and found that the local people described themselves as Nishi but referred to the people in villages a few kilometres further to the east as Miris.

B.B. Pandey, the author of a recent book on the Hill Miris,[1] argues that notwithstanding the intermarriage between those calling themselves Miris with tribesmen referred to as Nishis, there is no need to abandon the term Hill Miri or to refute their claim to a separate identity. What speaks in favour of that claim are such distinctive features as hair style, head-dress, and women's dress and ornaments as well as certain special religious and social practices. At the same time Pandey mentions that the Hill Miris have been under pressure both from Gallongs and Nishis, and concludes that the Hill Miris are "a link or bridge-tribe between the Nishi and Gallong mainly along the lower stretch of the Kamla."[2] The uncertainty which reigned for so long regarding the position of individual tribes is reflected in the confusing figures as to the strength of this tribal group. In 1912 it was estimated to be about 2,000, in 1961 the first regular census put the number of Hill Miris as 2,442, which would represent a very likely increase, but in the 1971 Census 8,174 Hill Miris were recorded, and this figure can only have been arrived at by a method of identification different from that employed ten years earlier.

The confusion of nomenclature stems partly from the fact that a name used by members of a tribal group for themselves may not be

[1] *The Hill Miri*, Shillong, 1974, pp. 9-12.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

used by, or even known to, the members of another branch of the same tribe. Thus the term Nishi by which so many of the tribesmen of the Subansiri District refer to themselves is not used by their fellow-tribesmen in Kameng District, who refer to them as Tagin, whereas the Nishis themselves use the term Tagin to describe their northern neighbours in the Sipi valley and the region drained by the upper Subansiri.

Yet, all these tribes, including the Hill Miris, but excluding the Apa Tanis, are embraced within a notional genealogical framework in which mythical features are interwoven with relationships that may have some historical foundation. The main structure of this framework is recognized by all Nishis, but views on detail vary from region to region.

The origin of the entire tribal group is being traced to a mythical figure called Abo Tani. He is believed to be of supernatural nature, while the first human being was At Nia, from whom Takr, the legendary ancestor of the Nishis is descended. Takr had three sons, called Dopum, Dodum and Dol, and these have given their names to three main branches of the Nishi group. Some Nishis believe that descendants of Dopum and Dol are found also among some Adi clans, but this idea is not reflected in any specific feeling of solidarity between Nishis and Adis.

Within each of the three main branches Dopum, Dodum and Dol there are several sub-branches which may be described as phratries and these in turn are divided into clans. None of these units including the main branches are endogamous, nor are phratries exogamous. Individual clans, however, are strictly exogamous, and there are small groups of clans which stand in brother relationship and do not intermarry. Some of the clans, moreover, are subdivided into named lineages. The Bedak clan, located in the upper Kamla valley, for instance, comprises four lineages known as Chugu, Changmo, Changlo and Ruglum. Unlike some Apa Tani sub-clans[3] marriage between members of such lineages is not permitted for the rule of clan-exogamy continues to operate even when fission has taken place, and a clan is divided into several lineages.

Neither the main branches nor the phratries are necessarily localized though some of the phratries and many clans have local associations. Only intensive research extending over the entire

[3]See my *A Himalayan Tribe*, p. 84.

Nishi region could ascertain the exact geographical distribution of the various units within the framework of branches, phratries and clans, and such an undertaking is still outstanding, though since the improvement of communication it would be far less difficult than it was at the time of main fieldwork in 1944-45. The instability of Nishi society, which in the past resulted in extensive movements of whole groups, ran counter to any permanent localization of phratries and clans, and there is evidence of a gradual drift of Nishi clans from the regions of higher altitude into the middle ranges and from there into the foothills. The information which I collected on my various tours in the 1940s and updated as far as possible in 1980, allows us to piece together the following picture:

The Dopum branch, believed to be descended from the eldest of the three founder brothers, is represented only by some small fragments of clans dwelling in such foothill villages as Joyhing and Boguli, a group of clans in the Kolariang area, between the Khru and Kamla rivers, and by several Hill Miri villages in the hills south of the Kamla. Thus it is as widely dispersed as imaginable and lacks any major concentration.

The Dol branch, on the other hand, is of much greater strength. It comprises five major phratries each consisting of a number of populous clans. The Durum-Dui phratry is found mainly in the area of the Palin and Kiyi valleys and includes such important clans as Likha, Gemir and Tassr, while other clans of the same phratry were dispersed some four generations ago by raids of stronger groups and are today represented only by isolated families.

Another phratry of the Dol branch is known as Dukum-Duri and this is divided into two divisions, one concentrated in the hills between Khru and Kamla, and the other in the upper Kamla valley and the Selu valley.

Two other phratries of the Dol branch are known as Tedü-Todum and Temi-Talum. While in my earlier work I could not establish many details about these phratries, during my recent visit to Raga I was able to compile a list of the constituent clans but without finding out much about their fortunes and distribution.

The Dodum branch is much better known, being largely represented on the one hand by such phratries as Pei, located in villages in the lower Kamla valley, and on the other by Bhat-Tebü and Leli-Pökhe. The former consists mainly of clans spread over the Panior and Par valleys, and the latter includes some large clans represent-

ed in the Kiyi valley as well as the Panior and Par regions. Clans of a third phratry known as Kemolir, share with those of the Leli-Pökhe phratry the tradition that their ancestors migrated south from the Palin and Khru valleys.

A remarkable feature of the phratry and clan system of Nishis and Hill Miris is the discrepancy between the very detailed knowledge many men possess about the composition of the various phratries including the names of clans, many of which are virtually extinct, and the non-functional nature of all these groups. Neither the three major divisions Dopum, Dodum, Dol nor phratries or clans are corporate groups with a sense of solidarity, and any mechanism for concerted action. In other Indian tribal societies, as for instance that of the Gonds of Middle India, the clan-membership of a man determines his actions in many situations and particularly in communal ritual activities, and among most Naga tribes—so close to the peoples of Arunachal Pradesh—individuals can depend on the protection of their clan fellows, who are not only under an obligation to revenge their death in the event of their falling victim to an attack, but may also be called upon to accept liability for the debts of a clan member. In the notoriously loosely structured Nishi society neither phratry nor clan members are burdened by any comparable duties and the only concrete function of the clans lies in their character as exogamous groups. Among the Apa Tanis, spatially and also in some respects culturally close to Nishis and Hill Miris, clans play a much more important role in the social and ritual system. Nishis have no institutions comparable to the cult-centres of individual clans or sub-clans, nor do clans ever rally to the defence of common interests as it is done by Apa Tani clans and wards.[4]

The whole structure of named divisions, phratries and clans appears thus as a purely fictional framework, whose persistence in Nishi thinking does not serve to validate social and political relations between the various units, and is totally unconnected with any ritual performances or even with religious beliefs comparable to the clan-cults of other tribal societies. It is therefore truly surprising that the consciousness of this framework of Nishi persists, and ordinary Nishis who have always lacked the help of any written records remember the names of the various clans and their group-

[4]See my *A Himalayan Tribe*, pp. 80-83.

ing in phratries. In all my notes on the phratry and clan-system I find only one reference to a possible political alignment such as might have anchored the groupings in tribal memory. In 1945 one of my Nishi informants mentioned a tradition according to which the ancestor of the Licha, Nielom, Tar and Lisi clans, which make up the Dodum phratry known as Leli or Pökhe, belonged originally to the Dol group but became the "brothers" of the Leli groups when threatened by repeated raids they had to beg the help of men of the Leli phratry.

Similar alliances between different clans are certainly rare, and no other concrete case has come to my notice. Their occurrence is also unlikely because not even men of one and the same clan are wont to unite in the face of aggression. Indeed I came across several instances of members of the same clan being involved in a feud with each other (see pp. 102-5).

Despite the apparent absence of formal alliances between clans, there are traditions supporting the view that groups of clans, usually belonging to the same phratry, were involved in the same migratory movements and subsequently settled in the same territory. Thus it is said that certain clans of the Chili-Dumchi phratry of the Dodum branch expanded southwards from the Khru region and occupied part of the Panior valley. The important Nabum clan of that phratry can trace its migration from the upper Khru valley to the Panior and Par valleys over five to six generations. We do not know whether there was any organization to coordinate such migratory movements but judging from the mobility of individual households in present days, one is inclined to believe that no formal organization existed but that individual families drifted from one area to the other, partly in search of better land to cultivate, and partly under the pressure of more powerful neighbours. It is probable that families linked by descent or marriage moved at the same time and in the same direction, but there is no indication that such migrations were planned by generally recognized leaders, comparable to the colonizations sparked off by sons of Chin and Mizo chiefs of even the highly organized foundations of new villages by prospective headmen among the Raj Gonds.[5]

There is one feature of the social framework embracing Nishis

[5] J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, London, 1912, p. 43. C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, *The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh*, Delhi and London, 1979, pp. 43-46.

and Hill Miris which remains to be more closely investigated. During my tours in 1944-45 I repeatedly heard the term Gungü with reference to people commonly referred to as Hill Miris, and I took this to correspond to the terms Dopum, Dodum and Dol. B.B. Pandey, who came to know the Hill Miris much better than I had done, mentions in his book *The Hill Miri* (Shillong, 1974) that he found no confirmation of this term. When in 1980 I enquired into this matter in Raga I was told the word Gungü existed, but did not refer to a social group but had the meaning "stranger" or "foreigner". It is possible that my Nishi informants had referred to Hill Miris as Gungü, because of the cultural differences between the two tribal groups, and that this misled me to take the term Gungü for the designation of a tribal branch such as Dopum or Dol. In this I was undoubtedly mistaken for in 1980 I discovered that phratries I had subsumed under "Gungü" are considered as belonging to the one or other of the main branches. Thus the Pei phratry is attributed to Dodum, the Peru phratry to Dopum and Telü-Todum and Tai-Talom to Dol. The fact that the clans of the latter phratries are found in the upper Kamal valley among other clans of the Dol group as well as in Nishi villages immediately west of the core of the Hill Miri region confirms my present opinion that it is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between Nishis and Hill Miris, both of whom are comprised within the structural framework outlined in the preceding pages.

The division of society into patrilineal exogamous clans is a feature in no way peculiar to the Nishi-Hill Miri group. We find it among Apa Tanis as well as Adis and most other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh including Noctes and Wanchus in Traip District on the border of Nagaland and Burma. Akas, Mijis and Khovas all have similar descent groups and so do the Sherdukpens. It is only among the Monpas that unilineal clans are not clearly formulated, though there are in some villages clan-like groups which may be described as pseudo-clans as they trace their descent from men whose origin in specific localities has given the whole descent-group a name derived from that locality. The absence of true exogamous unilineal clans among the Monpas is not surprising, as this group belongs basically to the Tibetan culture-sphere where unilineal descent-groups do not form a vital part of the social structure.

Social Stratification

The division of society into classes of different status is a pheno-

menon found in several of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It is most clearly pronounced among the Apa Tanis of Subansiri District and the Wanchus of Tirap District but occurs also in a number of other tribal societies.

Apa Tani society is divided into patricians (*guth*) and commoners (*guchi*), and in the past the latter category included free born commoners as well as slaves, but today the slaves, freed in the 1960s, have the same status as other *guchi*.[6] Similar terms, *gute* and *guchi*, are also used by Nishis, but their meaning is far less clear than among Apa Tanis, and in some areas it has been completely blurred.

In the Kamla region both Nishis and Hill Miris describe certain clans and even whole phratries as *gute* and others as *guchi*. There is the tradition that the *guchi* people were the first settlers in the country, and the *gute* were late comers. Another interpretation is that when the two ancestors of the Nishis arrived, the younger of the two brothers went ahead to spy out the land, and the elder brother followed later. The *guchi* clans are believed to be the descendants of the younger brother, who arrived first, and the *gute* clans the off-spring of the elder brother. There is a vague idea that the *gute* clans are of higher social status than the *guchi* clans, and it is said that in the beginning the two groups of clans did not intermarry. Today no such restriction is in force, and people of *gute* class enjoy no privileges.

In the regions of the Khru valley and upper Kamla valley, the division into *gute* and *guchi*, is most clearly pronounced and there the entire clans of Sartam, Rugi, Mei and Tali are of *guchi* status while the clans Niktor, Tungar and Haki are *gute*. Similarly within the Tai-Tamin phratry the important clans of Kabak and Balu are *gute* whereas the Lomra clan is *guchi*. The classification of Niktor as *gute* cannot be easily reconciled with the information, obtained in 1980, that the Niktor people were "servants" of the Kabak people and immigrated from the north along the Selu river, because in their home-villages good soil for cultivation was scarce. Yet, nowadays the Niktor and Kabak clans intermarry, and so any idea of an inferior status of *guchi* is probably obsolete.

In the areas of Panior and Par, which are close to the foothills, the distinction between *gute* and *guchi* seems to have been comple-

[6]For a detailed description of the Apa Tani class-system see *A Himalayan Tribe*, pp. 87-102.

tely obscured, possibly because of the involvement of a large part of the population in relatively recent population movements. In this area the *guchi* status is no longer attributed to whole clans, but the term is used for the descendants of slaves.

Even thirty years ago slavery was wide-spread among Nishis and many men, women and children taken captive in raids ended up as slaves if their kinsmen did not have the means to pay the ransoms demanded by their captors. But there was a difference between the slaves of Nishis and those of Apa Tanis. While an Apa Tani slave, even if freed by his master, could never rise above the status of a *guchi*, and usually remained in economic dependence, a Nishi slave could not only attain his freedom but also acquire property and rise to the status of a respected free man.

Whatever the original connotation of *gute* and *guchi* may have been among Nishis, today the distinction has lost all relevance, and Nishi society is becoming more and more egalitarian.

When in Chapter 11 we discuss Sherdukpens and Monpas, we shall see that among these groups status-distinctions are very pronounced. The upper and lower class of Sherdukpens, respectively known as *thong* and *tsaw* are very well defined and there is no mobility across class-lines just as there is none among Apa Tanis. Monpa society too is stratified, but there the number of status-groups is much larger.

Traces of a division of society along class-lines is also found among the Adis, but our knowledge of the phenomenon is still inadequate, and it is not mentioned by either of the two anthropologists who have worked on Adi tribes in recent years, namely Sachin Roy, the author of *Aspects of Padam-Minyong Culture* (Shillong, 1960), and K. Kumar, author of *The Pailibos* (Shillong, 1979). My own familiarity with any group of Adis is very limited, but when in 1937 I spent a short time among the Minyongs of Siang District, then known as Sadiya Frontier Tract, I came across some traditions relating to two social classes of different status.

What is not in doubt is the division of the Minyongs into two moieties, known as Kumuing and Kuri, each of which is sub-divided into a number of exogamous clans, for this is mentioned by all authorities on the Minyongs, and Sachin Roy gives on page 214 of his book a list of clans which coincides exactly with that

contained in a tour diary by J.H.F. Williams.[7] The latter mentions that in Riga, the largest Minyong village, political factions coincided with these two divisions and that in their backing of the rival parties of the neighbouring Karko tribe the Minyongs were split according to their moieties, a statement indicating a notable contrast to the groupings of Nishis, which are not a basis for political alignments.

While the existence of the two moieties among the Minyongs is explained by their alleged descent from two mythical tribal ancestors—comparable no doubt to the three Nishi ancestors Dopum, Dodum, Dol, there is yet another dual division among the Minyongs which appears somewhat obscure. According to R.C.R. Cumming,[8] there are within the Minyong tribe two social classes known as *mishing* and *mipak*. The origin and nature of these classes are not at all clear and neither my own field notes nor the accounts of other observers provide any real clue. A myth which I recorded in the village of Rotung and which describes the origin of the two divisions runs as follows:

When the Minyongs first came out of the earth they strangled a great mithan called Khosung. After they had cut up the mithan they sat down in a circle, each clan in its own place, and shared out the meat. All clans received shares except the clans of Dupak, Gao and Messar, for whom no meat was left. Therefore these clans were called *mipak*. In the old times *mishing* and *mipak* did not intermarry, for if a *mishing* consorted with a *mipak* he (or she) as well as any children from the union became *mipak*.

All the three clans mentioned in the story occur also in Williams' list, but while Messar and Gao belong to the Kuri group, Dupak is a Kumuing clan, and this suggests that the two classes *mishing* and *mipak* cut across the division into Kumuing and Kuri.

According to another story the *mipak* people are the descendants of a man whose wife was kidnapped by a spirit (*epom*) and forced to live with him. Finally the husband succeeded in killing the spirit and regaining his wife. The couple's children were the first *mipak*, and their lower status can perhaps be explained by the fact that their mother, though ultimately restored to her husband, had for two years lived in an adulterous union with a spirit.

[7]Tour diaries of the Assistant Political Officer, Pasighat, November 1940-April 1944. Shillong 1944, p. 12

[8]Census of India 1921, Assam Part I, Appendix B, p. XIII.

T.K. Lorrain's *Dictionary of the Abor-Miri Language* (Shillong, 1910), does not throw much light on the terms *mishing* and *mipak*. According to this dictionary the noun *mipak* means "Assamese; foreigner; alien; outcast, vagabond", and the verb *mipak* means "to be outcasted (for marrying one of another tribe or one below in social scale, etc.)". Both these meanings imply a degree of inferiority, and Cumming too translates *mipak* as "outcaste". He further states that marriages between *mishing* and *mipak*, though not prohibited, were comparatively rare, because sexual intercourse with a *mipak* caused a *mishing* to lose his status and to become a *mipak*. Yet even occasional intermarrige between the two classes must obviously lead to an increase in the proportion of *mipak*, because all off-spring of such mixed marriages are considered *mipak*. In Rotung I was told that two generations ago the villagers had all been *mishing* while at the time of my visit most were *mipak*.

The parallel between the Minyongs' division into *mishing* and *mipak* and that of the Apa Tanis' into *guth* and *guchi* is close enough to suggest that in the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh there is an underlying tendency towards stratification. This might be clearly expressed in distinctions of rights and obligations appropriate to two classes as among Apa Tanis and Sherdukpens or it may be blurred and without discernible function as among Nishis, even though the linguistic terms for the contrasitng classes persist.

The most striking and also best known example of a hierarchically organized tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh is provided by the Wanchus of Tirap District who are undoubtedly a branch of the Konyaks of Nagaland. Among the Wanchus there is a class of hereditary chiefs known as Wangham and a class of commoners called Wangpen. In between these two classes rank those who are the issue of unions between men of chiefly class and women of lower status.

The Wangham class consists exclusively of those members of a ruling chief's lineage who are the issue of marriages between Wangham men and women from other villages of similar status. As marriage within the chiefly lineage of the same village is inadmissible, all alliances in which both spouses are of Wangham rank have to be contracted between chiefly houses of different domains. Men of the highest chiefly rank can marry secondary wives of commoner class, and the issue from such chief-commoner unions constituted the Wangsa or small chiefly class. Girls of Wangham

status were never married to commoners, but if no suitable husband of equal status could be found, they were given in marriage to men of Wangsa, i.e. small chiefly class.

Men of Wangsa rank could either marry wives of similar status from other villages or conclude unions with commoner girls. The children from both types of marriage were of Wangsa status, for even the repeated admixture of commoner blood did not result in a further lowering of the status of descendants of a great chief.

The most striking difference between the chiefly classes, whether Wangham or Wangsa, and the commoners lies in the appearance of their women. Those of the former wear their hair long, whereas all commoner women, even those married to a paramount chief have their heads shaved or closely cropped.

People of different class did not eat from the same platter, but food cooked by commoners could be eaten even by chiefs of the highest rank.

Despite the fact that the great chiefs of the Wanchus had much more power and prestige than even the richest Apa Tani patrician, there is yet a certain conceptual similarity between the class-system of the Apa Tanis and the rank order of the Wanchus. And as among the Apa Tanis, who frown on intermarriage between ***guth*** and ***guchi***, girls of the upper class may have premarital love-affairs with ***guchi*** boys, the Wanchus too have a custom which seems to make nonsense of the great chiefs' claim to the purity of their line. A chief's bride of equal status remained for some time in her parental village paying only occasional visits to her husband. As long as she lived in her father's house she was free to associate with young men even of commoner status, and if she became pregnant the possibility that the child's father was a commoner was ignored and the child was accorded chiefly rank.

Both among Apa Tanis and the Wanchu it is the social, and not the physiological paternity which counts and determines a child's status.

Class-distinction affect marriage-rules also among Sherdukpens and Monpas. Among the former Thong and Tsao traditionally did not intermarry, though in recent years the rule has been relaxed and some unions across class-barriers have taken place. Monpa society is structured rather differently, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11, for Monpas are divided into a number of status groups, and there is no sign of a simple division into an

upper and a lower class, as among Apa Tanis, Sherdukpens, and possibly Minyongs.

Linguistic and Racial Differentiations

All the tribal populations of Arunachal Pradesh speak Tibeto-Burman languages, but while some dialects are mutually understandable others have diverged so far that meaningful communication between members of different groups, not necessarily far removed from each other, is hardly possible. Insofar as the Nishis are concerned it would appear at first sight that the major tribal divisions coincide with linguistic groupings. Nishis of the foothills adjoining the Lakhimpur District of Assam refer to their own dialect as Leli language, to the dialect of the Likha cluster of settlements as Durum language, and to the dialects spoken on the upper Par river and upper Panior river as Aya or Nabum. "Aya" means literally only "of the high regions" whereas Nabum is the name of a prominent clan whose north-south migration during the past six or seven generations can still be traced, though not with a high degree of accuracy.

However, such associations do not bear close scrutiny. While originally the main tribal divisions may have been localized each with its distinct mode of speech, with the dispersal and merging of populations, the connections between tribal groups and localities became obscured, and today a man's language is indicative of the region in which he grew up, rather than of his phratry or tribal branch. Thus many members of the Nabum clan in the Par valley speak "Leli", the people of Licha, though of Leli phratry according to the genealogical framework, speak a Durum dialect, and the Nurum-Benga people of the upper Khru valley, though part of the Dodum group, speak a dialect associated with the Dol clans of that region.

How far are these dialects mutually understandable? A man of the foothills has no difficulty in conversing with people of say Mengo, or the Palin or lower Khru valley. But when he meets people of the Upper Kamla valley understanding becomes difficult. He may not be as completely at a loss as, for instance, an Angami Naga in a Konyak village, but there is no more a question of unhampered conversation. In view of the isolation of groups in times of difficult communications and absence of security, it is nevertheless the overall linguistic uniformity rather than dialectical

differences which are surprising. In Nagaland some language groups are confined to a dozen villages, and on a three days' walk one may pass through the zones of three languages not mutually understandable. In the Nishi hills such a situation is unthinkable; language groups extend over large areas and merge very gradually one into the other.

Nishi tradition holds that all branches of the tribe have sprung from the same ancestor. The far-reaching linguistic uniformity and the similarity of basic customs in widely separated areas would seem to support this theory of a common origin, but the racial make-up of the Nishis speaks more for a heterogeneous character of the tribe. Some of the hill-tribes of Northeast India evince certainly a greater racial uniformity, and though the majority of Nishis bear some of the features commonly associated with the so-called Palaeo-Mongoloids, there are among them at least two outstanding and greatly divergent types. The more frequent one is characterized by a round, rather flat face with a broad snub-nose, prominent cheek-bones, eyes lying in shallow sockets, and a small, weak chin. Comparatively small stocky stature and a sallow yellow-brownish skin-colour seem to go often with this type. There is a striking difference between the Nishis with these traits which represent a fair picture of the Palaeo-Mongoloid type of the textbooks, and the Nishis characterized by an oblong face, a prominent, often hooked nose, with a narrow bridge, deep-set eyes, a well pronounced chin, ruddy complexion, comparatively high stature and athletic build.

Obviously the Nishi population of today does not consist only of individuals conforming to either of these two types which represent two extreme ends of a spectrum of physical features, extremes which cannot have sprung from a single origin, and suggest therefore the presence of at least two distinct elements in the racial make-up of this tribe.

Until physical anthropologists have studied in detail both the Nishis and their immediate neighbours it would be unjustifiable to draw from visual observations of the various physical types any far-reaching conclusion, but there seems to be nevertheless a prima facie case for the hypothesis that the Nishis as we find them today are the product of the blending of two or more distinct populations, one of which may perhaps be responsible for the tradition of an immigration from northern regions close to either side of

the Himalayan main range.

Migrations and Transhumance

The instability of Nishi settlements and the practice of shifting cultivation creates conditions in which individual households and whole communities can easily move from one area to another, and apart from traditions—perhaps partly legendary—of large-scale migrations in the distant past, many Nishis recall the movements of their own forefathers from one named settlement to the other.

As this type of migration belongs probably to a phase in the Nishis' history which has now come to an end, and present population movements are motivated in quite a different way, I propose to record here a few concrete instances of migrations which I recorded in 1945. While staying in the upper Panior valley, I discovered that most of the families of the village of Mengo had settled in the area only a few generations ago, and could describe the circumstances of their forebears' immigration.

Mengo lies in a broad valley separated by a range of high hills from several populated valleys whose rivers drain into the Khru. At the time of my enquiries these valleys were still unexplored, but I had collected some second-hand information on their inhabitants who belonged mainly to the Dol group. Of the four settlements of Mengo two were inhabited by people of Nabum clan, one by people of Gollo clan, and one by families of Tara clan. Some Gollo families were the first to settle at Mengo. They came from the north across the Yelibo range from Debra, a village in the Lebla area in one of the valleys drained by the Panyi, a tributary of the Khru. They came south because in Lebla the population had grown so much that there was not sufficient land for jhum-cultivation left. One of the Gollo men I spoke with told me that his was the fourth generation in Mengo, and that before their arrival Mengo had been uninhabited. But the families of the settlers increased and some of them founded the nearby village of Tapo, which contained then seven Gollo households.

People of Nabum clan came soon afterwards and were in 1945 also the fourth generation in Mengo. It is remembered that there was in Lebla a man called Nabum Takum. He had two sons Sakha and Tado, both of whom lived and died in Lebla. Sakha's sons Tasser and Tamar migrated to Mengo and so did Tado's three sons Kankha, Tai and Nanu. The latter had three sons,

Tarum, Topum and Tayam, all of whom lived in Mengo. Tarum's son Tai built his house at Rumi, a site close to Mengo, and his two grandsons Tajom and Talom, both alive in 1945, settled at Dorde, a place some 15 km. east of Mengo, where their father's sister was married to Serbe of Likha clan. Dorde had been a deserted site before Likha Serbe settled there. The descendants of Tayam, Nanu's youngest son, had moved to the Par valley which lies in the outer ranges south of Mengo. Other men of Nabum clan, descended from those who had moved from the Panyi valley to the Mengo area also moved towards the foothills and settled in various places in the Perü and Par valleys.

Some men of other phratries and clans, such as the Tana clan of the Leli phratry, now settled in the Par valley have the tradition that their forefathers came from the northeast and after crossing Kamla and Khru settled at Lihi, a place midway between Mengo and Likha. They mention a large number of localities, such as Yazali, Yoijat, and Embinkota where their ancestors are supposed to have stayed before they finally settled at Posa in the Par valley.

The move from the Khru area to Mengo and other villages in the Panior valley seems to have continued, and in 1945 I met in Mengo a man of Tara clan who only a year previously had left his home-village Gaga in the Panyi valley, because of a shortage of food caused by a plague of rats who had ravaged the crops. He came to Mengo where two sisters of his were married, and could help their brother to establish himself. Some five years earlier a family of Tedr clan had left therr home-village Litlot in the Panyi valley and settled at Mengo.

Population movements similar to those which brought such clans as Gollo and Nabum from the Panyi valley to the Mengo area, and from there to the Par valley, occurred also in the region of the Kamla river, but we lack detailed information on those migrations. It appears fairly certain, however, that people of the Tai-Tamin phratry and particularly the powerful Kabak clan and its subsections moved from the north possibly via the the Selu valley into the upper Kamla vally, and there split an earlier population akin to the Hill Miris in two, so that now the Guchi, Sojam and Rei clans of the upper Kamla valley are separated from related clans of the Chimr phratry of the lower Kamla valley. There is the tradition that the forefather of all Kabak people was Dirge-Dirpe, son of Talo, who came from the upper Subansiri valley, now regarded as the

home of Tagins rather than Nishis. His direct descendants in several generations are remembered, among them Ragumo, Ragrum and Rapchak. The latter had four sons: Sagdu, Changmo, Chaglo and Chagrak, and those have given their names to Kabak lineages still living in villages in the Kamla valley such as Mingo, Luba, Hebe, Bidan, and Dokum. Some of the descendants of Ragchak went to live at Hova, which was originally inhabited by clans akin to the Hill Miris south of the Kamla, but now no one lives at Hova, and the Kabak people who were living there moved to the regrouped village of Dokum, on the road near Raga.

The Kabak people themselves claim—not necessarily truthfully—that they did not fight the Pei people of the lower Kamla valley, but only Dui people of the Daporijo region. Whatever the truth of this claim may be, the Kabak clan was greatly feared because of its aggressive character and its numerical strength, and there can be no doubt that either by raiding or infiltration and intermarriage Kabak people took over several of the villages in the hills flanking the left bank of the Kamla river. Even in 1945 the Hill Miris of such Chimr villages as Tajo, Bua and La, south of the Kamla, were certainly still sufficiently afraid of their northern neighbours to increase their security by cutting down the cane suspension bridge which had spanned the Kamla river. Guch Tamar of Tapo (also known as Chemir) explained to me the reason for this action by pointing out that within the span of the last three or four generations the whole area had been subjected to much savage raiding and there had been a complete transformation of the political set-up. Previously inhabited by a group of clans which extended both north and south of the Kamla, the area north of that river was now dominated by the powerful Kabak clans. Having come from the upper reaches of the river some three generations ago these clans had first established themselves in Mingö, a village some four days' march northeast to Tapo (Chemir), and had rapidly extended their hold over the whole of the neighbourhood so that now they occupied most of the villages in the country lying south of the Sipi and north of the Kamla.

While most of the population movements described so far, are those of individual families or groups leaving their homes, either under the pressure of attacks or because of a shortage of cultivable land, there are other migrations which involve only a temporary change of habitat, and do not indicate a dissatisfaction with the migrants' permanent home-villages. The most important of such

movements were the annual migrations of Hill Miris of the Kamla valley and the hill-tracts south of the Kamla river to the plains region adjoining the foothills. They moved there in the cold weather leaving only a few very old people in their villages, and established themselves in camps situated year after year in the same locality. Hunting and fishing in the rivers and streams of the plains were during that time their main occupation and each clan and village community had their recognized hunting and fishing grounds, land which was considered their property as much as the communal village land used for slash-and-burn cultivation in the hills. The Miris recall that in their forefathers' days when hunting and fishing in the plains were still good, not only the villagers south of the Kamla, but also those of the north bank went regularly to the plains. Later Assamese colonists settled in the Miris' hunting and fishing grounds, and the Miris demanded a certain rent for their land, and at first this was paid in kind the cultivators giving the Miris a share in the crops grown. That payment was more in the nature of rent than of tribute, for the Miris with their age-old rights in the forest areas along the foothills, were in relation to the Assamese peasantry in a position similar to that of an absentee landlord insofar as they visited their hunting grounds annually and entertained quite friendly relations with the new-comers settled there but using at first only a fraction of the land for cultivation. Later when there was friction between the hillmen and the new settlers over the paying of these rents, the government, anxious to prevent any conflict on the borders of the administered territory, took over the obligation in the form of making annual payments to the Hill Miris and a few Nishis, and these payments were described as *posa*. In 1945 the memory was still strong among the Hill Miris that the *posa* was rent for land along the foothills which belonged to the Miris by ancient right and every year the hillmen spent some weeks in the plains villages built on their hunting grounds.

The payment of *posa* was not confined to the Hill Miris but some Nishis of foothill villages were also in receipt of *posa*, and in the Kameng District the Sherdukpens who had also claims on land cultivated by Assamese were entitled to *posa* payments. They still annually visit the plains to trade with Assamese, and also spend some time at Doimara, a new settlement within the borders of Arunachal Pradesh.

After the establishment of the Indian administration over the

whole of Arunachal Pradesh, *posa* payments were phased out, and unless the amounts due to the individual *posa*-holders had been adjusted to the decline in the value of money through inflation, the payments received would in any case have become negligible.

In 1945 I had still paid the *posa* to a gathering of Hill Miri notables, and even then there were complaints that the rupee coins paid out did not buy as much in the bazaars of the plains as the same rupee-amount had bought before the war. On that occasion I realized that the system of *posa*-payments had very real advantages for government. It had created a set of influential people who realized that they had to cooperate with government in such matters as the supply of porters. The officers of government had generally considered *posa* as a form of tribute with which in the early days of British rule the hillmen had been bought off from raiding the plains, but I am convinced that in this they were mistaken and *posa* was really a kind of rent for land belonging to the Miris and other hillmen by right.

Today the seasonal migrations to the plains have largely ceased, for the pressure of population growth in the plains of Assam has encroached on the Hill Miris' former hunting grounds and the economic changes in the hills have largely removed the necessity for the annual moves to the plains.

There remains, however, the historical problem, why for generations there has been a steady movement of tribal populations from the north and northwest to the south and southeast. Even the most settled of the Subansiri tribes, namely the Apa Tanis, have the tradition that their forefathers came from the north, along routes still remembered and retold in legends and songs,[9] and we have seen that among Nishis there have been numerous much more recent movements from the regions of the upper Khru and upper Kamla to the middle ranges and the foothills. The causes of these movements are obscure and must remain so until more anthropological research in the regions closer to the northern border of Arunachal Pradesh has been done, though even such research may not produce a definite solution of the problem, which may partly have to be sought on the far side of the Great Himalayan range, which means among the Tibetan populations who used to have contacts with the northernmost tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There may have been

[9]See *A Himalayan Tribe*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 12, 13, 160.

pressure by other populations, perhaps by Tibetans or Tibetanized tribes, on the Nishis of the higher regions, or exhaustion of the cultivable land, as mentioned by some of the settlers in Mengo, or an increase in population may have forced weaker groups to seek new land in the lower valleys where forest and unexhausted land suitable for slash-and-burn cultivations was more plentiful. If Nishi tradition is to be believed the Par region and lower Panior valley were uninhabited but for some scattered Sulungs until the arrival of the people of the Bhat-Tebü phratry, who were the first to carve fields from the virgin forest. There is certainly a great difference between the densely wooded outer ranges and the hills denuded by successive immigrants in the Talo-Jorum area on the lower Kiyi valley. In the 1940s the movement towards the outer ranges had not yet come to an end, but the pacification of the country and suppression of raids have now created a new situation of stability and such movements of population as still take place are of an entirely new kind.

In those areas which have recently been opened up by motorable roads and bus routes Nishis and Hill Miris evince now a tendency to move their houses from hill-tops and high spots into the vicinity of the roads where they can benefit from many of the facilities provided by government such as schools for their children, medical care, and wherever possible also piped water and even electricity. Government too has encouraged the re-grouping of villags in order to bring such welfare measures to as many households as possible. In the Raga Circle I visited several such regrouped villages, and had the impression that the inhabitants had adjusted themselves well to life in communities rather larger than traditional Hill Miri settlements. In Dukum, which lies on the road only a few kilometres east of Raga, there were altogether 31 households. Eight of these were of Maga clan and had all come at the same time from Lige, 3½ km east of Dukum. They retained their land at Lige and still went to cultivate there. Similarly seven families of Raga clan had only moved their houses but continued to till their land at Raga. Thirteen families were of the Hova branch of the Kabak clan, and had come in a body from Hova, a site higher in the hills, which has now become deserted. Minor clans represented in the re-grouped village are Mugu and Nidu.

A village known as Maga situated 40 km east of Raga, had in the early 1970s 13 houses of which 9 belonged to men of Maga clan.

In the process of re-grouping most of them moved to the newly established village of Kemliko not far from Dukum. The dissolution of this community is remarkable because Maga was known as a strong village which nobody dared to raid though Maga men raided other settlements.

While the traditional mobility of Nishis and Hill Miris undoubtedly facilitated the process of re-grouping it will be interesting to see whether this mobility will be detrimental to the stability of the newly re-grouped villages by making it easy for the inhabitants to settle elsewhere if the spirit moves them.

The abandonment of hill-settlements occurred in some areas even without the incentive of re-grouping under government sponsorship. Thus many of the Nishis on the hills flanking the lower course of the Panior river left their villages which they and their forefathers had built on the crest of ranges at altitudes of 1,500 to 3,000 feet, and moved down into the valley, where they now live in dispersed settlements close to the motor-road linking the plains with the Apa Tani valley. In making this move they forwent the better and healthier climate of the hills, but gained the advantage of easy communications, proximity to bazaars and schools, improved chances of obtaining casual employment in such public works as the building and repairing of the motor-road.

In the Par valley a similar movement to lower sites has taken place, and some Nishi communities have even settled in the plains outside the borders of Arunachal Pradesh.

2

Settlements and Houses

The dwellings in which the hill-people of Arunachal Pradesh choose to live vary according to the nature of the environment and the available building material no less than according to the social units individual houses are meant to accommodate. The range of house-styles extends from the flimsy bamboo huts of Sulungs to the enormous houses of Wanchu chiefs, the wooden framework of which is meant to last for generations even if the palm-thatched roofs have to be periodically replaced. Similarly there is a world of difference between the narrow "one family" houses of the Apa Tanis, squeezed together in poky lanes like sardines in a tin, and the impressive Nishi long-houses with their spacious undivided halls—houses many of which occupy the entire crown of a hill-top while series of granaries filled with stores needed to feed scores of mouths, cling to the hill-sides below such a residence of an important family-head.

The harsh climate of the high Himalayan valleys necessitates building in stone, but the areas where houses are thus constructed are small, and wood and bamboo are the normal building materials among the great majority of tribal populations. Except for the Wanchus, who build on solid ground, all those using only wood and bamboo erect their dwellings on piles, driving wooden stakes or stout bamboos into the earth, and fastening to these a bamboo framework which serves as the floor of the dwelling. Such pile dwellings are typical for many parts of Southeast Asia, from Burma as far as most of the Indonesian islands, but west of Arunachal Pradesh, they occur to my knowledge only in one strictly limited area, namely in some of the Rai villages of the Arun valley in Eastern Nepal.

The erection of dwellings on poles or stakes has two great advantages. In areas of high rain-fall it serves to keep the interior of the houses dry even if the ground below is flooded. The other

advantage is that pile-dwellings can be put up on the steepest slopes, while on sloping ground the building of a solid house necessitates the digging out of a level piece of ground. This advantage will be appreciated by anyone who tried and failed to find in a Nishi or Miri village some level space big enough to pitch a small tent. Monpas too live in hilly country, but as they have to build in stone to survive the cold of the winter they have no other choice, than to remove the earth on part of a hill-slope before they can begin to build one of their houses.

Several of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh live in large compact villages. The largest of these are the Apa Tani settlements with well over 500 houses which I described in detail in *A Himalayan Tribe* (pp. 14-19). Some of the Adi tribes too build large compact villages, and the principal Wanchu villages usually occupying the crest of a range, comprise scores of houses and constitute closely structured communities.

The character of typical Nishi settlements is very different. In the past their size ranged from three or four houses in small settlements to about 30 houses in the larger villages. The individual houses were usually widely dispersed, each long-house standing on a separate site, preferably the highest point of a hillock or spur, surrounded by granaries and pig styes.

Most of the houses are joint-family dwellings with up to twelve hearths and room for as many nuclear families. It is not unusual for 40 or 50 men, women and children to live in such a house, and to form a virtually autonomous social unit. The length of such a house can be as much as 50 metres and the width between 8 and 10 metres. It stands on a structure of wooden poles, many of them slanting so as to give maximum support to the framework of cross-beams which carries a floor of split bamboos. Access is gained through two covered verandahs, each on one end.

The great hall of the interior is usually undivided, and the fire-places on which all the cooking is done are arranged in a long line occupying the centre of the hall. Each of these hearths consists of a rectangular flat box filled with earth and the large stones on which the cooking pots rest stand on this earthen foundation. A large plaited tray hangs above each hearth, high enough above the fire to be not in danger of being burnt, and these trays are used for drying grain and protecting other provisions from humidity.

The hearth nearest to the entrance door is ususally that of the

head of the family and owner of the house. His senior wife shares this hearth, and if there are several wives, each of the junior ones has a hearth of her own, where she cooks for herself and her children, and occasionally also for her husband. Younger brothers of the house-owner and their wives are allocated separate hearths, and so are married sons and their families.

There are no store-rooms, and such personal possessions as clothes are kept in covered baskets which are suspended from the rafters or hung on the walls. All grain is kept in free-standing granaries, and it is usual for each wife and each dependent family to have a separate granary.

Nishis do not possess many material objects not in daily use. The men's weapons, such as *dao*, swords and spears are stuck into the wattle walls or hung up on rafters, and the few agricultural implements, hoes and digging drills kept in a corner. The various types of baskets, of which the Nishis manufacture a good many, also suspended from rafters or kept on the tray hanging above the fire-place.

Ornaments and valuable heirlooms, such as Tibetan bells and bronze-plates, are usually not stored in the houses, where they may fall into the hands of raiders, but are kept hidden and often buried in the forest. Thus a Nishi home does not contain much of value, and even should it burn either accidentally or set on fire by raiders, the loss is not irreparable, for in areas where there is still a reasonable amount of timber, a house can be rebuilt within one or two months, because house-construction is one of the few activities in which villagers cooperate on the basis of reciprocal help, the owner of the house rewarding the helpers with beer and food. In 1978 I saw in the village of Talo a large house which had recently been rebuilt. The owner told me that the collection of building materials had taken several weeks, but that all the men of the village helped in the actual construction and completed the work in six days. The cost to the owner was Rs 4,000, for he had to feed the workes lavishly with meat, rice and beer, and had also to pay some wages for the collection of wood and bamboos.

My visit to Talo, which is one of the Nishi villages within walking distance from the Apa Tani valley, and was hence familiar to me in 1944-45, gave me an insight into recent developments among Nishis. The appearance of the individual houses, both externally and in their interior arrangements, had hardly changed

in the three decades since my earlier stay in the village. Houses were still standing at a considerable distance from each other, and walking from one to the other involved a great deal of climbing steeply up hill-slopes and descending into the deep ravines which separated some of the houses from each other. But the number of houses had dramatically increased. In 1945 I had counted just under 40 houses, including some small houses of poor men, while in 1978 there were 176 houses, containing altogether 1,077 hearths, and a population of 2,076. The local Nishis, some of whom recalled my first visit in great detail and knew that I was familiar with past conditions stated emphatically that few people from other places had moved to Talo, and the growth of the population was due to the increase in the families of the old residents. Yet, there has probably been a considerable influx of women born in other places, for the men of Talo were rich and could marry many girls from neighbouring villages paying high bride prices. Even in 1945 there were men with as many as nine wives, and some of these women were still alive in 1978, and their sons had followed in their father's footsteps and married several girls.

Because of the pressure on space and cultivable land some Talo men had established colonies at a distance of five or six kilometres, and the largest of these consisted already of 26 houses.

There were also changes in the utilization of the environment. Imitating their Apa Tani neighbours, many of the Talo men had planted bamboo groves such as had not existed in 1945, and they had also greatly increased the acreage used for rice-cultivation, not only on the level land below the village, but also in side valleys and ravines wherever a trickle of water created the possibility for irrigation.

In 1980 I returned to the area and visited the neighbouring villages of Jorum and Mai. In Jorum too there had been a substantial increase in the population, and cultivable land had become scarce. I was told that previously men "quarrelled about women and mithan, and now they quarrel about land." Several groups of households had moved to the periphery of Jorum land, established there new settlements and turned some of the communal *jhum*-land into irrigated terraces. The men, who had transformed the land in this way by their own efforts, could claim these rice-terraces as their individual property, but if pressure on land increases, disputes over land will become inevitable, particularly

as the land has not yet been surveyed and in the absence of land-records individual rights cannot be easily proved.

Hill Miri settlements were always somewhat different from those in the heartland of the Nishis. For Hill Miri houses seldom stood isolated, and particularly in such villages as Tapo (Chemir) the houses formed a compact cluster. The slope to which they clung dropped at an angle of about 30 degrees, and there was no level patch of ground in the whole village. The houses built in a style similar to Nishi houses were mostly smaller, and even those of wealthy men did not have more than three or at the most four hearths, and the number of inmates was thus much less than in Nishi houses. While for reasons of security houses standing alone tend to be large in order to accommodate a joint family numerous enough to be able to beat off raiders, in a compact village inhabited by families linked by close kin-ties and hence likely to unite when attacked by outsiders houses need not be so large. Today such considerations are no longer relevant but tradition is strong among both Hill Miris and Nishis, and while the former continue to live in compact settlements of relatively small houses most Nishis, though no longer threatened by raiders continue to build very long houses and men regard the number of people they can gather together in one enormous house as a source of prestige.

It is obvious that in the huge unpartitioned halls of a Nishi house, the individual inmates have next to no privacy, and it is only the darkness enveloping all activities in such a house as soon as people move away from the blaze of a fire that makes it possible to remain ever unobserved by other members of the household. Similarly the frequent chatter and screaming of children in so large a house, is enervating for those no longer used to living continuously in the midst of a large and often noisy crowd. This is felt particularly by young educated men and women who spend long years at colleges or universities and get used to a reasonable measure of privacy.

Hence Nishi school teachers greatly prefer to stay in government quarters however simple even in places where they could live in their parental long-house. For in this they would have very little privacy and no space where they could do any undisturbed reading or writing.

In this respect Monpa and even Sherdukpen houses offer much

better facilities for the educated, because long contact with literacy brought to Arunachal Pradesh by Buddhist lamas has favoured an arrangement of the space inside the house which allows some of the inmates to read books, usually of a religious nature, and to perform rituals without being disturbed by those engaged in their normal domestic duties.

In Apa Tani villages the same purpose is served by small huts which some of the college students have erected next door to their parents' house, and in which they enjoy the privacy unobtainable in a normal Apa Tani dwelling where all the family's activities are concentrated in one large, dark and smoky room.

Neither Nishis nor Hill Miris and Apa Tanis have community houses comparable to the Nagas' men's houses (*morung*) which serve unmarried youths as well as older men as a place where they can gather or work on their own without being involved in the goings on in their family's house. The Apa Tanis have communal open sitting platforms (*lapang*) and small ritual huts (*nago*) which in combination may well be survivals of the institution of community houses. Nothing similar exists in Nishi and Hill Miri villages, and we have to look further east to the Padams, Minyongs and other Adi groups before we find community houses. These are very similar to the *morung* of many Naga tribes, serving the purpose of dormitories for the unmarried and of men's clubs. The Padams call such houses *moshup* and the Minyongs *dere*. They stand usually in the centre of the village, and are constructed like ordinary houses, though they are mostly larger, and are partly open at the sides. There are a number of fire-places (*merum*) n a *moshup*, and these correspond to the sections of the village which are also called *merum*. All the boys who use the fire-place form a closely knit group, and remain bound by feelings of friendship.

The lack among the Nishis of any comparable institution is explicable in a society which is loosely structured, and without an organized system of authority extending beyond the limits of a simple long-house. The sense of discipline and esprit de corps instilled into the boys in Naga *morung* or Padam *moshup* is here absent and remains so through a Nishi's entire life.

We shall see in Chapter 11 that the compactness and permanence of the Monpa villages with their solid stone houses corresponds to

the firm political structure of Monpa local units in the same way as the impermanence and dispersal of Nishi settlements corresponds to the instability and chaotic character of traditional Nishi society.

3

The Economic Base

The traditional economy of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, with the exception of the Apa Tanis, is based on a type of agriculture known as shifting or slash-and-burn cultivation. This is undoubtedly one of the most archaic forms of tillage. It developed at a time when man had no metal implements such as iron axes and the clearing of forest to make room for cultivation presented a major problem. Stone axes were then used to fell smaller trees, but fire served to kill off large trees and to get rid of the undergrowth covering the ground. As late as the twentieth century, some of the stone-age people in Melanesia, cultivated in this way, and the same method is still widely used in Southeast Asia, though iron-implements are now available to all the slash-and-burn cultivators of that part of the world. The burning of the felled trees clears the plot to be sown and produces wood-ash which acts as a valuable fertiliser thus obviating the need for any other type of manure. It goes without saying that this type of cultivation is possible only where a relatively sparse population has the run of large forest-tracts and can shift their fields whenever the soil shows signs of exhaustion. Provided it is left to remain fallow until new forest has grown up on the abandoned field, the land can be cultivated indefinitely, but to make this possible the cycle of rotation must be long enough to allow of a complete restoration of the forest growth and the accumulation of new humus.

In Arunachal Pradesh with its average population density of 6 persons per square kilometre and the luxurious forest-growth facilitated by a tropical and sub-tropical climate with heavy rainfall, there should be ideal conditions for slash-and-burn cultivation, and in many parts of the territory it is still the predominant type of tillage. However among some tribes, such as the Wanchus and some groups of Nishis a rapid growth of population, due partly to the suppression of raiding, which diminished the loss of life by violence, and partly the improvement of medical facilities and virtual eradica-

tion of certain epidemic diseases, the ratio between population and available land has changed in recent years, and the exhaustion and erosion of some tracts of land are clearly visible. In the previous chapter we have seen that a similar process seems to have led to emigration from overpopulated areas even as early as three or four generations ago, though at that time the migrants experienced no difficulty in finding virgin land in areas not more than a few days' journey removed from their original habitat. Today, this is no longer the case, and the shortage of land in some parts of the Nishi country is likely to present a serious problem in the foreseeable future.

Those who may argue that in a territory with an overall density of 6 persons per square kilometre it seems absurd to talk of a shortage of land, must be reminded that a large part of the area of Arunachal Pradesh is so mountainous that it has to be written off for any type of agricultural utilization, and this applies, of course, particularly to the regions in the far north where altitude alone limits the growing of any food crops.

In some places, such as in the region of Talo and Jorum, mentioned in Chapter 2, it has been possible to replace slash-and-burn cultivation with other forms of tillage, and particularly the growing of wet rice on irrigated terrace fields, but this can be done only where hill-slopes are not too steep and, above all, there are sources of water making artificial irrigation practical.

The majority of Nishis and Hill Miris are therefore still dependent on slash-and-burn cultivation, and when I first explored the Subansiri region only an insignificant percentage of these tribes knew any other form of tillage than is usually known as *jhum*-cultivation. The procedure of Nishi cultivators, which I recorded in Potin village in the lower Panior valley was as follows:

At the time when forest for the new *jhum*-fields was to be cleared there were sometimes disputes over the distribution of the land. The "big" men took the best and largest plots, and the less important men took what was left over, but after a day or two all settled down to the work of clearing the forest whatever land they had chosen or could get. But before any man who had a choice because of his position in the community selected a price of land, he took omens with the help of eggs and if the omens were unfavourable he dropped the idea of cultivating on that land and chose another plot, repeating the procedure of omens. The "small men" did not

consult omens because they did not have a real choice.

When a big man felled the forest on the plot he had chosen he called all the villagers to help in the work and feasted them with the meat of a pig or even a mithan and large quantities of rice-beer. If virgin jungle had to be cut there were some enormous trees to be felled, and this involved the building of scaffolds in order to enable the workers to get at a part of the trunk less massive than the part immediately above the ground. The felling of the tree growth on a large plot would have taken as much as one or two months even if many men cooperated. As all villagers had to clear some fields for their own use even rich and important men could not command a large labour force day after day, and though twenty men may have worked on one day, only five or ten would turn up on other days.

Men of modest means, who could not afford the food for large numbers of helpers, called only on five or six men to help them. Even slaves would clear some plots of their own, and the Potin people told me that all the men in his master's house would help a slave in clearing his *jhum*, a fact which throws an interesting light on the position of slaves in Nishi society.

Nishi clans settled in an area for a long time had their traditional clan-land, and the problems of distribution of plots to be cleared mentioned above relates only to the land within the boundaries of such clan-land. However, there was some flexibility in the ownership rights of clans, and if the number of clan-members dwindled people of other clans could take over some of the surplus land. Thus the land of Potin village had originally belonged to families of the Niri and Kholi clans, and as these clans had shrunk and surviving members had moved to Mebia and Joyhing respectively, men of Tabia clan from nearby Sekhe village had settled first at Lichi (a deserted site in 1945) and then to Potin, and were cultivating Niri and Kholi land. No price was paid for it because the few remaining Niri and Kholi men were not in need of the land, but if any of them had insisted on their right to be paid a mithan would have been given to them in recognition of their claim. A similar case occurred at no great distance when near the new motor-road from Yazali to Jorum several people from abandoned villages such as Selsemchi and Puli established a new settlement on a site called Tago. The land surrounding it and cultivated used to belong to the Nishis of Dodo, a village still existing in reduced form. As the Dodo villagers are now

very few in number they freely gave up part of their land without demanding any payment from the new settlers. Yet, there is in the same area also a case where one mithan was paid for land ceded by another village. Taba Tap, who had left Potin and moved down to the road running along the Panior valley and built a very large long-house some 3 km from Yazali cultivates now some land which belonged to the still existing village of Pei. For the permission to use thisland he paid the Pei people one mithan.

After the felling of the jungle on land to be taken under cultivation the trees and the undergrowth were allowed to dry, and were then set on fire. The charred wood covering the ground, was removed, but the ground was neither turned over nor dug up. In late April or early May the Nishis began the work of sowing, and usually the old *jhum*-fields (*rüa*) cultivated the second or third year were sown first, and the new *jhum*-fields (*rüp*) later. Before the sowing began the soil was cleared by hand, all weeds and stalks being torn out. In this task men and women cooperated, and when it was completed, men smoothed the ground with pieces of split bamboo, acting like a coarse broom, with which they brushed the ground horizontally. Next men and women planted maize and job's tears with crude digging-sticks, about 1½ metres long and without an iron tip. The men then broadcast millet, both *Eleusina coracana* and *Panicum miliare*, and last women dibbled rice, making a hole with a short digging stick and covering the grains with a movement of the foot. Taro and sweet potatoes were planted by both men and women using a *dao* to dig up the earth, but beans were planted by hand, the seeds being pressed into the soft soil. These crops could be planted at any time during the monsoon. For one cultivating season to the other sweet potatoes and taro to be kept for seed, were stored in deep pits lined with straw and leaves to protect them from humidity.

Apart from the *jhum*-fields on hill-slopes at some distance from the village and usually surrounded by forest, there were also fenced-in fields close to the houses, and these were manured and cultivated for many years in succession. They were used mainly for the growing of maize and millet, and these crops were sown in strips, which followed wherever possible the contours and thus minimized erosion. Chillies and tobacco were grown in small quantities on fields of all types.

Before the sowing began, a priest was called to perform a rite intended to guard the seed against the ravages of birds, field mice

and rats. The priest wrapped up some husked and lightly roasted rice in leaves, and impaled four such parcels on bamboo spikes which he ultimately fastened to a tree-trunk wrapped up in leaves.

These offerings of rice were not intended for deities, but for the departed. One of the four parcels was for the *orum*, i.e. deceased relatives; one for *soni*, i.e. people who had been killed; one for the *romtor-orum*, i.e. for villagers who would die between sowing and harvest, and the fourth parcel for the *orum-moda*, i.e. the totality of the departed charged with the task of driving away rats, wild pigs and other pests threatening the crops.

Against the tree-trunk, to which these parcels had been attached, the priest then leant a dibbling-stick, called *orum-chinia*, which although newly made, was deemed to belong to the departed. An old woman of the field-owner's household then dibbled a few seeds for the different categories of departed, and this seed-grain is described as *orum-gola*, i.e. the "share of the departed". The grain grown from these seeds was not separately harvested, but was thrashed together with the bulk of the crop.

All types of fields were weeded twice, and for this work, done mainly by women, hoes made of split and looped bamboo as well as iron hoes and small spades were employed.

If the crops were not sprouting well omens were consulted in order to discover which forest deity was affecting the growth unfavourably; and according to the results of this taking of omens either pigs or fowls were sacrificed to the spirits of the woods. It was believed also, that the earth spirits might have been angered by the cutting of the forest, and would also have to be pacified with offerings and sacrifices.

There were two types of crops, early ripening ones, grown mainly on fields close to the houses and lightly manured, and late ripening varieties of rice and millet grown on more distant *jhum*-fields, which used to provide the bulk of the Nishis' food. When the crops began to ripen they had to be guarded, particularly those on fields surrounded by forest, and hence subject to raids by monkeys, wild boars, deer, and birds.

There were several methods of harvesting. Most Nishis did not cut the rice, but stripped the grain from the standing ears and let them fall into a basket. Others cut off the ears of both rice and millet with small sickles, and the reapers, mainly women, threw the cut ears over their shoulders into a basket they carried on their back.

Such ears were spread on thrashing floors laid out in the midst of the fields. These ears were then thrashed under foot, a method very different from that of the Apa Tanis, who beat ears in bundles against small wooden boards held slanting inside the reaping baskets.

Nishis always stored all their grain in granaries standing in groups at some distance from the main house in order to remain undamaged in the house should fall victim to an accidental fire.

Though slash-and-burn cultivation was the common form of agriculture throughout the Nishi and Miri area, there were considerable local differences. One of these differences struck me very forcibly on my tour up the Kamla valley in 1945. In other areas I had seen, such as the Panior and Kiri valleys, Nishis cultivated in comparatively small patches, strewn it seemed haphazardly over the land surrounding their settlements, but the Kamla tribesmen seemed to prefer cultivating in large blocks with the field of one man adjoining those of others. These blocks lay often far from the villages, but belts of high forests were left to separate one block, belonging perhaps to a village a good three miles aways, from a block cultivated by the people of the neighbouring village. This practice of having the cultivation of many households, and in some cases of all the men of a village, in one great block, reminded me of the *jhum*-cultivation of the Wanchus of Tirap District, who also have all, or nearly all the fields of a village in one large expanse. This was certainly advantageous from the point of view of security, because any attack by raiders on people working in the fields, could be seen and possibly beaten back by other villagers, present on fields within sight and earshot.

Another peculiarity in the Kamla valley was the agricultural implements used for digging up the *jhum*-fields. When I first came to the area, iron was extremely scarce, because neither Tibetian supplies nor iron implements from Assam reached the people living along the trade-divide in adequate quantities. And as in an atmosphere of constant feuding, spears and swords were more essential than hoes, very little iron was available for agricultural tools. Hence the local people used short spade-like instruments with a wooden shaft, and inserted into this shaft and forming its continuation a shoulder-blade of a mithan, shaped roughly triangular, and sharpened at the cutting edge. This implement, called *lobe*, was wielded with both hands, meeting the ground at an angle of perhaps 80°, and being

inclined away from the worker. A few women used identical implements but with a blade of iron which was smaller than the bone blade. These spades were used for digging over the soil before the sowing, whereas after the sowing the ground was smoothed with small hoe-like implements made of bent bamboo. A good many tree-stumps as well as banana stumps were left on the *jhum*-fields, but between them the soil was very carefully prepared and on particularly steep slopes, felled trees and cut branches were arranged horizontally in order to protect the soil against rapid erosion.

In this area all cultivable land was then, and is still, clan-property and even some individual families had ownership rights in land. Members of clans which were on the increase and short of land could either hire land belonging to other clans or could buy such land outright, making payment in cattle. A parallel to this is found among the Wanchus who, though shifting cultivators had individual rights in land and could both hire and purchase land from those who had a surplus.

In the days of tribal feuds and raiding land was an object of conquest throughout the Nishi and Hill Miri area and the victors in a feud would take over the land of a vanquished and hence scattered clan.

Most Nishis and Hill Miris were more or less self-sufficient in grain, though in bad years they had to supplement their food grain by gathering wild roots and tubers, and various wild growing leafy vegetables which were usually eaten boiled and mixed with rice. The latter was invariably boiled, while maize was prepared for consumption in a variety of ways. Ground to flour and moistened with water it could be made into a kind of bread wrapped in leaves and baked in the ashes of the hearth or it could be made into a porridge or eaten in the form of pop-corn. Millet too was eaten as bread or porridge. All types of grain are used for the preparation of beer which forms an important part of the diet and plays an essential role at all social occasions and in the performance of rites.

Animal Husbandry

Unlike the Apa Tanis whose economic activities used to be concentrated almost entirely on the cultivation of their fertile land, the Nishis and Hill Miris always divided their energies between agriculture and the breeding of live-stock. Much of their mountainous

habitat could be put to no better use, and their skill as cattle-breeders enabled those in the vicinity of the Apa Tanis to trade mithan and pigs regularly for supplies of rice with which they supplemented their stock of grain in years of poor harvests. Nishis reared mithan, common cattle of the Indian breed, pigs, a few goats, and numerous chickens. Mithan (*bos frontalis*) was the most important domestic animal as it was among many of the hill-people of Arunachal Pradesh, and the neighbouring territories of similar climatic and ecological conditions such as Nagaland and the highlands of Burma. The mithan is a browser and prefers the tender shoots and young leaves of the forest to the grass of open country. Hence it is particularly suited for wooded country, and the environment of shifting cultivators provides suitable forage in the secondary forest springing up in the abandoned *jhum*.

The mithan shares the preference for wooded country with the wild gaur (*bos gaurus*), which it resembles also in colouration, the presence of a dorsal ridge, and the craving for salt. The latter characteristic is used by the breeders of mithan to keep contact with the animals which are allowed to roam about in the forest unattended but can be trained to return to the villages where they are given salt to lick. Mithan and gaur are interfertile, and the mating of wild gaur bulls and mithan cows was a frequent phenomenon as long as the gaur was common in the hills surrounding the Brahmaputra valley. Most experts, such as F.J. Simoons, believe indeed that the mithan is a domesticated gaur.[1]

Like other breeders of mithan the Nishis utilize the animal only in a limited way. It is principally kept for the sake of its meat and is neither milked nor used for traction or as a pack animal. We shall see, however, that Monpas and Sherdukpens use hybrids between mithan and common cattle for ploughing (see Chapter 11), but among the Nishis and Hill Miris I have never heard of any attempt to cross mithan with Indian cattle, and it seems that no spontaneous crossings occur even where both types of bovines are kept. The meat of mithan is highly prized, but mithan are usually killed only for sacrifice or on ceremonial occasions and unlike common cattle are not butchered solely for the sake of the meat. Their value has always been high, and they were regularly used as a medium of exchange, and particularly for the payment of bride-prices, indem-

[1]Frederick J. Simoons, *A Ceremonial Ox of India*, Madison, 1968.

nities, ransoms, and for the purchase of land. While the mithan of Apa Tanis are always kept away from the cultivated part of the valley, and brought to the villages only for sacrifice or at the time of sale, some Nishis and particularly those of the foothills are in the habit of bringing their mithan to the village in the evening and tying them up beneath the owner's house. Others turn their mithan loose in the forest to wander about at will. Every few days the owners go to the forest to look for the animals, and feed them salt in order to keep them used to contact with humans.

The price of mithan has always been high, and I remember a transaction in 1945 when a Nishi of Potin paid 100 carrying baskets of unhusked rice for one large mithan which corresponded then to Rs 400. Today prices are usually fixed in cash, and mithan are changing hands for as much as Rs 1,500.

The number of mithan kept by Nishis and Hill Miris fluctuates because of the frequency of epidemics, and particularly foot-and-mouth disease. The incidence of this has greatly increased as a result of growing contact with the plains and the import of old and often unhealthy Assamese cattle into the hills to be butchered for the sake of the meat. In 1978 the Nishis of the village of Talo owned more than 1,000 mithan, some wealthy men having a herd of about 30 animals. But a disastrous epidemic in 1979 decimated the stock of mithan in the area and some Nishis, as well as most Apa Tanis, lost almost all their animals. Common cattle seem to enjoy greater immunity, and withstood the epidemic much better.

Next in importance to Nishis are pigs, for these too can be used for sacrifices and before the introduction of money they formed a useful currency for smaller payments and particularly the purchase of minor valuables, such as ornaments. While Apa Tanis keep their pigs in fenced-in spaces below their houses, Nishis let the pigs roam about the village where they act as scavengers. Only when the vegetable crops in the fields near the village are ripening are the pigs confined in pig-styes. They are fed on kitchen refuse, the remains of beer-brewing, wild bananas and the sago-like pith of a fern. In 1980 a large pig was worth Rs 300-400.

Common cattle and goats are kept mainly for meat, but are occasionally also used for sacrifices. They usually wander about in the vicinity of the village and there is no provision for the organized herding of such minor live-stock. Fowls too are left to their own devices and rarely fed, but are caught and kept in baskets inside the

house during the night to protect them from wild cats and foxes.

Hunting and Fishing

Nishis have always had the reputation of being expert hunters, superior in wood craft to such tribes as the Apa Tanis. This is partly due to the fact that many of them lived in small settlements surrounded by forest, and familiarity with the forest and its animal denizens was acquired in childhood. Boys learnt to handle bow and arrow long before they grew to manhood, and a Nishi seldom left his village without carrying these weapons which virtually formed part of a man's dress. For the Nishis' type of hunting it was necessary to have poisoned arrows, for unless killed quickly a wounded animal could escape into the dense forest where it could be traced only with great difficulty. The poison used is made from the tubers of a plant called *omi*. This plant grows only at high altitude in places which are covered by snow in winter. In the 1940s a single tuber sufficient only for making two poisoned arrows had a value equivalent to Re 1 which would correspond to a present value of Rs 10. The Nishis of Mengo, Lebla and other villages close to high mountain ranges used to collect *omi* tubers and barter them to the people of lower ranges and foothills.

Nishis would stalk game alone or organize beats in which up to twenty men participated, often camping in the forest for several days. For such beats dogs were used, and the hunters were armed not only with bows and arrows, but also with spears. Nishis would tackle not only wild boars but even leopards and in rare cases tigers. Today guns are widely used and with their introduction the game has become scarcer and the hunting methods have changed.

Nishis were also skilled in the setting of traps. Using poisoned bamboo spears brought down deer and pigs in traps employing a mechanism of lever release. Smaller animals, particularly wood rats, squirrels and jungle-fowl were caught in noose-and-spring traps, and small birds were trapped by the use of gum applied to the branches of trees or pieces of cane baited with a live fly.

Hunting and trapping provided the Nishi with a large part of his meat diet, and enabled experienced hunters to increase their store of rice by bartering some of the game they had bagged. Venison was useful also to feed workers employed for felling the forest at the time of preparing new *jhum*-fields. A concrete example may demonstrate this. In 1944 Taba Serbe of Potin cleared two large

plots of land, and it took two months to fell the jungle. For this work he employed off and on 25 men whom he rewarded with ample food and drink. To do this he needed 10 baskets of meat and fish. Some of the meat was beef and pork which he had bought but five baskets were game which he and the men of his house had bagged in the chase, and two baskets were fish which they had caught. As meat is often smoked or dried, it can be stored until needed on such occasions.

Fishing provides the Nishis who live close to one of the major rivers with a substantial contribution to their diet, and there are three main methods of catching fish. Conical baskets are suspended from scaffolds built into the river where the flow is rapid, and once in such a trap the fish cannot escape. A larger operation is the construction of a dam across the river, and of a channel to one side through which most of the water flows. This channel leads into a bamboo cage, and fish entering it are caught by men and stunned by being hit with a heavy stick. The poisoning of a shallow pool with the juice extracted from the bark of a poisonous shrub is the third common method of catching fish. Nishis neither use hook and line nor do they spear fish.

Agriculture, live-stock breeding, food gathering and fishing allowed most Nishis to maintain a high degree of self-sufficiency insofar as food is concerned, and small communities dwelling in woodland not exhausted by overcultivation could have survived for long periods even without any contact with other populations in the same way as the Solungs of the Subansiri region subsisted in almost complete isolation, on foodgathering, hunting and minimal slash-and-burn cultivation. In fact most Nishis and Hill Miris relied, however, on obtaining various necessities by barter-trade with tribal neighbours as well as with populations in the plains of Assam or the highlands of Tibet. The nature of this trade, which must be of considerable antiquity, and has now been superseded by a different economic pattern based on the use of money is of sufficient interest to be described in a separate chapter.

4

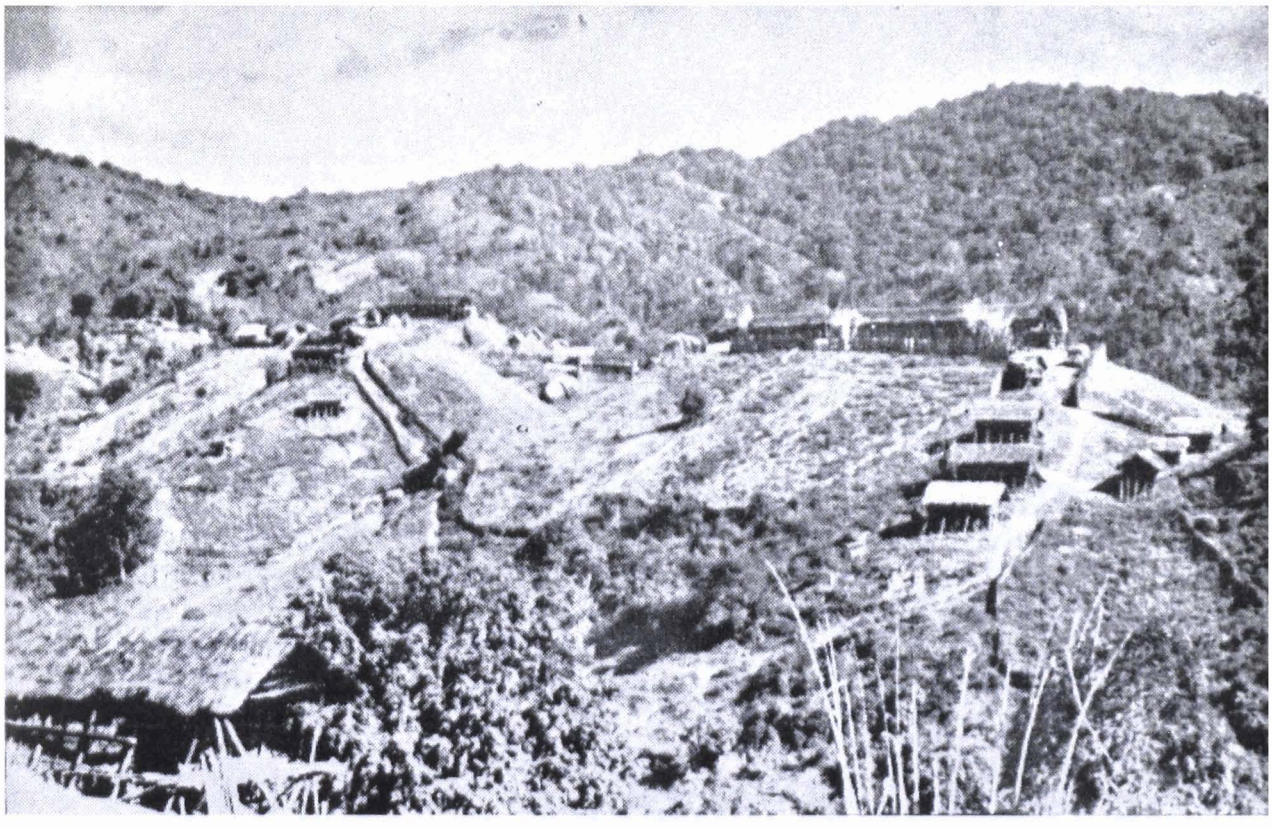
Trade and Barter

The two main pillars of the Nishis' economic system have always been agriculture and animal husbandry, and compared to these activities all other means of income used to be of minor importance as long as communications with the outside world were difficult and the Nishis had few needs which they could not meet by the exploitation of their own habitat. Even those Nishis who lived one or two days' walk from the plains of Assam depended for their subsistence on agriculture rather than on trade and wage-labour. Salt, procured partly from Assam and partly from Tibet, was the only item of diet for which all Nishis and Hill Miris relied on outside supplies.

Cloth, iron and various implements, on the other hand, were imported in considerable quantities, and even in the 1940s there were groups of Nishis who could not do without the wares of Assamese bazaars.

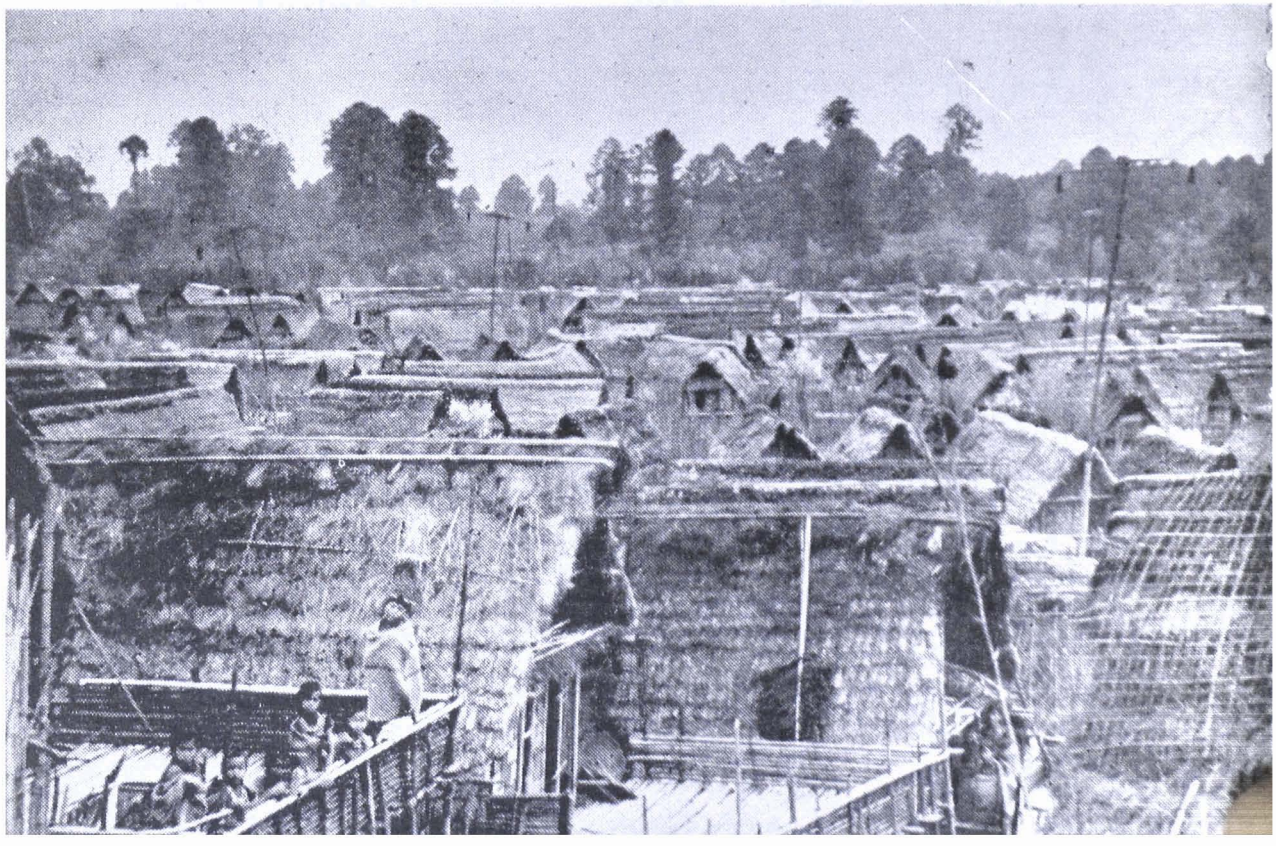
The traditional trading activities of the Nishis, as I observed them in 1944-45, can be divided into three categories: trade with the plains of Assam, trade with tribal neighbours, and trade with Tibet or populations under Tibetan influence. Least was known of the third category, but as this type of trade came to an end in 1962 even the fragmentary information which I collected in the 1940s is worth preserving as an example of trans Himalayan trade contacts in a region lacking caravan routes and other regular communications.

Trade with the plains of Assam. During the cold weather many Nishis of the Par valley and the lower Panior valley and a smaller number of Nishis from the Mai-Talo area and the Kiyi valley visited the plains to earn money by contract and daily labour and to make purchases in bazaars. Some of them sold on those occasions such jungle produce as bamboo shoots, palm leaves and incense, as well as chillies, taro, maize, oil seed, brinjals, beans and tomatoes grown



The Nishi village of Talo

The Apa Tani village of Hija



Nishi of Jorum village

Hill Miri of Biku village

Hill Miri woman

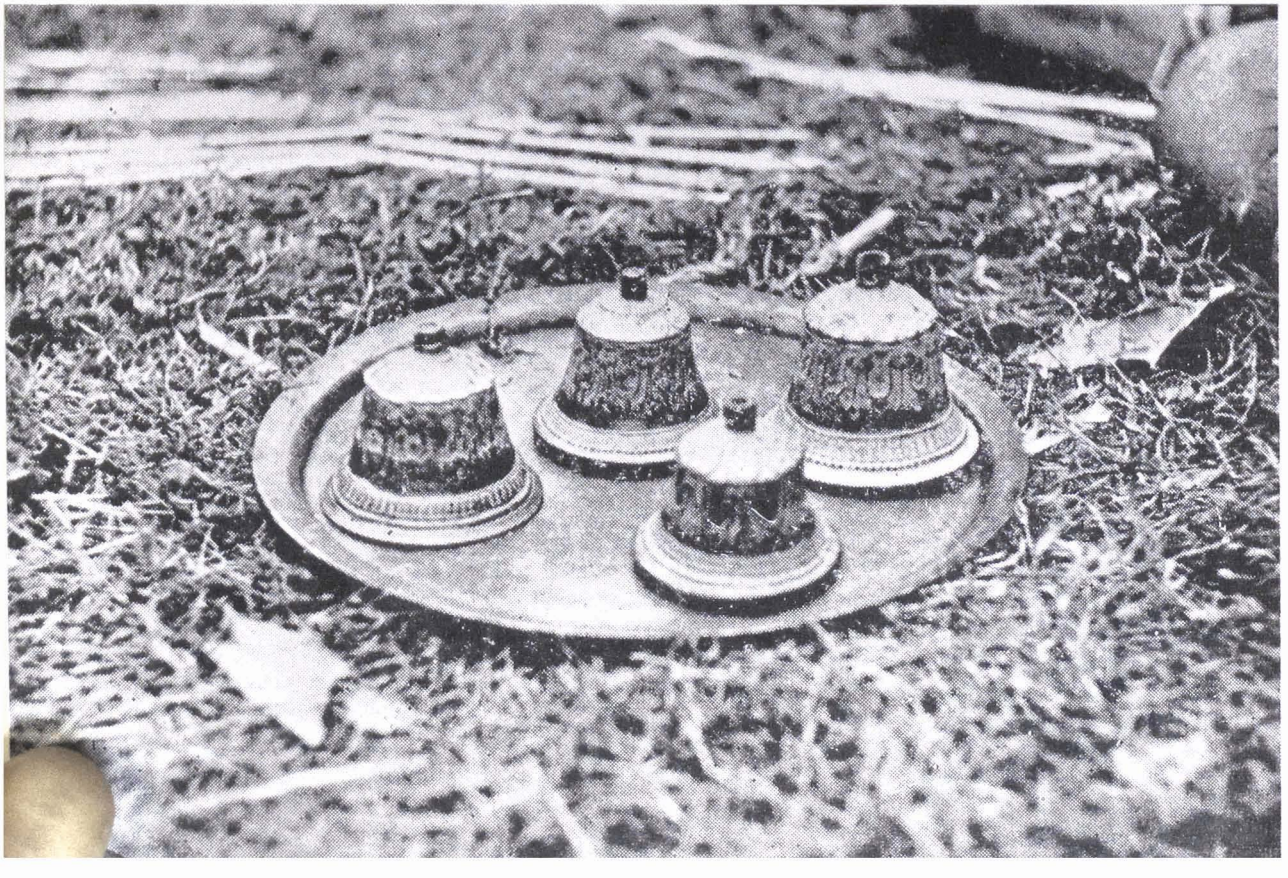
Nishi woman

Mithan sacrifice in Talo village

Nabum Epo speaks during peace negotiations with Likha Teji

Ritual structure put up by Miris for a mithan sacrifice

Tibetan bells (*maje*) used by Nishis for ceremonial exchanges



Sherdukpen Chief in ceremonial dress

Sherdukpen man in ceremonial dress

in their kitchen gardens. But it was only in a few villages standing in constant contact with the plains that Nishis cultivated vegetables with the specific purpose of sale. On their rare expeditions to the plains the Nishis of the interior took only chillies, for which there was apparently always a demand, and dried bamboo shoots, which were mainly bought by tea-garden labourers. Live-stock was but a minor item in the trade with the plains. Occasionally a mithan was purchased by Nishis of one of the small plains settlements, such as Rangajan or Kakoi near North Lakhimpur, and such an animal was either used for sacrifice or resold to Muslim butchers. Sale of other domestic animals to plainsmen was a rare occurrence, though a Nishi badly in need of cloth or salt might have sold a goat or a fowl in one of the nearby bazaars. In the 1920s the Nishis of the foothills made handsome profits by collecting and selling wild rubber which at times was valued at Rs 5 per kilogram. But the demand for wild rubber decreased and the price dropped so low that rubber tapping was no longer profitable. In former years Assam offered also a market for vegetable dyes, particularly madder, but chemical dyes completely displaced these forest products.

We thus see that whereas the Nishis by acquiring a taste for more and more bazaar goods became increasingly dependent on the plains, the plains men had less and less use for the products of the hills. The inevitable result was that the emphasis shifted from trade to wage-labour, and that the hillman, no longer a producer of goods valued by the Assamese villages, had to sell his own labour if he wanted to obtain the products of the plains, such as cotton and homespun silk cloth, iron, and above all salt.

Whereas most Nishis of the interior, i.e. the Mai-Talo group, the Kiyi valley, the upper Panior valley and the Khru region wove their own cloth, either of cotton or bark fibre (*pud*), the Nishis of the lower Panior valley and the Par valley relied as early as the 1940s entirely on bazaar cloth. Old men and women remembered then still a time when cotton was grown and bark fibre woven into cloth, and there is indeed no reason to believe that these Southern Nishis many of whom had come only a few generations previously from areas to the north and northwest had always been ignorant of the crafts widely practised in their earlier home. But the ease with which cheap machine-made cloth could be obtained, rather than preference for bazaar cloth, had killed tribal weaving south of the Panior river.

Nearly all *dao*, knives, spearheads and arrowheads were manufactured by Nishi blacksmiths. The iron was obtained from the plains, but the quantity bought there each year was not great, because broken *dao* and knives were used again and again for fashioning new implements. A few hoes such as used in tea-gardens were to be found in some Nishi villages, but the fieldwork was usually done with moon-shaped bamboo hoes sometimes fitted with an iron blade. The Nishis believed that their ancestors had been unfamiliar with the craft of iron-working, and had learnt it from Sulung blacksmiths, members of a small and elusive forest-tribe scattered all over the hills from the upper waters of the Par as far as the mountains between the Khru and upper Kamla, and between Kamla and Subansiri.

The habit of the Nishis of the foothills and outer ranges to earn cash by doing wage labour stems from the time when tea-gardens were laid out at no great distance from the hills skirting the Brahmaputra plains. Nishis from nearby villages were then employed for felling trees and clearing jungle, a type of work not congenial to the Assamese peasantry or the tea-garden labour imported from Middle India. During the time when there was not much to do on their *jhum*-fields many Nishis flocked to this work, and the money which at that time was of little use in the hills, enabled them to buy bazaar cloth, glass beads, brass vessels and salt. What were at first luxuries soon became necessities and the Nishis of the foothill villages acquired a taste for such commodities as *pan* and betel, the use of which was unknown in the higher hills. But the expansion of tea-gardens and hence the employment of Nishis for the clearing of jungle ultimately came to an end, and those used to earning cash wages had to look for alternative employment. This they found in the sugarcane plantations of Assamese and Nepali settlers, and there Nishis usually worked on contract, taking on the clearing of a plot for a specific payment. They preferred such contract work to work for daily labour, because it left them freer and even in the 1940s a man could earn as much as Rs 25 for clearing 1½ acres of jungle, and at that time this was a substantial sum.

It is impossible to estimate the total sum earned by Nishis of the outer ranges by such work. But it must have been substantial, for most of the salt consumed by the entire tribal population of the area between the plains of Assam and the trade divide with Tibet, must have been purchased with the earnings of those who worked on

the plains for wages. Apart from salt numerous iron implements and a great many beads and bracelets and various small articles such as matches, *pan* and betel were purchased with the money earned by the men who worked in the plains of Assam.

On the whole the Nishi purchaser was strictly practical and bought in the bazaars and from individual plainsmen only articles for which he had an immediate use. His pride of possession, leading to the accumulation of unspent goods was still confined to the traditional valuables of Tibetan origin, and Indian products were usually bought for the sake of their usefulness and not for the prestige their possession lent to the owner.

Trade with Tribal Neighbours

The economic resources of most Nishis were so similar that there was little scope for any large-scale interchange of their own products. The Nishis lacked moreover the trading spirit of their Apa Tani neighbours, and even men of villages close to the plains seldom purchased Assamese goods with the sole intention of selling them at a profit. When they did act as middlemen it was rather in casual barter transactions with friends than in an organized system of trade. An exception was the trade in salt of which they did buy more than they could themselves consume, knowing that any surplus would be taken up by visitors from villages in the interior. Yet, even such transactions were generally casual, and paralleled in no way the carefully planned salt trade of such Himalayan trading societies as the various Bhotia populations of Nepal.[1]

There was, of course, throughout the Subansiri region a continuous trickle of the products of local craftsmen from every centre of manufacture to the surrounding area. *Dao* made by blacksmiths in the upper Par valley, for instance, found their way into the Panior and Kiyi valley and cloth woven in the villages on the Pauyi river could be seen in Mengo or Lichi, several days' journey from their place of manufacture. Mithan, pigs and grain were bought and sold as the need arose and ceremonial friends exchanged a wide range of articles, both locally produced and imported, when they visited each other's villages. Limited as such barter within the tribe may have been, it did call for a common system of values by which

[1]A detailed description of this trade is contained in my book *Himalayan Traders*, London, 1975.

the price of an article could be roughly determined. This system was nowhere absolutely rigid, and varied in some features from one area to the other, but did provide a certain standard for the exchange of the most common commodities.

A concrete example will serve to demonstrate the nature of one local scheme of values; as the Nishis did not have any measures of weights, and only measures of volume, the Assamese term *seer* was used to signify a quantity of grain or salt which fills a vessel capable of taking one kilogram of husked grain. In Potin, a village in lower Panior valley the values were in 1944 roughly as follows:

1 *nielap*=1 very small chicken (about 3 weeks old), or 2 eggs, or 1½ *seer* of salt, or 1 small knife, such as worn by boys. The amount of grain valued 1 *nielap* varied according to the season. 1 *dir nielap* or about 3 *seer* of unhusked rice was the measure used in the rains, and 1 *dera nielap* or about 4½ *seer* of husked rice was the *nielap* measure in the cold weather after the harvest.

1 *nielap lobni*=1 middle sized chicken, or 4 eggs, or 1 small bazaar cloth such as worn by children, 3 *seer* of salt, or 1 knife of Nishi make, or 2 *nielap* of rice according the season.

1 *yolo*=8 *nielap*, or 2 hens, or 1 pig 4-5 months old, or 1 goat about 4 months old; or 2 cotton bazaar cloths, or 1 Apa Tani cloth with broad multi-coloured border, or 1 Nishi *dao*; or 2 carrying baskets of unhusked rice (each containing about 18-20 *seer*).

1 *opu pugi*=1 middle sized pig, or 4 cotton bazaar cloths, or 1 Tibeten *dao*, or 16 *seer* of salt, or 5 carrying baskets of unhusked rice.

1 *opu pukan*=1 sow, or 1 Assamese silk cloth, or 24 *seer* salt, or 8 carrying baskets of unhusked rice.

It is obvious from this list that the values of this system were not completely consistent, and it is indeed very doubtful whether the correlation of the individual values was ever completely clear in the Nishis' minds.

Licha at the upper end of the Kiyi valley, and hence not very far from the former trade-divide between Assam and Tibet used slightly different values. A *nielap* was there too worth a small chicken or two eggs, but only ¾ *seer* of salt, compared to 1½ *seer* in Potin; one *yolo* equalled 1 pig or goat about 4 months old, or 1 Nishi cloth or 1 simple Apa Tani cloth, or 1 small Tibetan *dao*, or 1 big carrying basket of unhusked rice. An *opu* equalled in Licha 3 *yolo*, or 1 sow,

or 1 she-goat, or 2 Apa Tani cloths with broad multi-coloured border, or 1 big Tibetan *dao*, 1 Assamese silk cloth, or 10 *seer* of salt, or 3 big or 5 small carrying baskets of unhusked rice.

Thus it appears that in Licha salt and Apa Tani cloths were more expensive than in Potin, but that Tibetan *dao* were rather cheaper. In the higher price of salt in Licha lay the margin of profit for the middleman and the lesser price of Apa Tani cloth in Potin was due to the easy availability of bazaar cloth which kept down all cloth prices.

There were, of course, temporary fluctuations in the prices of commodities owing to political events. Thus communications between villages in the interior and the plains of Assam were sometimes cut off by feuds, and such villages had then to pay higher prices of Indian goods which had to pass through many hands.

A situation very different from the economic relations between Nishis and Nishis had developed in the country immediately bordering on the Apa Tani valley, and particularly in the Nishi villages of Mai, Jorum and Talo. There the recurrent exchange of goods between two complementary economies had virtually welded these Nishi villages and their Apa Tani trade-partners into one economic unit.

The two tribes were economically complementary insofar as the Apa Tanis produced a surplus of rice but very little meat, and the Nishis of these villages reared large number of mithan, pigs and goats, but had often to supplement their supply or rice by purchases from Apa Tanis. Alone the village of Talo sold annually an average of 20 mithan to Apa Tanis, who paid invariably in rice, giving 15-30 carrying baskets of unhusked rice for one mithan, the price varying according to the size and sex of the animal. Other villages occasionally also bought Apa Tani rice, paying in mithan or pigs, but were less dependent on such purchases than Talo and Jorum, large villages whose *jhum*-land was largely exhausted by long periods of cultivation, while the wet rice they had learnt to cultivate did not cover their requirements.

The sale of animals was only one aspect of the economic relations between the two tribes. The Nishis also bartered pigs for Apa Tani cloth and Apa Tani *dao* and knives, and the Apa Tanis gave rice in exchange for earthen pots, gourd vessels and occasionally cotton, and many Nishis undertook to herd mithan belonging to Apa Tanis. Particularly close was the interdependence of Nishis and Apa Tanis in the field of cloth manufacture. The Apa Tanis

were—and still are—expert weavers, but having practically all their cultivable land under food-crops, grew no cotton. The Nishis of the neighbouring villager, on the other hand, cultivated cotton on their *jhum*-fields, but did not weave sufficient cloth even to cover their own requirements. Much of their cotton was sold to Apa Tanis who spun and wove it into cloth, some of which was subsequently sold to Nishis. By an arrangement which resulted in yet closer cooperation poor Apa Tani women, mainly of commoner (*guchi*) class went to live for weeks at a time in Nishi houses and, helped by Nishi girls, spun the Nishis' cotton, dyed the yarn and wove cloth. Their wage for weaving one cloth was a quantity of cotton sufficient for the manufacture of another cloth of equal size, and this they took home to their village. These women were fed by their Nishi employers, and during the months after harvest, there were Apa Tani women in nearly every house of Mai, Jorum and Talo.

Apa Tani traders also used to visit distant Nishi villages carrying with them cloth, *dao*, knives and salt, and bought pigs, dogs, gourd vessels and sometimes also ornaments of Tibetan origin. These trading trips were essentially different from the casual barter of Nishi with Nishi. For Apa Tanis used to set out with the specific purpose of trading and exchanged their wares wherever they could do so with advantage without running too great a risk of being captured and held to ransom. Similar trading enterprises were rare among Nishis, and if in villages at a distance of several days' walk Apa Tani textiles were found it was usually due to the initiative of Apa Tani traders, and not to that of Nishis who had travelled to the Apa Tani valley.

Trade with Tibet or Tibetanized Populations

All material objects, as distinguished from slaves and cattle, that made up a Nishi's wealth were of Tibetan origin, and in this respect there was little difference between Nishis of the foothills regularly visiting the plains of Assam, and Nishis in the high hills of the interior. A man's social status was judged by the number of Tibetan prayer-bells (*maje*) and bronze-plates he possessed, the number and value of Tibetan beads he could give as dowry to his daughter, and the number of mithan he could if necessary raise at short notice by the sale of these and other valuables of Tibetan make. Assamese goods, even bronze-plates and bell-metal cups not unlike some Tibetan articles, had never gained a similar place

of honour in Nishi culture, and an old connection between Nishis and Tibetan or outposts of Tibetan culture is therefore beyond doubt.

As long as the frontier between India and Tibet was open, the import of Tibetan goods continued, but today it has completely stopped. The following notes are hence only of historical interest, and are based on my observations in 1944-45. The Nishis of the Par, Panior and Kiyi valleys, though in possession of a good number of Tibetan valuables, knew then little of the routes to Tibet or the exact manner in which their fellow-tribesmen to the north and northwest obtained Tibetan goods. The only village in which I then saw not only Tibetan beads, valuables and swords but also Tibetan textiles of obviously recent manufacture was Mengo on the upper waters of the Panior. There red and black sashes of Tibetan wool and pieces of grey woollen cloth were worn and all these as well as Tibetan ear-rings studded with corals and turquoise had been brought from villages on the Panyi river, a tributary of the Khru. It was in Mengo that I first met people from the Panyi valley, and they spoke of a people whom they called Boru who acted as middlemen in the trade between Tibetans and the Nishis of the Khru and Panyi valley. Today we know that these Boru are identical with people living in the Hure Circle in the upper Kamla valley, who though calling themselves Boru are more commonly known as Bangro. I have not been able to visit the area inhabited by these Bangros, but from the account of officials and neighbouring tribes it seems that they are one of the Tibetanized tribal groups, and this impression is reinforced by the fact that they intermarry with Nas of the Taksin area who have come under strong Tibetan influence. According to the Census returns of 1971 there were then only 1,085 Bangros, but it is not unlikely that some members of this ethnic group were returned as Nishis or under another name, for in the remote regions close to the border with Tibet the identity of the various tribal groups has not yet been established with complete clarity.

In the 1940s I heard in the Mengo area also of people referred to as Nga or Na who were supposed to dwell in the high mountains close to Tibet, but were often at war with Tibetans and recruited Nishis to assist them in these fights. They were reported as living in houses built of stone and wearing clothes made of fur or sheepskins. When the region in the upper Subansiri was explo-

red it was found that in the area of Taksin there were indeed people known as Na. They speak a language of their own, but know also Nishi and Sulung. The women wear long gowns and horizontally striped aprons in Tibetan style. Untill all trade with Tibet stopped they obtained these clothes as well as salt and iron, from Tibet, but subsequently the government imported Tibetan-style clothes from Kalimpong, air-lifted them to Taksin and sold them at cost-price to the Nas. I was told that the old men and women in Na villages still speak Tibetan, and that they used to keep yak and sheep which they had obtained from Tibet.

Thus there can be little doubt that Bangros and Nas were among the middlemen through whose hands Tibetan goods reached the upper Kamla valley. In the 1940s articles of Tibetan origin could be seen in all Hill Miri villages as well as on men and women visiting the plains of Assam. Prominent among the ornaments were necklaces of large beads made of conch-shell, white stone, blue porcelain, and yellow stone, and discs of bell-metal strung into women's belts. Large tufts of yak hair formed part of Miri head-dresses, and Tibetan swords were carried by all the wealthy men.

As today all trade with Tibet has ceased, the nature of the trans-Himalayan trade in this region can be judged only on the basis of my observations in 1945. Woollen cloth, made-up woollen coats and caps, ornaments of various kinds, plates of bell-metal, swords and above all salt formed the bulk of the imported Tibetan goods. In exchange for these commodities the tribesmen of the Kamla and Sipi regions gave skins of monkey, bear, leopard, fish-otter, barking deer, serow (a kind of antelope), python and other snakes, as well as cane ropes, sago-pith, madder and other dyes. The people of the upper Subansiri valley systematically collected these exchange goods against the arrival of Tibetan purchasers, and in the Sipi valley I saw dried skins hung up under the rafters ready for despatch. All this trade was by barter, and Tibetan coins were not known in the Kamla area. There I was given the rates at which skins were exchange for Tibetan goods. One serow skin was bartered for 2-3 *seer* of salt, one complete otter skin with tail and legs fetched one sword and 1½ *seer* of salt, one leopard skin 2 swords and 1½ *seer* of salt, and for 4 bear skins one large woollen cloth about 4 by 2 arm-lengths in size was obtained. Some of the Tibetan textiles were surprisingly cheap. Thus strips of woollen cloth approximately 54 inches long and 10

inches wide were sold for one or two fowls, sashes of red and black wool for one fowl, and coats of grey wool with half sleeves that reach below the knees for one middle-sized pig. Only big tailored coats of closely woven material usually of purple or carmine colour were highly priced, and on the periphery of Tibetan influence as much as one small mithan was paid for such a coat. Salt was comparatively expensive; a middle-sized pig bought about 2 *seer* of salt, a big hen ½ *seer*. For a Tibetan sword of superior quality one big sow and one small pig was paid, and for a sword of average quality one middle-sized pig or one full grown goat.

Most valuable of all Tibetan goods were the prayer-bells known to the Nishis and Miris as *maje* and to the Assamese as *deogante*. They were sold without clapper and handle, and the tribesmen were unaware of their original purpose and regarded them as the work of gods. They were treated with the reverence and care elsewhere accorded to works of art, given names and referred to as male and female. A *maje* of high class might be bought for ten mithan and more, but there were *maje* of all grades down to those worth only one or two cotton cloths. The sale of a valuable *maje* was as serious and consequential an undertaking as a marriage and created between purchaser and seller a tie similar to that between kinsmen. Plates of bell-metal, valued up to one or two mithan were also used mainly for ceremonial payments and were accorded a similar sentimental value. Tibetan beads too were highly valued and indispensable for certain ceremonial exchanges. There were more than a dozen classes of beads and it needed the experience of a connoisseur to accord to every bead its correct value. Some wealthy men collected beads one by one composing through the course of years strings of great beauty and worth as much as two full grown mithan.

In the Kamla region the trade-divide between India and Tibet ran through the villages of Rute-Hate and Sibing-pa, known also as Guchi-Sojam, and along the watershed between the Kamla and the Sipi river. Up to that line most of the salt consumed came from Assam, and beyond it Tibetan salt was in common use, but whereas Tibetan ornaments and valuables were traded across the divide of the salt-trade and reached every part of the Miri country, Indian goods filtered only occasionally and in isolated instances beyond the trade-divide into the country under Tibetan economic influence. The line running through Route-Hate and along the

hills south of the Sipi river had there to be regarded as the boundary of *predominant* Tibetan influence, comparable perhaps to the lower Kamla river as the northern boundary of the *predominant* Assamese-trade influence. The belt lying between these two boundaries was served by tribal trade bringing in Tibetan and Indian goods in approximately equal quantities and it is in this area, equally remote from both sources of supply that salt was scarcest and most highly prized. The people in this belt had also the lowest standard of living. It was there that the shoulder-blades of mithan were used as hoes and women wore grass-skirts in default of loin-cloths.

In this area conditions have dramatically improved and in 1980 the local tribesmen looked as prosperous as in any other part of the Subansiri District, with the sole exception of the Apa Tani valley, whose inhabitants remained economically ahead of Nishis and Hill Miris.

In the 1940s, the earliest period for which data on inter-tribal trade are available, the trade in articles imported from Tibet as well as from Assam was only one aspect of a complex feature of tribal economics. While largely self-sufficient in regard to food supplies no Miri village produced all essential implements and articles of dress, and between Miris and their tribal neighbours as well as between the individual Miri villages there was therefore a continuous flow of commodities. A very large percentage of this exchange of goods was not in the nature of trade, i.e. immediate material gain was not the sole motive of the transaction.

Trade between Miris and Apa Tanis

It was mainly the trade with Apa Tanis which fell into the category of commerce in the narrower sense. No other tribe between the Subansiri and the Ramang rivers was as trade-minded as the Apa Tanis, who not only regularly brought up goods from the plains of Assam, but were themselves producers of high quality cotton cloth, iron implements and a salty substance gained from vegetable ash. Apa Tanis undertook trading expeditions which took them several days' journey from their own country, and the trade between Miris and Apa Tanis were almost entirely in the hands of such adventurous traders. The part of the Miri region more or less regularly visited by Apa Tanis comprised the villages of Taplo, Pemir, Murga, Rakhe, Bua, Tapo (Chemir), and La south of the

Kamla, Balu between Kamla and Khru, and Hova (Tago), Dobom and Bidak north of the Kamla. Only considerations of personal safety prevented Apa Tanis from venturing further afield. While I was camping in Taplo (Chemir) Apa Tanis immediately grasped the opportunity of the temporary security to extend their trade as far as Taga and Gocham on the south bank of the Kamla. The market for Apa Tani goods, however, was not confined to the area actually visited by Apa Tani traders; Apa Tani could be seen right up to the trade-divide between India and Tibet, and *dao* and knives of Apa Tani manufacture filtered even further north along the valleys of Kamla and Selu, and occasionally even as far as the Sipi valley.

Only the Miri villages closest to the Apa Tani valley purchased rice from Apa Tanis in times of scarcity, and in such cases the purchasers themselves arranged for the transport. The difficulty of carriage excluded grain from the trade with more distant villages. Rice was usually paid for in mithan, and the credit allowed by Apa Tanis to Miri customers who were in temporary difficulties often became the source of disputes and feuds. For a young mithan bull Apa Tanis paid approximately ten to fifteen baskets (i.e. 324-487 *seer*) of unhusked rice, and for a full-grown mithan cow twice this amount was paid. But the goods carried by Apa Tanis on their trading trips were almost invariably sold against immediate payment, and the articles bartered for cloth, *dao* and salt, were of a wide range. Pigs ranked first, among the goods sold to Apa Tanis, but the latter bought only pigs small enough to be easily carried, and dogs and fowls were sometimes given to round off a payment. Besides live-stock Miris sold to Apa Tanis Tibetan beads, small prayer-bells (*maje*) of minor value, fibre rain-coats, fibre rain-hats, plaited cane and grass belts, and occasionally a Tibetan *dao*. Very valuable Tibetan *maje* worth several mithan were never bought by Apa Tani traders who did not value them as much as Miris and Nishis did.

Although nowadays no more *maje* and other valuables reach the Subansiri region from Tibet, the stock already in the hands of the local tribesmen is large enough to allow their circulation in the course of ceremonial payments. In 1980 I heard of enterprising Apa Tani traders purchasing old beads and Tibetan valuables from modernized Nishis, whose appreciation of such heirlooms had diminished. These Apa Tanis then travelled across the Suban-

siri into Siang District, selling Tibetan valuables at high prices to traditionally minded tribesmen. Such trading-trips to distant regions are now possible because of the general pacification which has removed the fear of kidnapping. Local small-scale trade is also still flourishing, and on the road from Ziro to Raga one can see groups of Apa Tani women carrying heavy baskets who visit nearby Miri villages for the purpose of petty trade. The general use of money has facilitated all such trade because goods can be disposed of even if the purchaser does not have a suitable object for barter immediately available.

The pattern of trade has changed not only because of the drying up of supplies from Tibet and the introduction of money transaction which replace barter, but also because of the shift in the lines of communications. This is shown by the example of the Hill Miris in the villages between the Kamla river and the plains of Assam.

For many generations these villagers acted as middlemen in the trade between Assam and the hillmen in the region north of the Kamla, as far to the Indo-Tibetan trade divide. As they were used to spend the greater part of the winter in Assam they had ample opportunity for developing commercial contacts with the Assamese peasants and small shopkeepers. Thus they could obtain large quantities of Assamese goods not only for their own consumption but also for resale to the tribesmen north of the Kamla, who hardly ever visited Assam. They paid for these goods largely with cash earned by wage-labour in the plains, and also sold chillies, bamboo shoots, and such forest produce as wild rubber and madder.

This trade continued even after the Indian administration was extended to the highlands. However, when a motorable road was built to connect Ziro in the Apa Tani valley with Raga, the circle headquarters north of Kamla, and Raga with Daperigo on the Subansiri river, the Miri middlemen were cut out, for their former trade-partners and customers in the hills north of the Kamla could now obtain supplies either direct from North Lakhimpur or more frequently from Ziro. In Raga a few small shops have sprung up, and these get their wares mainly from traders in Ziro. Apart from such basic foodstuffs as rice, pulses, dried fish, salt, sugar, edible oil, tea and spices, such shops stock soap, tobacco, cigarettes, matches, electric torches and batteries, sandals, a few textiles, and

stationery. Such goods can be brought by trucks or bus in a few hours from Ziro and in a day from North Lakhimpur. Hence the Miris who carried Assamese goods on their backs across the hills south of the Kamla can no longer compete, and have thus lost an important pillar of their economy. Hence some villages in the hills south of the Kamla have been deserted, and the inhabitants moved to the lowlands near Dulungmukh where they settled and started plough cultivation. Those who have temporarily emigrated retain their land and let forest grow on it with a view to future *jhum*-cultivation. Several families of Gocham, which was once an important village, on the right bank of the lower Kamla recently settled at Raga, the circle headquarters.

5

Family Structure

The structure of Nishi and Hill Miri families differs fundamentally from that of the families of Apa Tanis, Adis and Wanchus, and it is no exaggeration to say that the Nishi family pattern is unique among Himalayan tribal societies. What then is so peculiar in the manner Nishi families are constituted? Unlike Apa Tanis and the majority of Adis, the Nishis and Hill Miris normally do not live in nuclear families limited to a married couple and their unmarried children and perhaps a widowed parent. Most Nishi houses are large enough to shelter a number of nuclear families each of which functions to a large extent as a separate economic unit, and has its own hearth, its own granary standing at some distance from the main house and its own cultivation. When we speak of Nishi long-houses we must remember that they are different from the long-houses so familiar to anthropologists from Indonesia. Unlike the latter they are not subdivided into separate compartments where individual families have almost as much privacy as in a house of their own. All the inmates of a Nishi long-house share one great undivided hall, and in this hall there are about as many hearths as there are separate family units, even though the unit headed by the senior man and owner of the house may spread over two hearths.

The number of nuclear families dwelling in a house varies according to circumstances. Five to six hearths are about average, but in the houses of important men there may be as many as twelve hearths, and the inmates of such a house may easily number 50 to 60 persons.

The composition of such an extended household depends largely on the manner in which it came into existence. Let us assume that a young married man had either left his village because of the danger of repeated raids—not an unusual occurrence in past times—or that he had quarrelled with his brothers and therefore moved out of the family home, and settled on a vacant site in the vicinity

of friendly families. In either case he would have built a modest house large enough for himself, his wife and their children. In such a house there would have been only two hearths, one for the owner and his wife, and one at which casual visitors could stay. If the couple had sons the house would have been enlarged by adding to its length as the sons were getting married. Each of the married sons would have had a hearth of his own, a separate granary and separate *jhum*-fields. In this respect a Nishi family differs from tribal families in most other parts of India, where married sons and their wives either cultivate and mess together with the parents, or move out of the parental house altogether. In the Nishi case the eldest son succeeds his father as head of the household and his younger brothers and their families remain in the parental long-house but continue to cultivate and cook on their own.

Apart from married sons or brothers of the senior man, there may also be dependants, not related to the house-owner, who moved into his house seeking shelter from enemies, perhaps after their own houses had been raided and burnt. In past years the house-owner might also have had slaves, and each slave, particularly if he had a wife, was given a hearth where the couple cooked and ate.

Another way in which a Nishi household may grow is by the increase in the number of the house-holder's wives. It is not unusual for Nishis to marry ten and more wives, and normally every new wife is allocated a separate hearth, where she cooks for herself and her eventual children and also entertains her husband with beer and snacks, though he continues to eat his main meals and feeds his guests at the hearth of the senior wife.

In exceptional cases a daughter of the house may also establish her separate hearth, cultivate by herself and keep the yield of her field in a granary of her own. As long as slavery was common such an enterprising unmarried girl could also buy slaves who would then have lived in the common long-house. Occasionally a son-in-law was also accommodated in his father-in-law's long-house, but there is no general practice of incorporating sons-in-law into the family as a permanent arrangement such as exists among Tibetans and some tribal societies under Tibetan influence.

There are no rigid rules regarding the composition of the group inhabiting a Nishi long-house, but the size of such a residential

unit determines to a great extent the prestige of the owner of the house. His position as head of the community living under his roof is uncontested. Only when a man is incapacitated by old age will the *de facto* leadership pass on to his eldest son. Yet the father remains even then the symbolic head of the household and retains his seat at the hearth nearest to the front-door. His position is very different from that of an old Apa Tani who has to move into a smaller house leaving a son in possession of his former house.

Marriage

Nishis and Hill Miris look upon marriage quite differently from Apa Tanis and Adis. In their eyes it is not so much a union between two people attracted to each other and intent on living together as more or less equal partners, than an alliance between two families to whom it brings a number of material advantages as well as prestige and power. Fathers demand for their daughters large bride-prices and a man strengthens his political position by entering a marriage-alliance with a girl belonging to an influential family. This aspect of marriage is highlighted by the fact that the ceremonies and rites accompanying the transfer of a girl from her father's house to that of her husband are almost identical with those surrounding the purchase of a valuable Tibetan bell (see Chapter 6). Both these transactions create similar obligations between the two parties.

The ideal Nishi and Hill Miri marriage is one concluded as a result of negotiations—often of a lengthy and complicated kind—conducted between the father or guardian of the bride and the groom or men of his household. Traditionally the girls to be given in marriage were not consulted beforehand and it was not unusual that immature girls were married to grown up men, or conversely mature girls to small boys, if the interests of the two families required such an alliance. We shall see, however, that individual likes and dislikes often interfered with the arrangements devised by the couple's elders and that in many instances marriages ended in elopement or divorce. The case-histories recounted below will demonstrate in which way marriages can be wrecked and to what an extent the inclinations and passions of the partners can cut through all the ties forged by the original negotiations. Bride-prices already paid may have to be returned

or another girl substituted if the original bride elopes and cannot be restored to her husband. Innumerable disputes and bloody feuds arose in the past from broken engagements or marriages, for a Nishi who has paid a bride-price feels that the right he has acquired thereby can be enforced in the same way as that resulting from any trade deal.

Whereas among Apa Tanis and several other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, such as Wanchus and Minyongs, the unmarried are free to indulge in pre-marital love-affairs, Nishi girls have much less freedom, for their parents fear that any unsanctioned attachment and even more a pregnancy would greatly diminish their value on the marriage market, and deprive their father of the prospect of receiving a large bride-price. Young Nishis familiar with Apa Tani habits did not hold back with comments on the good fortune of Apa Tani youths who could sleep with girls without any fear of the anger of their fathers, whereas they themselves "could only just joke with girls" because any greater intimacy would be followed by demands for heavy compensation or an inflated bride-price. Hence there is no recognized form of courtship, though Nishi girls do not give the impression of being very subdued, and the many cases of elopement and adultery suggest that young Nishi women are by no means always reconciled to living with a husband foisted on them by a father greedy for a fat bride-price.

Both among Nishis and Hill Miris there are several types of marriage of different prestigiousness, and the position of a wife depends to some extent on the kind of ceremonial with which the wedding was celebrated.

The Nishis call the most prestigious marriage *jel honam dui kot*. It is expensive because it involves the exchange of gifts over some years and the payment of a bride-price of several mithan. Before the girl's parents are approached a priest (*nyubu*) is called to the prospective groom's house to consult omens. Only if these are favourable will the girl's parents be contacted. When this is done they in turn will call a priest to their house to see the omens. The omens taken independently by the two priests must match if the parties are to go ahead with negotiations about the marriage. Once agreement has been reached in principle the groom is invited to the house of the girl's parents and her mother indicates the betrothal by garlanding him with a string of beads. Thereupon

follows a series of visits and exchanges of presents, and these may extend over several years particularly if the bride is immature. At the first of the ceremonial visits the groom's people go in grand procession to the house of the girl's father. They bring several mithan and sacrifice one. The girl's father may be content and give Tibetan bells and bronze-plates in exchange. Alternatively the prospective bride's kinsmen may say: "Next time you must bring some more mithan, only then will we give you valuables."

For the final marriage rite the bride is taken in procession to the groom's house and there is feasting for several days. Weddings as well as celebrations accompanying the sale of a Tibetan bell are occasions for the singing of alternating songs which involve questions and answers about Nishi mythology and legendary history comparable to similar Apa Tani competitions in the form of songs on the occasion of the Mloko festival.[1] These alternating songs are called *üd*, and at large weddings Nishis may spend four or five nights in entertaining each other with such songs. There are also dances known as *buya* in which men and girls form mixed rows. Brass plates are beaten like gongs, but there is no use of drums either at weddings or any other festivity.

The entirety of the exchange of visits and gifts leading up to a marriage which may extend over several years is referred to as *nieda*, a term used by Hill Miris for any marriage celebrated with full rites.

Another type of Nishi marriage is called *nyem selam*, and this is a kind of marriage by capture. No omens are taken and the girl's parents are approached only after the event. The girl may be aware of the planned capture and may be willing to go with the groom, or she may be taken by surprise and dragged away by force. Even if the girl's parents do not approve of the match, the groom's party will resist the bride's return, their prestige being at stake. This type of marriage may be used also if the parents of both sides are in agreement, but the girl is opposed to the match. *Nyem selam* is the quickest way of concluding a marriage, but it is not necessarily very much cheaper than an arranged marriage, for a high bride-price may have to be given to placate the bride's parents and establish cordial relations between the two families.

[1]See *A Himalayan Tribe*, p. 160.

There is no preference for marriages between specific kinsmen, for in traditional Nishi marriage the linking of two families for mutual support in feuds and the realization of large bride-prices are the prior considerations. Marriage with the mother's brother's daughter is allowed, but union with a father's sister's daughter is strictly forbidden and I was told that a man breaking this taboo may even be killed, though my informants were not able to quote a concrete example for such a sanction. A custom unusual among Indian tribes is the marriage of a man with his sister's daughter, and even with the real or classificatory sister of his own mother. I was told that such a marriage was not only tolerated but even appreciated, an attitude standing in strong contrast to Apa Tani rules which do not permit any marriage with members of the mother's lineage within a span of four generations.

Marriage within the clan is a very serious offence, but in 1980 I heard of a recent case of such an illegitimate union which had occurred within the Taba clan. Such a couple are virtually excommunicated and cannot participate in any religious rite. I was also told of the case of a priest who had had sexual relations with an unmarried girl of his own clan. He was fined one mithan and a *pakhe* rite was performed to wipe out the offence. The girl subsequently married another man. Nishis believe that a priest guilty of such an offence would also be subject to supernatural sanctions: rain would fall as he begins to invoke the gods at any rite. Exclusion from participation in religious rituals applies also to illegitimate children, rare as they are in Nishi society.

The terminology regarding the different marriage types used by Hill Miris is somewhat different from that of the Nishis, but the systems are similar. The most prestigious marriage is known as *nieda* or *nida*, and only this type of marriage establishes a lasting and socially significant bond between the two families involved. A *nieda* marriage is solemnized with elaborate rites extending over a considerable time. The bride-groom has to pay a bride-price which may amount to as much as twenty mithan given to the bride's father, not necessarily at one time but over a period of months or even years. The price should be matched by a considerable dowry consisting of ornaments, Tibetan bells, valuable beads and—in the old times—perhaps also a slave. This type of marriage is upheld by supernatural as well as social sanctions. If a wife married by *nieda* rites elopes with another man, the duped husband should not accept

her price from the seducer but should try to recover her. If negotiations fail and the woman refuses to return, he should take revenge by force of arms, a way no longer open to aggrieved husbands. The Miris used to believe that a man who accepted compensation, and thereby virtually "sold" his wife would incur the displeasure of the gods and expose himself to misfortune.

Nieda marriages are usually concluded between families of approximately equal status and wealth, and there are other and cheaper ways of acquiring a wife. A wealthy man already married by ***nieda*** may wish to add to the number of his wives by marrying a girl from a relatively poor family unable to provide a dowry. He is likely to obtain such a girl by paying the father as little as one or two mithan and without holding an expensive wedding celebration. Such a marriage is referred to as *tado-hale*, a wife married in this manner has a status different from that of a ***nieda*** wife, and may be passed on to another man without damaging the husband's prestige or arousing the wrath of the gods. Should she elope the lover can satisfy the husband by paying compensation equal to the bride-price originally paid to the wife's parents.

The comparative expenses of ***nieda*** and *tado-hale* marriages can be seen from the following example. Dungu Tamin of Rute-Hate, a village in the upper Kamla valley, had three wives. The first he married by ***nieda*** rites, and his father provided ten mithan as bride-price and ten more mithan to be slaughtered over the years in the course of negotiations and exchanges of visits. With the bride Tamin received two strings of valuable white and blue beads (*sutar*) and three named Tibetan bells (*maje*). His second wife was married by *tado-hale* and he himself gave a bride-price of five mithan and slaughtered two. The bride brought one string of *sutar* beads and several small valuables. For the third wife he gave only two mithan and she brought no valuables with her.

Marriage by capture, often with the girl's consent, is also practised and is known as *nim-möli* or *lut*. Often a bride-price is subsequently paid and the girl's parents may then even give her a dowry of beads and Tibetan bells if they are reasonably affluent.

Among the Miris of the lower Kamla valley I have come across a rather unusual type of marriage in which the initiative lies entirely with the girl. Thus the daughter of Guch Tamar, a prominent man of Chemir, was a woman of independent mind who remained unlonger than it is usual among Miris. Living under

her parents roof she enjoyed a great deal of independence, cultivating a *jhum* of her own and cooking her food on a separate hearth. Year after year she had called upon the men of the village to help her fell the jungle, and with the surplus of several years' crops she had bought two mithan and several valuable Tibetan bells. One fine day she went to a nearby settlement to live with a young man who was related to her mother, dispensing in doing so with all formalities. When that settlement became threatened by a tribal feud, the couple sought refuge in Chemir and built a house of their own. To regularize their union and reconcile Guch Tamar the husband paid him four mithan as a bride-price.

I have heard of similarly independent Nishi girls who postponed marriage until they had accumulated sufficient cattle, valuables and even slaves to be able to dispense with a dowry and marry a man of their choice, without depending on their parents' or brothers' initiative. Yet such cases of self-sufficient and self-willed young women are rare, and most Nishi girls abide by their father's choice of a husband.

While normally a formal marriage by *nieda* rites precedes other unions, this is not necessarily so, and some men acquire their first wives by capture or *tado-hale*, and perform a *nieda* marriage only when they are well established. The following example will demonstrate this:

Chaglo Tara of Mingö village in the upper Kamla valley had four wives when I visited his house in 1945. His first wife was Rei Yemak whom he had captured by force, though subsequently he paid her parents ten mithan as a bride-price. His second wife, Rei Yabin, had been "bought" by *tado-hale* for one female mithan. The acquisition of his third wife, Taia Nyame, was more complicated. Tara had given two mithan into the care of Döm Tarak of a nearby village. These two mithan were robbed by Have Taka on account of a quarrel between Have Taka and Taio Totu. In retaliation Döm Tarak captured Taio Tara's youngest wife Nyame and gave her to Chagla Tara in compensation for his mithan which had been captured while in Döm Tarak's care. At the time of my visit Nyame stayed peacefully in Tara's house irrespective of the fact that she had been forcibly abducted from her original husband, who lived in a village only two days' journey from Mingö. Only Chaglo Tara's fourth marriage was a *nieda* celebrated with full rites. His father had paid over a long time a bride-price of 23 mithan for Nilö

Yadam, the daughter of Nilö Tasser, an important man of the Sipi valley, several days' journey to the north of Mingö. Tasser gave his daughter a dowry of ten Tibetan bells and four bracelets each worth one mithan, and he sometimes visited her in Mingö and thereby kept alive the close tie with his son-in-law, an important aspect of every *nieda* relationship which differs fundamentally from the casual relations between families connected only by a *tado-hale* union.

A kinsman of Tara by name of Chaglo Tagla who lived in Bidak, a day's walk from Mingö, had ten wives and with the exception of the second wife married by *nieda* and one wife acquired by capture, all others had been married by *tado-hale* and come from seven different villages. They all shared Tagla's large house which sheltered also his six slaves and their wives and children.

Polygamy

The accumulation of large numbers of wives by rich men is an aspect of Nishi and Hill Miri society which distinguishes them from most of the ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh and significantly from their closest tribal neighbours the Apa Tanis, few of whom have more than one wife. For the Nishis it is a matter of prestige to add as many women as possible to their household. Sexual attraction to young girls, obtainable at a price, is probably the least important motive for filling a great long-house with more and more women. The prime incentive used to be the desire for security and political influence. In the days before the establishment of a settled administration a Nishi rightly argued that the larger was his network of marriage alliances the smaller was the chance of a plot being hatched against him in secret, for preparations for a raid were likely to leak to some of his kinsmen spread over a large area. Even if kinsmen were not prepared to take up arms in defense of their in-laws, they could send warnings and thereby remove the element of surprise essential in Nishi feuding for the success of a raid.

At a time when the entire Kiyi and upper Panior valleys were terrorized by two war-leaders of the Likha area, I was told that no combination of villagers could successfully counter their dominance because the two brothers had built up so large a network of alliances that any contemplated move against them would have been exposed.

For political purposes even elderly men married young women if such marriages promised to strengthen their position in the power-

game, and the fathers of girls were tempted by large bride-prices and the prestige of an alliance with a prominent family. But what about the feelings of the young wives? Their position in a large and prosperous household was not necessarily unpleasant. The work was divided between several women and with the comings and goings of guests there was usually a fair amount of gossip and joking over mugs of millet beer. An old man was likely to have several adult sons living in the house, and these inherited ultimately not only his fortune but also his wives. Nishis saw little harm in a son's anticipating his privileges and deputizing for an aging father who took perhaps only a platonic interest in a young wife married for political ends. Such a veiled form of polyandry made for contentment among young wives and prevented the development of tensions within the giant household.

While a son's discreet affair with a young wife of his father was tolerated because after his father's death he was in any case entitled to her sexual favours, a very different view was taken of a young slave who formed an attachment to a wife of his owner. I have heard of rich men who killed slaves for seducing their wives, and as it needs two for adultery one can only assume that some wives of polygamous old men were not averse to adventures with their husbands' young slaves, if there were no sons with whom they could legitimately consort.

A Nishi's right to inherit his father's wives except his own mother is incontestable, for the bride-prices were paid out of the family's joint funds. Should a widow want to marry some one outside the kin-group, this can be arranged if the suitor is prepared to pay a bride-price to the late husband's heirs. Indeed I have seen a boy, no more than twelve years old, staking a claim to his deceased father's young widow. She had remarried and her brothers had wrongly "eaten" the bride-price paid by the second husband. The young boy stated quite seriously that he was entitled to the woman or at least to her price. Though nobody thought that he could successfully press his claim, the elders present considered his demand quite legitimate.

In theory there is no limit to the number of wives a Nishi or Hill Miri might marry. Men with ten wives were and still are not unusual, but the largest number of wives of one man I have heard of were the twenty wives of Taba Tasser of Sekhe village in the Panior valley. His numerous sons constituted in the 1940s the main

male poplution of the villages of Sekhe and Yoijat. Even as late as 1980 there was a prominent Hill Miri of Raga who had at that time just acquired his fourteenth wife. It was said that he had "bought" the young girl for his son, but when the son suddenly died he had taken her as an additional wife for himself.

The system of allocating to the wives separate hearths and granaries and allowing them to cultivate and mess on their own seems to minimize friction in large Nishi households. Though the senior wife who shares her husband's hearth enjoys the highest status the junior wives are not under her control and unlike in Hindu polygamous families there seems to be little jealousy between either the wives or the children from different wives. The senior wife is the one the husband married first, though the marriage may have been by capture. A second wife, even if married by *nieda*, can never become senior to the first wife installed at her husband's hearth, and this rule constitutes a certain inconsistency with the general idea that a woman's status depends on the manner in which she was joined to her husband's household.

Despite the Nishis' tendency to violence and aggression they also evince a remarkable ability to accommodate different interests and this may have been fostered by life in huge undivided halls where people have to practise tolerance if they are not to come to blows.

The following two cases, separated by a span of 35 years, may illustrate this tolerance and ability to make the best of awkward situations:

The first of the two cases occurred in the Hill Miri village o Chemir. There the second wife of Guch Tamar married to him by *tado-hale* had fallen in love with a new settler from a distant village on the Khru river. Her husband had asked her to lend the newcomer a hand with his cultivation without foreseeing that she would be captivated by the handsome stranger's charm. The affair between the two came soon to light, and instead of avenging the adultery Guch Tamar invited his wife's lover to come and live in his house. He allotted a separate hearth to the couple and they became his dependants. This tolerant attitude was well rewarded, for by relinquishing his marital rights he not only retained the woman as a worker but gained the services of the man who replaced him in the role of husband.

A similar case occurred recently in a large Nishi house in Yazali. There Taba Tat, a prominent old man and former government

interpreter (*kotoki*), had built a large long-house when he moved from the hill-village of Potin into the Panior valley. He betrothed a daughter from one of his ten wives, then a small child, to a man of Nich clan who had migrated from the distant Palin valley to Yazali, where he sought the patronage of Taba Tat. When the stranger and potential son-in-law came to stay in Taba Tat's house he got involved with his fiancee's mother, a youthful woman closer to him in age than his child-bride was. Presumably frustrated by having an old and much married husband, she fell for the stranger and when the liaison became known Taba Tat acted very much as Guch Tamar had done in similar circumstances. He cancelled the betrothal of his small daughter and gave the new-comer the wife whom he had seduced on the condition that he joined his household and worked for him as a dependant.

Polygamy on the scale practised by Nishis combined with a considerable independence of women is certainly not conducive to sexual possessiveness and it would seem that in disputes over women it is the fear of losing face and prestige which makes a man fight for the retention of a woman whose price he has paid rather than any great emotional attachment.

Disputes over women are nevertheless numerous and in the following section I shall quote case histories which show that the rules governing the betrothal of daughters and acquisition of wives are frequently broken, and that in past years killings and feuds often resulted from breaches of promise, the elopement of engaged girls or the abduction of married women.

Disputes Arising from Marriage Cases

The most fateful of disputes resulting from a breach of promise began some three generations ago and involved men of Likha clan of Puli village and men of Taba clan settled then at Lichi in the Panior valley. Likha Piji gave then 60 mithan to Taba Takha in advance payment for two of his daughters and a valuable Tibetan bell. But Taba Takha defaulted on the deal and the Likha men blamed all the Taba people nursing their grievance for many years. When I heard of the case Taba Takha's son Tem was an old man of about seventy, and the Taba people on whom the Likha men took revenge were men in their middle thirties and forties. In 1939, some fifty years after the original quarrel, the descendants of Likha Piji raided Lichi, a small settlement of four houses in which Taba

Nieri, a descendant of Taba Takha was living. There were about thirty raiders led by Likha Horku and Take. The raiders caught the villagers asleep, entered the houses and killed eleven adult men, and took sixteen people captive most of them women and children. Twelve of these were subsequently ransomed, but when I visited the area in 1944 four of the captives were still kept as slaves by Likha men. Their ultimate release was only made possible by the fact that my party was accompanied by a section of Assam Rifles. The horrific raid on Lichi was symptomatic of the enmity which could grow up between groups who at one time must have been friendly enough to enter into negotiations about a marital alliance.

Another dispute involving violence arose also from a failure to honour the terms of the arrangement about a marriage. Taba Taji of Gae village had agreed to give his daughter in marriage to Pei Boga of Pei village for a bride-price of five mithan. But as Pei Boga failed to give the mithan Taji withheld the girl. One day, when her mother visited Pei, Boga captured her and kept her in his house, saying he would release her only if Taji gave him their daughter. Under duress the girl was handed over to Boga without proper marriage rites whereupon the mother was released. By the time I recorded the case no bride-price had been paid, and it is likely that Taba Taji's kinsmen will brood over Boga's treachery until they see a chance of recouping their loss.

In the old days it was not unusual for a man to default on the payment of a bride-price which had been agreed during the negotiations leading up to a marriage, and conversely the father of a girl might have received the payment for his daughter and then accepted a better offer from another suitor. Thus Taba Rimpum of Gae village complained that Techi Rengsho of Köbe village had promised to give him his daughter and had accepted already eight mithan and a great quantity of cloth, but had in the end married his daughter to Toko Tei without returning the mithan. He pleaded that for the time being he had no mithan to give, even though it was known that he had received mithan also from Toko Tei. In this case too retaliation for the deceit was likely to be in store for Techi Rengsho.

Fraud in marriage deals could take different shapes, including the substitution of a girl other than the promised bride. Taba Serbe of Potin had such an experience. He had agreed with Licha Togur and Licha Take of Kirum to pay them 15 mithan as price for a girl

of their household on the understanding that she would be of good status. When the brothers brought the bride to Potin Serbe slaughtered a big mithan for the wedding feast, and it was only afterwards that he discovered the deception of which he had become a victim. The girl introduced as Licha Yopu was not the daughter of one of the big men of Licha Togur's kingroup, but the daughter of one of Togur's slaves. Thereupon Serbe sent her back and demanded to be given either a girl of good status or in place of the bride a valuable Tibetan bell. He said that he would not be content with the return of the mithan he had already paid because his prestige would be damaged if he withdrew ignominiously from the bargain.

Occasionally a marriage may also be used to settle a quarrel between two families. Thus Mörbem Taru of Panyo village on the upper Selu river gave his daughter to Dungu Tar of Rute-Hate to placate him over the capture of his father, whom Mörbem had kept prisoner in his houses in connection with an old feud. By marrying his daughter by *tado-hale* to his old enemy and asking for a bride-price of only one mithan, Mörbem had buried the quarrel. I met him in Rute-Hate where he was visiting his daughter obviously sure of a friendly reception by Dungu Tar.

It will be noted that in all these cases there was never any question of the suitability of the prospective spouses, and that girls were traded in the same way as mithan or Tibetan bells. Even girls captured in war could be kept as wives if they were of respectable family background, but men of good status did not marry slave girls nor kept them as concubines.

In view of the small regard for a girl's wishes in the arrangements of her marriage it is not surprising that many young wives elope from the house of an unwanted husband. Sometimes they succeed in staying with a man of their choice, but there are also cases when such a wife is forcibly brought back to her husband's house.

A case illustrating the way in which such cases may be settled nowadays when the raiding of houses and the capture of people are no longer acceptable methods to press a claim, occurred in 1979 in the Raga Circle.

A Hill Miri girl from a village in the lower Kamla valley was married to her mother's younger brother as his fourth wife. She objected to be a man's fourth wife and probably did not fancy her mother's brother as a husband. So she ran away to Kicho and entered the

house of a man of Maga clan. The Maga people were prepared to shelter her and insisted that they had no obligation to return her to her husband as she had come to them of her own accord. But her husband and her kinsmen objected violently, and whereas thirty years ago they might have raided the house where the girl had found refuge, they now appealed to the Circle Officer at Raga. The Maga people also came to Raga and acrimonious debates raged for several days. Finally the Maga people brought a mithan which they offered as compensation for the husband. But he and his supporters refused to accept it. The quarrel became so heated that the Circle Officer asked for police to stand by in the event of an outbreak of fighting. The Circle Officer, himself a tribal from a neighbouring region and well acquainted with tribal sentiment, proposed the following compromise: "As the girl had been formally married she must be given back to her husband and stay for at least one night in his house. He was not to put her in stocks, and if she did not stay but returned to the Maga people then compensation should be negotiated."

The girl was returned to her husband but did not leave his house the next day, for he had placated her by the proposal that she should be taken over by one of his kinsmen who had only one other wife. The man in question lived in the foothills near Dulungmukh and the girl was taken to his village. However this solution did not please the girl either, for she objected to any polygamous marriage. Finally she went to live with another man of her husband's clan who was a bachelor and pleased to accept her as his wife. By the time I heard of the case she was staying—presumably contentedly—with this man. The original husband did not object to this arrangement, for his face was saved by the fact that she had been passed on to a kinsman of his, and the Maga people who had acted as the girl's protectors could not interfere either.

In past years Nishis dealt rather differently with obligations arising from a bride's or wife's defection, and one of the most bizarre turns in such a case I observed in 1944 in Talo village. In the wake of our expedition Nishis from several foothill villages had come to Talo in the hope of realizing ancient claims which they had not dared to press until the first intervention of a government party in tribal affairs bolstered their courage. One of the claimants was Pil Leji of Selsemchi, who had a perfectly valid though unpromising claim on Tod Rekha. The latter was an impoverished Nishi who lived

then in an Apa Tani village. Many years earlier Pil Leji had given his sister with a large dowry to Tod Rekha on the understanding that in return he would receive Tod Rekha's sister in marriage. But the marriage never took place, for when Tod Rekha took his sister, decked with the ornaments of her dowry, to Selsemchi they halted on the way in a friendly village, and there the girl met Gem Pumbo, one of the leaders of the war-like village of Kirum, and ran away with him. Gem Pumbo subsequently promised that he would properly marry the girl, but never paid a bride-price to Tod Rekha. Now, many years later Pil Leji, whose sister was still Tod Rekha's wife, claimed either a bride-price of at least two mithan for his sister, or a girl of Tod Rekha's family, preferably Tod Rekha's grown-up daughter. But Tod Rekha, who was heavily indebted to Apa Tanis, was unwilling to dispose of his only asset. Instead he offered to everybody's astonishment the wife of his own son to Pil Leji. No one enquired what the woman or her husband would say, but privately I was told that Tod Rekha's son would be glad to be rid of a girl whom he did not like and never slept with, and Pil Leji had no other chance of getting anything else out of the poverty-stricken Tod Rekha.

Another and equally involved case of elopement with a quite different outcome had happened a few months before my arrival on the scene.

Yela, the young daughter of Licha Temi, a wealthy man of Kirum, was betrothed to Likha Tako of Müdo, but before the marriage could be solemnized she eloped with Gami Bayam, a poor young man of her own village. He knew that he could not possibly pay the bride-price the girl's father was sure to demand, and so the young couple decided to run away. They sought shelter in Bator, a village about two days' walk from Kirum, where Bayam's sister was married to Bari Totum. The father of the girl at first did not know where his daughter and her lover were hiding. So he approached Chigi Nime, an Apa Tani priest known as an experienced negotiator, with the request to locate the girl and then get her back. Chigi Nime ultimately heard from other Apa Tanis that the lover had found refuge in Bari Totum's house in Bator village. He then sent messengers to Bari Totum to find out what price the latter would demand for giving up the couple. The negotiators agreed on a price consisting of seven mithan, two Tibetan bells, two long *dao*, one silk cloth and one Apa Tani cloth, and several pieces of meat. Chigi Nime was foolish enough to advance the entire price and to get

the couple delivered and brought to his own house in Duta. From there Licha Temi's men collected the couple, saying that Temi would refund to Chigi Nime his entire expenditure plus a commission. In reality, however, Temi never paid up, and Chigi Nime had to bear the entire cost of the operation.

When the couple was brought to Kirum, the girl's father sent them to Likha Tako who took Yela as his wife but kept Gami Bayam in his own house as a slave—rather surprisingly perhaps as the former lovers were now in the same house with all the opportunities for clandestine meetings this may have involved.

In most disputes over women the value of bride-prices and the prestige of men unwilling to give up a claim seem to be more important considerations than the feelings of the men and particularly the women concerned. Yet there are exceptions and a case which occurred in 1980 proves that emotions of passionate attachment are not foreign to tribesmen. The rather pathetic story of a young husband's desperate attempts to regain his wife came to my knowledge when I was camping at Raga.

Take Takya, a Nishi of Nyapin, had a young and pretty wife. He worked as contractor at Itanagar, and took his wife with him to the capital. The leader of his gang of labourers was a man from Mingo, which was also the wife's home village. The two fell in love and eloped together. The husband who was passionately fond of his wife, believed that they had gone to Assam, and set out to trace them. For this purpose he took Rs 7,000 in cash with him, but when he stayed in a lodging house in North Lakhimpur the whole amount was stolen. Already unsettled by his wife's defection and enraged by the theft of his money, for which he blamed the owner of the lodging house, he set light to some drums of kerosene in the courtyard and the whole house went up in flames. He was arrested and spent the next 6½ months in jail.

When he was released he continued his search, and having heard a rumour that his wife and her lover had gone north, came to Raga and told the Circle Officer of his misfortune. The latter advised him to marry another wife and claim compensation from the abductor. But Take Takya insisted that no other woman could replace the wife whom he loved, and continued his search by going to Daporijo.

In the meantime, the Circle Officer, who took a most sympathetic interest in the unfortunate man's plight, heard through the network of village headmen that the fugitive couple were staying at

Radum, not far from their home-village Mingö. He sent for them but they refused to come to Raga, and sent word that the husband should come to Radum to discuss the case. Meanwhile Take Takya had returned to Raga, but did not dare to go to Radum without the support of his kinsmen, fearing that he might be kidnapped by the people of Mingo.

On the insistence of the Circle Officer, the elders of Radum guaranteed his safety, and when I had to leave Raga he had gone to Radum. The outcome of the case was then still uncertain, but it was clear that the husband was not interested in compensation, but only wanted to get his wife back.

A typical attitude of Nishis and Hill Miris to marital complications is the relative indifference of husbands to the temporary infidelity of a wife, provided they can ultimately regain possession of her. They may take revenge on the lover who has blemished their honour by seducing the wife, but the latter would not be rejected or physically punished provided she returned to the husband's house. In this respect Nishis behave very differently from Wanchu chiefs, who were known to have killed adulterous couples by drowning, even though Wanchu society was otherwise permissive in sexual matters.

While a wife's adultery in no way reflects on the honour of her parents and brothers, her final defection from her husband and return to her parents creates for the latter considerable economic difficulties. They have to return the entire bride-price, unless they can compensate the husband by giving him another daughter to take the place of the defecting wife. In addition they may have to give the hus band one large Tibetan bell, and by doing this they retain the affinal relationship known as *nin-orum.*

If a wife elopes with another man, husband and parents join in the attempt to bring her back, and in past times they threatened the seducer with raiding him unless he gave the woman up. If he relinquished her he had to slaughter a mithan as a peace offering.

In the event of a betrothed girl refusing to go ahead with the marriage rites, because she prefers another man, the parents have to return any part of the bride-price already paid, and they will then demand a price from the man whom their daughter wants to marry, or with whom she may already have eloped.

The return of part of the bride-price may be demanded also if a young wife dies within one year of the marriage. An alternative

to this repayment is the replacement of the deceased wife by one of her sisters who can be given to the widower without incurring the expenditure of a new wedding.

With the introduction of school education among Nishis and Hill Miris in recent years there have been some changes in the manner in which marriages are arranged. Educated boys do not favour marriage by capture and where a Youth Organization is active, such as in the Yazali area, there is a move to abolish this type of marriage altogether. If a girl is captured against her will she can appeal to the Youth Organization and the young men will try to rescue her. School education for girls has also raised the marriage age. Girls going to school are rarely married, and if a girl was married in childhood she is unlikely to be sent to school. Hence there are no married girls even in large schools such as the one at Yazali; a middle school with 200 pupils of both sexes. Educated girls, and following their example even some girls who have not been to school, now resist attempts to marry them to men who have already several wives. Another practice which is on the way out is the marriage of small boys with older girls for political reasons. Among the educated there is also less insistence on high bride-prices, and if a boy wants to marry a particular girl without expecting a large dowry, her parents' demand for mithan may also be modest.

Not surprisingly all such modern developments are making only small inroads into old established customs and are slow to penetrate the less accessible regions. There are still rich men with many wives and even some young politicians follow the old practices. Thus an *Anchal Samithi* member of Mintlat with obvious political aspirations has already four wives although he is quite young and reasonably well educated. For the youngest of his wives he paid 12 mithan corresponds today to about Rs 20,000.

For a politician there is also an incentive to marry at least two wives: one to stay in his village and look after his land, and another more educated wife to be with him at the capital Itanagar and act as hostess. Thus Tada Talang, the Education Minister of Arunachal Pradesh in 1980 had one wife in his village at Nyapin and lived in Itanagar in modern style with a most accomplished and exceedingly attractive second wife, one of the numerous daughters of Taba Tat (see pages 71-72).

The Position of Women

Considering the way in which many Nishi and Miri girls used to be married to men they had hardly met without being even asked for their consent to the match, one would think that the women of these tribes are oppressed household drudges with no will of their own. A closer familiarity with Nishi families, however, leads one to a very different view. In the course of my travels among Nishis and Miris I have met many women who were clearly forceful personalities and at least equal to their husbands in the management of the family's affairs. Outstanding among them was Biku Yama, a Miri *posa*-holder, who in 1945 came to meet me in Chemir to receive her *posa*-payment. She was a widow and apparently the leading personality of Biku, having inherited from her late husband the right to *posa* as well as his position in the village. At that time I was preparing an exploratory journey up the Kamla valley and was in dire need of porters prepared to accompany us into potentially unfriendly country. Biku Yama declared that she herself would accompany us, my wife being the first white woman she had ever set eyes on, and she shamed several Miri headmen to do the same. She had clearly sufficient authority to persuade some men of her village to enlist as porters. Throughout the journey she was a tower of strength and greatly helped in dispelling the suspicions of villagers unaccustomed to contact with outsiders.

Another impressive woman was the wife of Toko Bat of Talo village, whom her somewhat elusive husband sometimes used as envoy when he did not want to commit himself in dealings with officers of government because he preferred to sit on the fence in disputes with different parties. His wife, a woman with an enormous goitre but great self-assurance, discharged the task of go-between well enough to keep us in a good mood without exposing her husband's double dealings.

It was not unusual for Nishi women to go on minor trading trips to nearby villages, even though their sex did not necessarily protect them against being kidnapped, a hazard facing almost any Nishi who ventured away from his or her home-ground.

I have mentioned already the economic independence enterprising unmarried women can enjoy, and in the case of such single women it is understood that they can freely dispose of all the property which they have acquired by their own efforts.

Yet a married woman, and particularly the senior wife of a

wealthy man, has a considerable hold on the valuables belonging to the family. There may well be an underlying idea that many of the precious objects, such as beads, silver bracelets, bell metal plates and cups, and even certain Tibetan bells are more the property of women than of men. For they change hands mainly by being brought into a family with a bride, and are always in the keeping of women, the husband sometimes not even knowing where they are hidden. In the days of feuds and raiding houses provided no safe place for the storage of valuables, and precious articles were often buried in the forest, where they were secure from raiders. Though customs may have differed from place to place, I was repeatedly told that a husband could not give away or sell any Tibetan bell or valuable string of beads without the consent of his senior wife, whereas a wife was allowed to sell ornaments without her husband's knowledge. Among the innumerable disputes over property which Nishis used to refer to me when I was Assistant Political Officer I do not remember a single case of a husband contesting a deal negotiated by his wife on the grounds that she acted without his knowledge and consent. An indication of the rights of women to certain valuables is the rule that a *maje* which a man received as part of his wife's dowry must after his death go to her son or be given as a dowry to her daughter. It may on no account be given to a son of another wife or form part of the dowry of the daughter of one of her husband's other wives. The high status of a Nishi's senior wife is reflected also in the custom that her daughters fetch larger bride-prices than those of junior wives. There is also a rule that irrespective of birth-order the eldest son of senior wife is a man's principal heir and successor as household-head.

Insofar as the load of work is concerned Nishi women labour probably harder and more continuously than men. Apart from the felling of the forest, which is men's work, women do rather more of the agricultural work, and they are always engaged in household tasks while men spend a great deal of time sitting round the fire, drinking millet beer, and discussing disputes over trade-deals, bride-prices and the endless claims which used to be passed from generation to generation. In modern times productive activities are probably more equally divided between the sexes. For since feuds, slave-raiding and the capturing of mithan no longer occupy the mind and time of men, they have learnt to engage in contract work and wage-labour in the employment of government. There has been less

change in the work of the women. They continue to bear the main burden of agricultural work, perform most household chores, collect and carry fire-wood, and in some villages make pots and weave cotton cloth. The latter activities, however, are diminishing in importance as bazaar cloth and industrially produced pots, pans and buckets replace the home-made articles.

Schooling for girls is of too recent a date to have produced a class of educated Nishi and Miri girls who compete on a large scale with men for clerical and office jobs. But in nursing and school-teaching the first Nishi girls have already made an appearance and within a few years more Nishi and Miri girls with educational qualifications are likely to enter the job market.

6

Ceremonial Exchanges

We have seen that one of the aspects of Nishi and Miri marriage is the establishment of lasting friendly relations between the contracting parties. For these parties stand subsequently in a *ninorum* relationship and are under a moral obligation to give each other support in an emergency. In past years when raids and kidnapping were the order of the day, the network of alliances created by marriage-relations was of supreme importance, for in the absence of any authority system affording the individual protection against violence and aggression each family had to build up its own defenses against potential enemies, and this could be done only by collecting as many friends and supporters as possible. The conclusion of marriage-alliances was the most obvious way of doing this, but the obligations created between affines were no more solid than the marriage on which they were based. While the giving of a daughter in marriage was intended to forge a firm bond with the son-in-law and his kin-group this ploy could also back-fire if the spouses fell out and even more so if the wife, succumbing to the attraction of another man gave her husband the slip, and let her parents face the wrath of their duped son-in-law. The large investment of mithan, supplies for the feeding of guests at numerous ceremonial visits, and of valuables given as dowry rests thus on the slender foundation of a young woman's sense of responsibility and fidelity to a husband for whom she has perhaps little affection.

The instability of marriages and unpredictability of human emotions imperiling the most carefully laid plans may well have induced the Nishis to seek another and more durable symbol to which they could anchor their network of alliances without risking the turning of friendship into resentment and enmity. If a young girl handed by one potential ally to the other was too volatile a pawn, a more immutable though equally valuable gift had to be

found whose transfer could create a more durable link of friendship between the two partners.

Miraculously such an item was found in the shape of Tibetan bells (*maje*) enormously valuable in Nishi eyes though of no practical use. The transfer of such a bell was accompanied by ceremonies and rituals resembling in many ways those of a *nieda* wedding.

We do not know how it happened that the tribes of the Subansiri region invested small bells of Tibetan origin with mystical qualities and considered them as the creation of gods and not of human artisans. In Tibet small bronze bells, fitted with brass or silver handles, often in the shape of a *vajra* (thunderbolt) are among the paraphernelia of Buddhist ritual and found in the position of nearly every lama or monk to be rung in the course of prayers and ritual chants. The Subansiri tribes, however, are unaware of the nature of these bells as musical instruments, and none of the *maje* in their possession have either handle or clapper. Yet, the Nishis evince a keen interest in the ornamentation found on most of these bells, and assess their value according to the kind and extent of embellishment. Believed to be the work of supernatural beings they are greatly cherished and handed down from generation to generation. Each *maje* is considered unique, has a distinctive name, and is believed to be either male or female.

There is no indication as to the process by which these bells originating in the sphere of Buddhist ritual were transferred to the tribal value system. While in Tibet they were of modest monetary value unless the handle was of precious metal, Nishis are known to have paid for one of these bells without either handle or clapper and hence virtually a torso, as much as ten mithan costing now up to Rs 16,000. The only comparable change in the significance and ceremonial role of material objects taken over from a different cultural sphere are perhaps the Chinese porcelain jars and plates which the hill-tribes of Borneo and the Philippines use for ritual payments and symbols of wealth without being aware of their origin. The Nishis too value a *maje* which is neither useful nor of great aesthetic appeal, solely because the ownership of a specific named *maje* lends its owner prestige and is thus an important status symbol.

The Nishis recognize several categories of *maje* and within each

of these there are subdivisions with separate characteristics. The three main types are:

lam worth about half a mithan
mokh worth between one and five mithan
ripi worth up to ten mithan

The Nishis have separate terms for the various ornaments of *maje*, which are in relief and consist sometimes of rows of Tibetan letters the meaning of which is unknown to the Nishis.

The types of ornaments indicate whether a *maje* is male or female. Thus certain straight, rib-like lines described as *maglo* occur only in male *maje*.

The most valuable *maje* have individual names but it is not known how these names originated, and those I was told did not seem to have any specific meaning. Only *maje* worth at least three mithan can be used for a ceremonial transfer by which a *nin-asa* relationship is established. Such a relationship is of the same nature as the *nin-orum* relationship created by a marriage.

The conclusion of a *nin-asa* relationship may begin with an incidental visit of a man to a village where he has no ceremonial friend. If he meets there a man whom he likes he may propose to enter into a friendship agreement and suggests at first an exchange of *dao*. He will then invite the man to visit him in his house and promises to kill a pig, in return of which the potential friend may give him a cloth. These small gifts are gradually increased until by an exchange of a *maje* for mithan and other valuable a full *nin-asa* pact is concluded.

At the sale of a valuable *maje* the price is usually paid in instalments, and when the purchaser finally comes to fetch it, a rite known as *dapo*—the same term as that used for a peace-treaty—is performed near the house, but the *maje* will be handed over inside the seller's house. Then both seller and purchaser go to the latter's house and at the rest places lying on the way they erect wooden *dapo* posts. No animals are sacrificed at these posts, but leaf-bundles containing rice are tied to the posts, and a priest of the seller's village accompanies the party and chants at the *dapo* posts and also on the way. The purchaser's priest awaits the party in the latter's house, and when the procession bringing the *maje* arrives there several mithan have to be sacrificed. For on that

occasion the purchaser has to perform a *yülo* rite for Doni-Sü and other gods. Such a rite is performed also at a *nieda* wedding which shares many features with the transfer of *maje*.

If a man has started paying for a *maje* after agreeing to purchase it, he cannot withdraw from the bargain. In the event of his becoming impoverished after paying, say, five mithan and being unable to complete the transaction, he cannot claim the return of the five mithan. But if the seller is well disposed towards him, he may agree to give him a smaller *maje* instead, and in this way both parties save their face.

Only once did I have the opportunity to watch one of the ceremonies connected with the transfer of a *maje*, and the solemnity of the proceedings expressed the importance attached by the tribesmen to the conclusion of a *maje dapo* as such a pact is called. It was the afternoon of 27 March 1945 when a large group of men and women from Malempo arrived in Rute-Hate, a village in the upper Kamla valley. Chugdu Tania, a young man of Mingö who had recently settled at Rute-Hate, was entering into a bond of friendship with Böki Tari, by selling him a *maje* called Rusi, which he had inherited from his father. Böki Tari had already paid two mithan, a silk cloth and other valuables, and was bringing now a mithan and a mithan calf as well as a large quantity of beer and meat. The party arrived shortly before sunset and most of the villagers of Rute-Hate watched the arrival of the procession. Ahead walked two men leading the mithan whose horns were adorned with long streamers of bamboo shavings, as well as a half grown mithan calf. Next came a priest in ceremonial robes and a line of women, each carrying a basket with two bamboo vessels filled with beer or a basket full of meat. Behind them came the men, all carrying spears in addition to the Tibetan swords, and among them the purchaser of the bell, Böki Tari, wearing an impressive head-dress made of yak's hair. Another priest, chanting prayers as he walked, brought up the rear of the procession.

The mithan were tied up outside Tania's house and the visitors went inside. They sat down by the hearths withour formality, the men in one group and the women in another. The two priests paced up and down the long room, chanting and waving their bamboo whisks. Their songs were in praise of the bell Rusi, moulded by gods and cherished by generations of proud possessors,

the bell which they had come to collect from its present owner. They called upon the spirits of the house and the locality begging them to show favour to the guests. Then they purified the food, sprinkling it with beer, and prayed: "May the food and drink be wholesome, may none who partake of the feast suffer pains in stomach or belly; may all eat and drink, and then depart happily."

Not until the priests had touched the vessels of millet-beer with their bamboo whisks, and taken a gourd ladle with beer to pour on the mithan and the ground, was the drink dealt out. This was not done by the host whose household members had prepared the beer, but by the wife of Böki Tari. The beer brought by Tari's party was to be drunk only the following day before the *maje* was to be solemnly handed over.

In buying the bell Rusi from the young Chugdu Tania, Böki Tari, whose two grown up sons had accompanied him, forged another link in a net of ritual friendship pacts and marriage alliances which covered already a large part of the surrounding country, extending over nine villages situated in a roughly circular area with a diameter of some 25 miles.

The numerous visits which precede the transfer of a bell serve an important purpose. During these visits, each of which involves lavish entertainment, the families of the two prospective allies become acquainted and individual attachments may spring up under the mantle of ceremonial friendship.

One might think that nowadays when there are no more feuds and raids, and security is assured by government, there is no more need for alliances aimed at mutual protection, friendship-pacts based on the transfer of a *maje* might hence have become superfluous. This, however, is not so and in 1980 I was told that *maje* are still being ceremoniously transferred and *dapo* rites performed by the parties to the deal.

Most Nishis declare that *maje* are the work of supernatural beings, but that they do not know where they originally came from. Yet, there is a story explaining the production of *maje* and this I was told by Kop Teni, a very knowledgeable Nishi who lived in the plains village of Rangajan near North Lakhimpur and was hence in touch with many people of other than Nishi stock. The story runs as follows:

"The maker of all *maje* was Loma. He worked only at night

and remained totally limp at day time. He lived alone and had no bones in his body but consisted only of flesh and skin.

"When Loma was born his father Teni saw that he had no bones and wanted to throw him away. But at midnight the child said: 'You must not discard me. I have come for a special work. The smell of *nia* and *nigin* [two alloys contained in *maje*] has come into my nostrils, and the gods have called me. I must go to them.'

"Teni agreed and Loma asked his father to put him into a *nia-dudu*, a boat-like vessel made of bronze, and leave him there. Teni complied with this request and placed Loma into a trough of bell-metal. There he started catching crickets and lining them up. From the heads he made the reliefs on the top of a *maje*, from their eyes the pattern on the edge of the *maje* and from their antennae the smaller ornamentation. He collected wax to make the models, but no one knows wherefrom Loma got the metal. Teni was very pleased to see his son do such great work, but Loma continued to live in solitude, for any noise of human beings disturbed his work. The best *maje* he made at midnight, and just before dawn he made bell-metal bracelets and other less valuable objects.

"Now Loma no longer makes *maje* and no one knows what has happened to him."

The story, though possibly not entirely of Nishi origin, suggests that there is some realization that *maje* were made by the *cire-perdue* process even though their creation is usually attributed to gods.

While Tibetan bells are the prime objects for the establishment of ceremonial relationships of the *nin-asa* type, other valuables are often exchanged both in the course of visits leading up to the sale of a *maje* as well as with the bride at a *nieda* wedding. Very exceptionally a grand *dapo* rite may be performed on the occasion of the handing-over of both a bride and a valuable *maje*, no doubt in exchange for a very large number of mithan.

In assessing the exceedingly important role of the exchange of valuables and mithan, i.e. moveable property, it must be remembered that in the traditional economic pattern of Nishi society there was no place for individual property rights in land, and wealth consisted hence solely in the possession of *mobilia* such as cattle, ornaments of various kinds and *maje*, whose value

was entirely fictional and unconnected with any practical use to which they could be put.

The instability of traditional Nishi society was largely due to the impermanence of private property, for cattle and valuables could be robbed or destroyed in raids, whereas the wealth of such tribes as the Apa Tanis was largely in land which is immovable and cannot be wrested from its owners by force. Hence Nishis had to build up their wealth and prestige by creating a network of alliances which served them as a shield in an otherwise amorphous and uncoordinated society, while Apa Tanis, living in crowded villages, had no need to *create* a system which offered them security because they were born into social units which afforded them protection and assistance in emergencies.

7

Slavery

Until the formal abolition of slavery in the 1960s slaves, known as *niera*, were among the movable assets of many wealthy Nishis and Hill Miris, as indeed they were among the Apa Tanis. When I first travelled in Nishi and Miri country in 1944 and 1945 I encountered innumerable slaves, and at that time one took it for granted that among the inmates of one of the great long-houses there would be several slaves. They were not necessarily at once recognizable as slaves, for neither in dress or manners was there much difference between a domestic slave and a poor man who had attached himself to a prominent householder, either because he did not have sufficient resources to fend for himself or more likely because his house had been raided and burnt by an enemy, and he had to seek the protection of a patron powerful enough to discourage any further attack.

The position of slaves among the Apa Tanis, which I have discribed in detail in *A Himalayan Tribe: From Cattle to Cash* (1980), was very different from that of Nishi slaves. For though as Apa Tani slave (*mura*) might have been given his freedom by his master, he usually continued as his dependent and remained for ever a member of the *guchi* class with no possibility of raising his status to that of a patrician. In Nishi society mobility has always been much greater, for a person born as a slave could, if freed by his master, rise in the social scale and end up as a respected and wealthy man, whose slave origin was no handicap whatever, provided he was sufficiently energetic to acquire a reasonable amount of wealth. Thus in 1945 I met a one-time slave, Licha Butu by name, who told me himself the story of his rise to wealth and a good social status. He was then living in Talo and I happened to come to his house when he was engaged in the performance of a ritual involving the sacrifice of a mithan. Many guests had gathered for the ceremony and Butu, wearing several valuable necklaces, did the honours of the host. At first I took him

for a prominent man of high status, and was surprised to hear that untlil ten years before he had been a slave in Toko Tekhi's house.

Butu's father had been killed in a drunken quarrel by Licha Tale, who subsequently captured and sold Butu, then a small child, to Toko Tekhi of Talo. There he grew up in his master's house, and when he reached marriageable age Toko Tekhi paid the bride-price for a free-born girl. Even after he had married her he continued to live in Toko Tekhi's house. Though he still worked for his master he and his wife cultivated a *jhum*-field of their own, and sometimes Butu went to the plains of Assam to do wage-labour. With his earnings he bought cloth and beads and these he traded in Talo and other Nishi villages for pigs. From an owner of pigs he became an owner of mithan and finally Tekhi allowed him to build a house of his own. He married three more wives and also bought a slave-girl who together with her free-born husband was living under his roof.

This story illustrates the fluidity of Nishi society in which a slave could become an affluent householder and owner of other slaves, and even a slave still living in his master's house could marry a freeman's daughter.

In the days of warfare many men, women and children captured in raids were either ransomed by their kinsmen, kept as slaves by their captors, or sold to people in no way connected with the feud that had triggered off the raid in which they had lost their freedom. Persons of high status who had been captured in war and sold as slaves might have been socially superior to the man who bought them, and to some extent their status was recognized, and they and their sons were given a good position in their master's household and could partake of the ritual food prepared in the house. But they lost their clan-name and had to adopt that of their owner. The status of a slave was not necessarily hereditary, and the sons of a slave did not automatically become the slaves of the son of their father's owner, but would be regarded as his "brothers". Indeed the son of a slave was sometimes given a big wedding with full rites, and unlike an Apa Tani freed slave such a man was under no obligation to give to the owner's sons any share of the meat of animals killed at sacrifices or in the chase.

If a slave-girl's original clan was of good status, she could be married with full rites (*nieda*), but if she came from slave stock she could not have a big wedding. The owner of a slave was entitled to receive half of the bride-price paid for any daughter of his slave,

but conversely he was expected to pay half of any bride-price paid for girls to the sons of that slave.

The prices paid for slaves in 1945 were up to to four mithan for a good young slave of either sex, while mediocre slaves were sold for one or two mithan, old slaves for one mithan, and small boys and girls also for about one mithan. At that time the value of mithan ranged between Rs 100 and Rs 300.

When purchasing a slave Nishis took various factors into consideration. The most important was the prospect for the slave's integration into the household, and the extent of the likelihood of his or her escape. For a slave who had all the time to be watched was of no use to the owner, and for this reason people preferred to buy slaves whose original home was in a distant area and who were hence unlikely to make a successful escape or to be rescued by their kinsmen. As among the Nishis there is no special class of slaves, as there is among the Apa Tanis, virtually all slaves were originally captured in feuds or the children of such captives. We shall see presently that in many raids men, women and children were taken prisoner, and those who were not ransomed by their kinsmen, often unable to furnish the mithan required, were either kept as slaves or sold to distant villages. The responsibility to free such slaves remained on the conscience of their kinsmen, and in 1944 many Nishis of the foothill villages took the opportunity of my visits to villages where such captives were being held, to attempt the liberation of their relatives, some of whom had been as much as ten years in captivity.

A slave living in a village far from his original home and without any kinsmen nearby to aid his flight rarely succeeded in escaping. For the owner of an escaped slave could claim compensation from anyone who had given the fugitive shelter, and if he felt strong enough he even might have raided the house in which the slave had found refuge. There was a subtle distinction, however, between a slave bought or inherited, and a person captured recently in a raid. The obligation to pay the owner the price of an escaped slave incurred by anyone sheltering him arose only if the fugitive was a slave purchased or obtained by way of inheritance or dowry, whereas no one assisting the escape of a prisoner of war from captivity was under any obligation to indemnify the captor.

If a slave who was purchased died within one year after the sale, the former owner had to refund half of the purchase price, very

much in the same way as even nowadays part of a bride-price has to be returned if a bride dies within a year.

Owners could punish an unruly slave though I heard of few cases of serious punishments being inflicted, except in the case of a slave who had committed adultery with his owner's wife. Under such circumstances a slave might hawe been killed in anger, while the wife was let off with some abuse. Even if greatly provoked by acts of infidelity a Nishi was unlikely to drive away or kill a wife for this would have involved the loss of the investment he had made when paying a large bride-price.

Purchase and capture were not the only ways in which slaves could be acquired. A debtor unable to repay a loan would sometimes have had to join the household of his creditor or that of a man who undertook to pay off his debt. The position of such a bond-servant was hardly different from that of a domestic slave. Moreover slaves were sometimes given as part of a dowry. Whereas Apa Tanis were not supposed to have sexual relations with their female slaves, on the ground that such women counted as members of the owner's clan and intercourse with them would have amounted to clan-incest. Nishis and Hill Miris, though also incorporating slaves into the owner's clan did not use this argument, and there were many cases of girls originally purchased as slaves being taken on as secondary wives of their owners.

A concrete example may illustrate the various circumstances under which slaves used to be inducted into a man's household. Thus in the house of Chaglo Tagla of Bidak village there were, in addition to ten wives, the following slaves and dependants:

(1) Tas Tanya of Bidak had come to live in Tagla's house because the latter had bought him a wife; his father had been a free man and independent of Chaglo Tagla.

(2) Dopum Tai of Dopum village in the upper Khru valley had been purchased from Terü Char for three mithan.

(3) Balu Tachak came to Tagla's house as a dependent (*rügo*) and not as a slave (*niera*). Tachak's father had killed a mithan of Tagla, and instead of giving a price or risking a feud, Tachak came to work for Tagla; he was incidentally a brother of Tagla's eldest wife.

(4) Higi Talo of Par village had come to Tagla because he was too poor to obtain a wife; Tagla bought him a wife, and Talo stayed with him as a slave. His legal position was such that Tagla

could even have sold him.

(5) Higi Chatum had been captured by men of Lomra together with his mother, and both of them were ultimately sold to Tagla. While Chatum was a slave in the house, his mother had become the nineth wife of Tagla.

(6) Muke Tabi of Par village had been captured by men of Hova and then sold to Tagla.

There were also some other people living in Tagla's house who were dependent on him, but were not regarded as slaves. Thus Haman Tara had been bought by Tagla's father from Sojam village, but had later been given his freedom and allowed to cultivate separately. His wife and their sons and daughters were considered as being free, but when the daughters married Tagla was given part of the bride-prices. There was also Sungü Tame, who had come from Raga on account of a quarrel. He was economically independent and only shared Tagla's house.

An incident also concerning Tagla's household demonstrates that a self-willed slave could create a great deal of trouble for his owner. Thus Tagla's father Tachak had bought from a man of Göba village a slave by name of Nilö Tasser, originally from Nilö in the Sipi valley. Nilö Tasser had been staying in Göba and had stolen rice from Tungam Tamar's granary. In retaliation Tamar captured him and sold him for the bargain price of two mithan to Chaglo Tachak. While Nilö Tasser stayed in Tachak's house in Bidak he seduced three women: Meli Kemir, who was a slave of Tagla, Lomra Yapu, who was also a slave-girl, and Rei Yechi, who was a wife of Tagla's brother Tedü. Rei Yechi remained in the house, but no longer as Tedü's wife, but in the role of a slave. Subsequently, Nilö Tasser killed Tagla's brother Toluk in a quarrel, and then escaped to his home-village Nilö, which was henceforth in hostile relations with Bidak.

The keeping of able-bodied men from nearby villages as slaves was always a risky business, and Apa Tanis had numerous unfortunate experiences with Nishi bond-servants who were supposed to work off a debt but escaped to their villages and later used their knowledge of the Apa Tani valley by acting as guides of Nishi raiding parties.

Since the abolition of slavery such difficulties no longer arise, but while people are no more captured with the intention of selling them as slaves, in disputes arising from cases of adultery

or fraud, offenders are sometimes still tied up and kept in stocks until the quarrel has been settled by negotiations. The administration wisely does not interfere with such coercive practices as long as the village-elders (*gaonbura*) approve of them and involve themselves in the settlement of the dispute.

When in the 1960s the government decreed the freeing of slaves and undertook the compensation of slave-owners this measure brought about less change than one might have expected. Raiding for the sake of capturing prisoners and selling them as slaves had already largely come to an end, and many of the still existing slaves chose to stay with their owners because they considered themselves as member of the family and had nowhere else to go. position was henceforth similar to that of other dependents and there was, of course, no longer the possibility of their being sold or given away as part of a dowry.

Even in the 1940s I encountered Nishis who refused to leave the villages and houses in which for years they had lived as slaves after having been captured, even though the intervention of government gave them the choice of returning to their original home villages. For there they had no more friends or close relations, and so they preferred the familiar environment of households in which they felt at home. Nishis seem to have so great a capacity of fitting into almost any community that except when people were detained in stocks, lovers separated or small children torn from their parents, there was perhaps less hardship and suffering than one might be inclined to assume. Some concrete examples will illustrate this point.

While I was camping in Talo village in 1945 Hele of Mai village lodged a complaint against Toko Bat, the leading man of Talo. He claimed that five years previously an epidemic had swept through Talo, Mai and other nearby villages. The Talo men blamed Mai for having brought the disease from the plains of Assam, and in retaliation captured six Mai people who had been working on the fields unaware of any danger. Four of these were subsequently ransomed, but the youngest wife of Mai Höli's late father was in 1945 still in Toko Bat's house, and Mai Höli emboldened by my presence demanded her return to Mai. The women in question argued spiritedly against her stepson's plea for her release, and protested against the suggestion that she should return to Mai. "Why should I leave Talo?" she said. "True I was the daughter of a rich

man, and now I live with one of Toko Bat's slaves; but my former husband is dead and here I am happy."

A similar situation arose shortly afterwards in the village of Bentam. In the wake of our expedition a band of men of Piliapu had come to demand the release of a boy, captured several years earlier in a raid on their village. But the boy, grown into a handsome young man, gave no thanks to his would be liberators. If they were so keen on having him back, he argued, they should have ransomed him years ago. Now it was too late to free him. Bentam had become his home and he had no desire to go to a distant village with kinsmen he hardly knew. He preferred to stay where he was. His relations were furious, for they had suffered a serious loss of face. But in the circumstances they could not carry off the young man by force.

Another one-time captive happy in the village of his captor I encountered in Mingö in the upper Kamla valley. Karr Tanya had been captured by Halung Kompu when he was a young boy. Since then he had married a girl of Mingö and had been helped to set up a household of his own. Sometimes he went to see his brothers in Karr village but he had no wish to go there, an unsettled area where people were always afraid of raids. He told me that Halung Kompa had captured him in the course of a feud with someone else. Now he had made friends with Kompu and the two were planning to combine and raid the man responsible for the dispute which had led to Karr Tanya's capture.

The next chapter will deal in greater detail with the political system—more precisely the general state of lawlessness—which had created the conditions for the frequent capturing of men, women and children, and had hence prepared the ground on which the institution of slavery thrived until its abolition in the 1960s.

8

The Role of Force in a Lawless Society

The traditional authority systems of the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh varied greatly in character and effectiveness. They ranged from the role of hereditary and autocratic chiefs among the Wanchus to the system of councils known as *kebang* prevailing among most of the Adi tribes. In my recent book *A Himalayan Tribe* I described in some detail the role of the village-elders (*buliang*) of the Apa Tanis and the informal councils in the framework of which they exercised their authority. In view of the many cultural features linking Nishis and Hill Miris with Apa Tanis one would expect that similar authority structures might have existed among these groups, but in fact both Nishis and Hill Miris lacked any tradition of legal sanctions, and in the absence of any authority to enforce social controls they can well be described as "lawless". Yet even such an assessment is an over-simplification. For social behaviour was determined by certain conventions which were generally observed even though there was no authority vested in individuals or councils to enforce compliance with such rules of conduct. Examples for such widely accepted but unenforceable rules is the convention already mentioned that part of the bride-price for a girl who dies within a year of her marriage should be refunded and that a man sheltering an escaped slave should indemnify the owner of the fugitive. The sacrosanct status of a go-between (*gingdung*) generally upheld but not supported by any legal authority can be quoted as another example for such a convention.

Throughout the entire Nishi and Miri area there was never a tribal organization capable of maintaining law and order, nor was there any form of established village-government of the type existing in such societies as those of Adis, Wanchus or Nagas. Whether a Nishi settlement consisted of only four or five long-houses or

whether thirty such houses were grouped together on one site, the inhabitants did not form a closely knit social and political unit. Households could join and leave at will, and in some areas there was a continuous though slow movement of people from one settlement to the other, such as I described in Chapter 2 with reference to the Mengo area. In a Nishi settlement there was no one man and no council of family-heads to wield authority over all the villagers. No one had by virtue of his ascribed status any influence over his neighbours. Feuds leading to raids, killings and looting were normally not between village and village but between household and household. Quite often one or two houses in a village were raided and burnt, and the inhabitants carried off captive or even killed, while other households remained unmolested and their members made no attempt to come to the aid of their co-villagers.

Similar attitudes are rare among Indian tribal societies but occur among Ifugaos in the Philippines, where it is not uncommon for a villager to witness an offence committed against a neighbour, such as the theft of a pig or even the kidnapping of a child, without intervening to prevent such an act. All he is likely to do is to demand an indemnity from the offender who by paying it purchases his acquiescence and silence.

As among the Ifugaos, where the individual has no other security than the protection of his kinsmen, who are morally bound to avenge any injury he suffered, the Nishi could only provide a measure of safety for himself and his immediate family by filling his house with as many ablebodied men as possible and by concluding alliances based on marriage or the transfer of a valuable Tibetan bell.

The majority of Nishi and Hill Miri disputes arise from claims and counter-claims relating to trade-deals, and violence was often the outcome of ill-feeling which began with a quarrel over a debt or the failure to pay an agreed price for a bride or valuable object. The chain of events which may lead from a simple trade dispute to raiding, the capture of people and even killings can best be understood from a complicated quarrel in which Toko Tekhi of Talo and Jorum Tacho of Jorum village were involved. Tekhi had arranged to purchase from Tacho a necklace of valuable beads for the price of two mithan. He gave Tacho at once one mithan and received the beads because he promised to deliver the second mithan after a few months, and Tacho had no reason to doubt

Tekhi's credit-worthiness. Yet Tekhi procrastinated the payment though Tacho reminded him several times. Infuriated by Tekhi's dilatory attitude Tacho decided to resort to self-help and sent several young men of his household to locate and catch one of Tekhi's mithan grazing in the forest. As mithan are usually unattended the capture of an animal, perhaps slightly more valuable than the mithan Tekhi owed Tacho, was easily carried out.

As a Nishi considered the capture of one of his mithan almost as great an insult as the kidnapping of a member of his household, Tekhi felt aggrieved and plotted a counter stroke which would restore his prestige. The opportunity came when some of the women of Tacho's household were cutting thatching grass in a lonely valley. Tekhi arranged an ambush and his men caught one young girl and brought her to Talo where she was kept in Tekhi's house with one of her legs fastened in a large log of wood which hampered her movement and prevented her from escaping. Such a captive is usually not badly treated and it is a point of honour that she should be well fed.

When a quarrel reaches the stage at which a kinsman or dependant has been seized, a new situation has arisen and the next step follows a more or less customary course. The captor has no interest in keeping the kidnapping secret, and when the victim's kinsmen learn of the capture they are under the moral obligation to arrange for a ransom. In the above case the girl was ransomed for a relatively modest amount, and this put a temporary stop to the dispute between the two powerful men living in neighbouring villages.

But not all disputes were resolved so easily. The kinsmen of anyone kept prisoner in his captor's house usually commissioned a man reputed for his skill in negotiations to approach the captor and act as mediator. Such a go-between is called *gingdung*. While he was engaged in his mission he was considered inviolable, and despite the general atmosphere of violence and treachery, I never heard of an attack on a *gingdung*. As soon as he had embarked on his mission everybody knew that the relatives of the prisoner were prepared to pay a ransom. Only the amount of the ransom and, of course, the relatives' ability to meet the captor's demands were in doubt. The value of the ransom was determined by several factors. Most important was the status of the captive, but the reason for the capture had also to be taken into account. In the dispute between Tekhi and Tacho only the unlawful abduction of a mithan had to be

avenged, but in more complex cases a ransom had often to cover much greater losses, and the release of the prisoner might even have been conditional on the payment of compensation for the slaying of a kinsman in the distant past.

If both parties were tired of the quarrel, a hostage might have been released on receipt of a modest ransom, and the two opponents might then have met and negotiated a general settlement of their differences including the original claims and the injuries suffered by both sides in having their cattle and kinsmen captured. Such a settlement concluded between the two parties was their own affair and no one else was concerned with it.

Sometimes it happened that a man holding a captive to ransom extracted from his or her kinsman an exorbitant price, and the man compelled to pay such a ransom to achieve the victim's release had then an additional grievance, but had no alternative to biding his time until he could take revenge. However just his case may have been there existed no tribal authority to whom he could appeal. If he was wealthy enough to organize a raid and could count on the support of a number of powerful kinsmen, he might have decided to raid his opponent's house, not necessarily with the intent to slay some of the inmates, but in order to take revenge and to take prisoners whose release he could make conditional on being compensated for all past injuries.

The organization of a raid required some capital outlay, for warriors joining had to be feasted before they set out. They were also promised some minor share in the loot, but did not share responsibility for the raid. For they were hired mercenaries and the organizer of the raid was held accountable for their deeds. A strange feature of Nishi warfare was the custom that the organizer of a raid, instead of leading his warriors into battle, awaited the outcome at home. This was not considered a sign of cowardice and it was argued that the organizer would act irresponsibly if he risked his own life. For if the enterprise miscarried and any of the raiders were captured or killed, it was the duty of the organizer to effect their ransom or in the case of their death compensate their dependants. If he were to be killed in the fight he could not have fulfilled these obligations and the men recruited for the raid preferred therefore to know him in safety.

Raids directed against a single household used to be frequent and most Nishis of the time before 1945 had been involved in

several raids either as victims or attackers. These small-scale raids did not seem to fall easily into the category of war, but were in many cases more in the nature of an extreme form of self-help supported by force. A man recruiting warriors for a big raid might visit several villages where he had allies and when doing so he took several valuables with him. For it was customary to give one Tibetan bell to an influential man, who would keep it for the warriors to be enlisted. After the raid it would be sold and shares of the mithan realized were distributed among the raiders.

Before the raid a rite was performed which the Nishis called *yokum* or *kharam-padu*. A ritual bamboo structure was erected and a priest prayed to Doni (sun), Yob (god of the chase) and Geda-ui (a forest god). To these deities the raiders prayed that their enemies should all be asleep in their houses, that they should not have gone hunting or visiting, but be all caught in their houses. A dog was sacrificed and its head taken along by one of the raiders and thrown on the veranda of the house to be raided immediately before the attack.

The strategy of Nishi and Miri raids was entirely based on the element of surprise. The raiders rushed to the house at night, and in the first confusion tried to capture as many of the inhabitants as possible. If there was resistance there would be casualties, but the attackers were usually well content if they could drag off several captives and secure some loot without incurring a blood feud by killing any of the inmates of the house. However, if a man was killed one of his hands was cut off and taken home as a trophy. Subsequently it was used for the *ropi* ceremony which was similar to the Apa Tani *ropi* rite described in my book *A Himalayan Tribe* (pp. 165-67).

On the return of successful raiders to the village of the organizer a large ritual structure (*yob-lopü*) was built and the organizer sacrificed a mithan and used its meat to feast the warriors. If an enemy had been killed they would dance for two or three nights, but if only prisoners had been taken the raiders would dance only a few times round the ritual structure.

A man who had killed one of the enemies was given a special reward by the organizer, but he was subsequently subject to several taboos. For a considerable time he was not allowed to eat with others, not even with his wife and children. Moreover he was not allowed to eat venison, wild birds and fish. For two nights he was

not supposed to sleep with his wife, and had to sit up grasping his *dao* prepared to ward off the spirit of his victim who might come and attack him. He could sleep in the day time, but not in a recumbent position, but sitting up with his head supported by his hands. Once the *ropi* rite had been performed the killer could go to sleep as usual, for this rite prevented the return of the spirit of the dead man.

The whole atmosphere of feuds and the resulting insecurity in past times cannot be visualized without a description of a number of raids which had occurred in the years preceding my arrival in the Subansiri region in 1944. Many of the negotiations for the termination of hostilities were conducted in my presence and so was the conclusion of several peace pacts. At that time no Nishi thought that disputes could be resolved in any other way and the success of *panchayat* organizations in recent years is truly surprising considering that most of the village elders involved had grown up in an environment of violence and feuding.

The first major feud the details of which came to my notice was one between Likha Teji of Takhe settlement in the Kiyi valley and Nabum Epo of Piliapu in the Par valley. This feud had a long history and exemplifies the various aspects of Nishi warfare as well as the machinery for peace-making.

The feud began when an epidemic of some unspecified disease spread throughout the hills, and in a settlement of Likha Tablia and Ekhin, separated only by a narrow gully from Takho, several people died. Tablia and Ekhin blamed Likha Teji's people for having brought the disease, and—though being of the same clan—raided Teji's settlement and captured seven men and women. Nishis regard disease carrying as an offence which calls for retribution and many feuds started with accusations of having brought a disease.

To ransom his kinsmen and dependants Likha Teji had to pay 15 mithan to Tablia and Ekhin. Yet he did not feel guilty and proposed to clear himself and his family of the suspicion of having carried the disease by staging an ordeal. A large pot of water was heated to boiling point and one of Teji's maternal kinsmen thrusted his hand and forearm into the water. When the arm was withdrawn the skin was unharmed and everybody present admitted that Teji and his village must have been innocent of the spreading of the disease. The epidemic had obviously come from elsewhere and it was not long before suspicion fell upon the people of Piliapu, a village

some 15 miles south of the cluster of Likha settlements of which Takho constituted one. Many of the people affected by the epidemic talked about taking revenge on Piliapu, but it was Teji, still smarting under the injustice of having been raided and made to pay 15 mithan as a ransom, who decided to mount a raid on the house of Nabum Epo, one of the leading men of Piliapu. Toko Heli of Talo took part in the raid, but it was Likha Teji who organized it and provisioned the raiders. He himself followed Nishi custom and did not participate in the raid.

According to Teji he had not asked the warriors to kill any of the Piliapu people, but had instructed them only to capture some in order to hold them to ransom. However, in the mêlée Nabum Epo's mother was slain and eighteen people were captured. Of these only one was ransomed while others were set free owing to the intervention of a well known go-between whose hand was strengthened by the news that a government mission planned to visit the area and took an interest in the case. Nabum Epo, who might otherwise have been unable to obtain compensation for the death of his mother, took advantage of our presence and pressed his claim with the support of many of his kinsmen.

When a meeting of the two parties in the neutral village of Talo was held, I had an opportunity to watch the negotiations which followed the traditional procedure. The outward form of such meetings conforms to the same pattern which I had observed also among Apa Tanis. The opponents squat on the floor in two lines or in semi-circles facing each other. Anyone may speak in the debate, but it is usual for the principal opponents to state their case in long and well argued speeches. While a man puts forward his argument he is rarely interrupted and a skilled orator may easily speak without pause for an hour or more. He underlines his exposition with the help of bamboo sticks which he places in a long line in front of him using them as tallies for persons killed, men and mithan captured, ransoms paid and trade-debts owing. Each tally or group of tallies stands for a separate transaction and if a discussion has been going on for some hours, there will be long lines and complicated combinations of sticks in front of the opposing parties. An experienced orator handles his sticks with so much skill that he never has to interrupt his speech while he arranges his tallies.

Though today there are no more feuds to be ended and few

indemnities for killings to be paid, the technique of debate survives as claims for bride-prices have to be settled and trade-deals to be straightened out. In the past, when more serious disputes were discussed, it was not unusual for a debate to last for several days. For both sides traced their grievances as far back as memory reached, and the unpaid bride-prices of grandmothers might be brought into the argument no less than raids and killings that had happened long before any of the speakers had been born. A meeting might have broken up without an agreement having been reached, but there might have been an understanding that the parties would come together again and that in the meantime both sides would refrain from open hostilities. While at the beginning of the debate the opponents might have snarled at each other like angry dogs, tempers could quickly mellow and there would be jokes and laughter as the one time enemies discussed the details of their claims. Nishis looked upon such negotiations as a national sport, and the display of oratory, the evaluation of cattle and Tibetan bells, and the recounting of deeds of valour served as a kind of entertainment which gained in excitement as the values at stake increased and it became clear that a settlement would involve the transfer of valuables of considerable price.

In the negotiations between Likha Teji and Nabum Epo all these facets of a grand debate were displayed most brilliantly. Teji sitting in the middle of a rough semi-circle of his followers and partisans faced the larger semi-circle of his opponents with Nabum Epo of Piliapu sitting with immobile masklike features in the midst of his own men and sympathisers from other villages which had suffered from attacks of members of the Likha clan. Teji, slightly flushed with excitement, spoke vividly and well, never hesitating or searching for a word, and handling the tally sticks with the mastery of an expert orator.

At the end of his lengthy speech which had begun with an account of how he had planned the raid on Piliapu and provisioned the warriors, and dealt with the reason for the raid and his instructions to the warriors, he said that he was now willing to compensate Epo, whose mother had been slain inadvertently. He would even conclude a treaty of friendship, which would enable him to go to Epo's house and Epo to receive hospitality in his own house. As a sign of his goodwill he had brought three mithan and one Tibetan bell worth five to six mithan.

The next speaker was not Nabum Epo himself but his sister's son, a rather insignificant youth, who elaborated at great length the history of the raid from Piliapu's point of view, but proved a poor orator, and could never speak and arrange his tally-sticks at the same time. His discourse was followed by a speech of Likha Teji's mother's brother, and when this had come to an end Nabum Epo summed up the position and put forward his demands. He would be content with the return of the ransom paid by Piliapu people to achieve the release of the prisoner taken by Teji's warriors, and suitable compensation for the murder of his mother. No one could fully repair this loss. If it had been a wife who had been killed, he could marry another, but never could he find another mother. She had been famous for her beauty, being of light skin, and his father had paid for her a bride-price of twenty mithan since she came from a great house. For her he did not want mithan or many small *maje* and valuables, but one very large and precious *maje* he knew to be in possession of Likha Teji. If this was given to him he would be prepared to forget the past and conclude a *pakhe* treaty. He was speaking well and with animation, and the tone in which he addressed Teji was not entirely unfriendly.

Epo had hardly ended when Teji jumped up and declared he would go back to his village, collect the mithan and valuables due to Epo, and prepare for his coming. Then he departed rapidly followed by the two of his wives who had come with him.

Once agreement had been reached in such negotiations and one of the litigants had undertaken to indemnify the other party, the time and place of the final reconciliation was fixed. Usually the injured party went to the offender's house, and there received the agreed damages. Yet even at that time there could still be haggling and bargaining, for the Nishi scale of values did not lend itself to precise definitions, and the animals or articles prepared for payment were not necessarily acceptable to the recipient.

While there prevailed a state of feud and particularly if one party had suffered the loss of a kinsman, the two opponents were not supposed to eat and drink in each other's houses, and in order to re-establish normal relations it was necessary to perform a rite known as *pakhe* which involved the sacrifice of a mithan or at least of a pig. At this rite, the divine couple Potor-Met, who act as the guardians of oaths, were invoked to witness the re-

establishment of friendly relations. A peace-pact of even greater solemnity, known a *dapo*, was concluded if the feud had been of long standing and there had been numerous losses of life on both sides. A *dapo* pact was considered binding even on the descendants of both parties, and Potor-Met were called upon to avenge any breach of the pact.

In the dispute between Likha Teji and Nabum Epo the handing-over of the indemnity for the death of Epo's mother went reasonably smoothly. Epo had come to Teji's house, and the latter's wives fetched the valuables from a store room. The first was a fine Tibetan sword which Teji handed to Epo as the price for his mother's ribs. Then he produced a Tibetan bell for her knees, a cornelian bead for her eyes, two strings of yellow Tibetan beads as price for her bowels, and at last a bronze-bracelet for her arms. In addition he gave one Tibetan bell of great value to appease Epo's wrath about his mother's murder, and seal the peace-pact to be concluded.

Epo and his party closely scrutinized every object, determined not to accept anything of inferior quality. In the sword they could find no fault, but the bell offered for the knees was rejected as inferior, and they would not even look at the half-broken cornelian bead. Teji tried to make them accept a bell metal plate in place of the *maje*, but that plate was of Assamese origin and therefore regarded as inferior. But when he produced in its place an old Tibetan bell metal plate as price for the knees it was accepted, and Teji gave the *maje* which had at first been refused in addition to the cornelian bead for the woman's eyes. There was no criticism of the yellow beads and the Tibetan bell paid to soften Epo's grief also passed the scrutiny of the experts. But the bronze bracelet was found unsatisfactory, and Teji had to add to it a second bracelet of different type. Though the Piliapu party had talked about a cloth as price 'for the skin' of Epo's mother, they dropped this claim and declared themselves as satisfied.

In the meantime three mithan had been brought. One was to be taken away by Epo and the two others sacrificed during the *pakhe* rite. They were tied to the two forked posts which formed part of the ritual structure put up for the *pakhe* rite. A priest invoked Potor-Met asking them to watch the rite of reconciliation. Then the two mithan were slaughtered with a *dao* without much

formality and cut up at once. Epo was watching, but Teji did not stay until the end of the rite. Though from then on Epo could have eaten in Teji's house, he and his men remained in the small camp they had set up at some distance, and there cooked and ate their share of the mithan. Peace may have been established, but there was certainly little cordiality between the two parties to the pact.

While the feud between Likha Teji and Nabum Epo involved the men of two different clans, each prominent within its region, it was nevertheless basically a private dispute, and so were most Nishi feuds. Only rarely did they assume the character of inter-clan warfare. Unlike most other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh Nishis did not hesitate to raid and even kill people of their own clan. Thus Likha Horku raided the house of Likha Rebla because the latter had given shelter to a woman captured in the former's raid on Lichi (see p. 74). Horku had killed her small child in cold blood while she was a prisoner in his house, and after this she had escaped and Rebla had helped her to return to her home village. Thereupon Likha Horku attacked Rebla's house, killed two men and one woman, and captured Likha Rebla, seven women and two boys. Through the mediation of two other men of Likha clan Rebla and five women were ransomed, but the remaining captives continued to be held in Horku's house until the intervention of our mission in 1945.

At the time of my first contact with the Nishis of the Panior region innumerable accounts of the aggressiveness and ruthlessness of certain groups of Likha men circulated among the people of that area, and it seems that for no obvious reason Likha men had killed some of their prisoners. Thus Tao Temi of Chod village told me that his elder brother Tao Terü who had lived in Karlo in the Perin valley was first captured and then killed by Likha Jili of Müdo, the same settlement in which the notorious raiders Likha Horku and Take lived. In 1939 Likha Jili had raided three houses af Karlo and captured two men and one woman. After he had arrived with his captives in Müdo, he took Tao Terü and his mother to the jungle and killed them there. In the past there had been several settlements of Tao clan in the Kiyi valley, but they were wiped out completely by Likha people. At that time the inhabitants of a cluster of settlements which included Müdo were so powerful that no one dared to retaliate against

their raids, and it would seem that the Likha men had become used to raiding for the sake of enriching themselves by extorting large ransoms for the release of their captives. It is possible that they killed some prisoners outright in order to break down any resistance to their enormous demands for ransom payments in respect of those captives who were still alive.

The assumption that much raiding used to be done for purely mercenary purposes, and not to avenge an earlier wrong, is supported by the fact that raiders frequently captured casual visitors to the houses attacked, and held them to ransom as if they had been involved in the dispute which had triggered off the raid. If only retaliation had been intended in a raid there would have been no point in detaining people who had been present by mere chance. Ransoms for such people often equalled those as for members of the main opponent's family. Thus in 1939 when Toko Taji and Toko Tojur raided Chodo village, Taba Chogo, a casual visitor to the place, was captured and later released on payment of the very high ransom of seven mithan and three Tibetan bells.

At the present time when peace reigns throughout the Subansiri region and Nishis and Hill Miris seem to run their lives without resort to armed conflict on a large scale it is difficult to envisage the constant threat of death or capture which used to hang over the parents and grandparents of the present generation. A few brief examples of the kind of raids which were then frequent occurrences may illustrate the atmosphere prevailing as late as the 1940s.

In 1943 men from Taipu village in the Pering valley raided Yeling village in the Par valley, some eight miles south of Taipu. The pretext was an influenza epidemic some seven years previously which was supposed to have spread to Taipu via Yeling. Nabum Kamin and one girl were killed in the raid, and fourteen women and three boys were captured. By 1944 two women and the three boys had been ransomed, but six women were still being held in Taipu in the houses of Nabum Tacho and Nabum Hali, and four women had been moved to Shoto, a settlement of Likha clansmen and were in the houses of two men who had taken part in the raid.

About the same time Likha Take and Horku raided Little Mengo, a settlement south of the Panior river, and killed thirteen people of Kama clan, and captured five girls, who a year later were still being held in two houses of Müdo, the settlement of Take and Horku. They were released when I visited Müdo.

Sometimes relatively insignificant quarrels between neighbours led to killings and kidnappings. Thus two men of Mai clan and village, Talin and Tale, stole a bronze plate belonging to Mai Elu, and fled with it to Jorum, a village some two hours' walk from Mai. Two months later the two men returned to Mai accompanied by some of their Jorum friends in order to move their stores of rice to Jorum. As this furtive visit occurred late in the evening the people of Mai thought that raiders had come, and attacked the party. In the tussle Jorum men killed Ekha and Taram of Mai, and when Mitu Hania of Mai tried to separate the fighting men, Mai Elu, the man whose plate had been stolen, flew into a rage and killed him. Not only did he kill Hania, but he also got hold of his wife Bini and sold her to Toko Heli of Kirum, a settlement of the Licha clan.

Hania's and Bini's son Mitu Tade escaped to Talo, and after some time he ambushed a slave-woman of Mai, took her to Kirum and exchanged her for his mother, who, at the time he told me the story, was living with him in Talo. Mitu Tade was barred from visiting Mai, but the people of Mai and Jorum were at least outwardly friendly. Then only one household of Talo maintained amicable relations with one household of Mai.

At the time of my stay in the area several of the people of Talo village were troubled by cattle raiders from Kirum and other settlements of the Licha clan, who within one year had lifted ten of their mithan. They told me that they could not take any action against the Licha men, because some families of Talo had matrimonial alliances with Licha clansmen, and whenever other men of Talo planned a retaliatory raid they informed their relatives in Kirum. Toko Bat, the most influential man in Talo, had cousins in Kirum and his sister was married to a Licha man.

Most of the numerous feuds, the details of which I recorded, involved only a limited number of households and were not in the nature of inter-tribal conflicts. There were, however, some exceptions. Tribal memory preserves the story of a mass struggle against Torr and Tago people, a powerful folk whose settlements stretched in an unbroken arc from Talo land over Jorum as far as Mai. So warlike were the Torr and Tago people and so continuous their depredations on neighbouring communities that all the surrounding villages combined in a war of extermination, wiped out the settlements of Torr and Tago folk and killed every man and boy. This

is supposed to have happened about four generations ago. Several years after the extermination of the Torr and Tago people, which is remembered in detail and has no doubt a historical base, people of Toko clan immigrated into the area from the Palin valley. The presence of a very large population in the Talo-Jorum area in the not too distant past would explain the deforestation of the region, and it is not unlikely that the deterioration of the land and the resultant decrease in grain output owing to the over-cultivation of the hill-slopes had led the Torr and Tago people to the practice of continuous raiding whereby they made up for the deficit in their agricultural economy.

It is tempting to speculate whether the warlike Likha and Licha people who terrorized, until recently, a large region, might ultimately have gone the way of the Torr and Tago people, if in the years following 1944 the government had not put an end to their depredations.

The only warlike action involving large forces described to me by eye-witnesses was an attack of a combined Apa Tani and Hill Miri force on the Nishi village of Jorum. The Apa Tanis of Hang village had a long-standing feud with some leading men of Jorum and wanting to deal them a crushing blow, they enlisted about 200 Miris from the villages of La, Taia, Gocham, Golom, Biku, Bau, Niedo, Küna and Rotom. From among the Apa Tanis they raised about 300 men. The Hang men promised to each Miri leader one prisoner, and two mithan to be slaughtered for each of the participating Miri villages. The prisoners, so optimistically promised, were to be captured in Jorum. On the day of the raid it was raining. The Apa Tanis and Miris started from Hang at sunset and arrived at Jorum well before midnight. Their first target was Taram Taka, and the organizers of the raid had promised five Tibetan bells to anyone killing him. As the raiders entered Jorum they set fire to Taram Taka's house, and when he came out Niedo Tadak killed him with a spear. In that moment Nishis from all the other houses of Jorum converged on the raiders, and slew Niedo Tadak and nine other Hill Miris as well as several Apa Tanis. Moreover they captured Küna Tessü and Küna Tadak.

The invading force was completely routed and retreated in disarray to Hang. Recriminations against the Apa Tani organizers started instantly. The Miris, who had never before seen Jorum, blamed the Apa Tanis for having misled them by not telling them

that there were houses on all the hillocks surrounding Taram Taka's house. By attacking only his house at first, instead of starting fires all around and thereby causing confusion, they had laid themselves open to a concerted attack by all the Jorum men who fought on their home ground while the Miris stumbled about in the dark.

To placate their defeated allies the Apa Tanis slaughtered two mithan to be eaten by the Miri warriors, and gave them one more mithan to perform a joint rite on their return home. This mithan was sacrificed in Biku. But the Miris demanded compensation for their losses, and this demand was partly granted. Taia Tara received a Nishi slave, and Golom Tade was given a Jorum man captured already before the raid. Other Miris remained unsatisfied, and they sought to recoup their losses by capturing Apa Tanis. Two of these died in Niedo after two years of captivity, and others succeeded in escaping.

The Miris of Rotom and Pabo received no compensation for their men killed in Jorum, and though the abortive raid occurred at the beginning of the 20th century—probably in the year 1909—these Miris nursed their grievance against the Apa Tanis, and when in 1945 I tried to arrange a peace-treaty between the Apa Tanis of Hari and Büla and the Pei and Perrü Miris, the people of Rotom and Pabo refused to joint the *dapo* unless they received satisfaction of their claims going back to events that had occurred more than 40 years earlier.

In the foregoing accounts of feuds and raids we have seen that among Nishis and Hill Miris self-help used to be the one way in which an injured party could get redress of a grievance. In a society lacking any institutionalized authority to uphold law and order there could not be any legal sanctions which protected the interests of individuals against those wielding superior power. There were, however, isolated cases of joint action being taken by several leading men of a village to remedy a breach of a generally accepted convention. Peace-pacts are considered inviolable, and in the case in question such a pact had been patently broken. There had been a *dapo* pact between the three villages of Teipu, Jorum and Talo. A year after this *dapo* had been concluded Taba Tago of Teipu was on his way to Talo where he wanted to visit his friend Toko Bat. On the way he and his wife were ambushed and captured by Nich Taji allegedly acting on the instigation of Toko Höli of Talo. Both the victims were brought to Talo and kept for six days in the house

of Tago Nitin. Then the prominent men of Talo and Jorum protested against the breach of the *dapo* and themselves released the captives and escorted them home. No ransom was demanded or paid, but when Taba Tago reached home he killed a mithan and fed with meat his rescuers. In addition he gave them some presents of cloth. This was one of the few cases when several prominent men cooperated in righting a wrong, and it was clearly their combined influence which induced Tago Nitin to give up the captives.

Normally, however, there was no mechanism to deal with a breach of tribal custom, and B.K. Shukla, who knew the Nishis better than anyone else, pointed out that even clan-incest, though considered disgraceful, could escape retribution and some couples guilty of the disregard of the taboo on sexual relations within the clan were able to live together as man and wife without facing ostracism.[1]

The very absence of a legal authority excluded the recognition of certain actions as "crimes" punishable irrespective of the positions of the offender and the injured party, and deviations from the accepted type of behaviour, however grievously they might have injured an individual, were considered only as "torts". And as wrongs were considered as personal rather than social matters, a powerful man could brazenly flaunt public opinion and boast of his ability to ride roughshod over the interests of weaker men. Hence an individual threatened by a more powerful opponent could only save himself by entering the household of an even more powerful person, who by extending his support gained a new dependant and member of his domestic work force.

In trying to understand a social order which left the individual to fend for himself and did not provide for a tribal authority capable of restraining aggressors, we must consider whether in the mind of the Nishi there was any consistent assessment of conduct as normally good or bad. At first glance it appears that traditional Nishi ideology can be summed up in the dictum "might is right." Yet, closer consideration leads us to the conclusion that even though a powerful and wealthy man, capable of hiring warriors to crush his enemies and despoiling weaker communities, could get away with violating the interests of others, his conduct was by no means regarded right.

[1]B.K. Shukla, *The Daflas of the Subansiri Region*, Shillong, 1965, p. 80.

Anyone who has listened to a Nishi arguing his case in the course of peace negotiations and enumerating the injuries which he and his kin had suffered at the hands of his opponent, must realize that in describing the ruthlessness of his adversaries the speaker was appealing to a sense of justice and to moral values he presumed his listeners to share with him. By accusing his enemies of treachery, breach of agreements, outright lies, unprovoked aggression, robbery, theft and similar dastardly acts he manifested his conviction that his audience would be moved by indignation, and thereby express a moral judgement similar to that of the speaker. The fact that most of the participants in a meeting such as the negotiations between Likha Teji and Nabum Epo described above, were prejudiced and there was no tribunal capable of translating such indignation and the recognition of a deed as unjust into punitive action was indicative only of the absence of legal sanctions in the usual sense, but not of the non-existence of any standard of right and wrong.

However, while in the debates over past disputes which accompanied all attempts at settling feuds there were many appeals to the moral sense of the bystanders, expressions of remorse or a sense of guilt in relation to deeds of violence were totally lacking. Though a man might readily have admitted that by killing a person he had inflicted an injury on the victim's kinsmen and also that the latter had a right to receive compensation, he showed no signs of being conscious of having offended against an impersonal moral order. Consequently there was no sense of guilt or sin, and the matter was closed as soon as the slain person's kinsmen accepted the offered compensation.

Some traces of the recognition of an accepted code of conduct based on the idea of a moral order can perhaps be seen in the sacrosanct status of a go-between (*gingdung*) which even the most high-handed hesitated to violate. Though an attack on a negotiator on a peace mission would not have met with immediate retribution by joint action of the community, such an act running counter to all traditional standards of behaviour would have been universally condemned. Another indication of the recognition of binding moral obligations is the importance attached to oaths. We have seen already that at the conclusion of a peace-pact (*pakhe*) Potor-Met are invoked and Nishis firmly believe that whoever breaks the solemn promise to abstain from further acts of aggres-

sion will be stricken by disaster. Oaths and ordeals are also used to establish the guilt or innocence of an accused, and we may conclude from this that even though 'crimes' in the normal sense are not punished by public action, the actual guilt of a person charged with an offence is not a matter of indifference to those involved in the case. To perjure oneself is believed to be extremely dangerous because of the supernatural sanctions invoked in an oath, and a guilty man will normally rather pay compensation than jeopardize his life or health by swearing a false oath.

While Potor-Met are considered the guardians of oaths who avenge any breach of an undertaking enforced by an oath, gods and spirits are otherwise not believed to be concerned with the moral conduct of human beings, and offerings and sacrifices are never tendered in atonement of wrong conduct. It would indeed have been strange if sentiments so conspicuously absent in human beings were attributed to deities. In traditional Nishi society there seems to have been no room for sentimentality or compassion, or indeed the recognition for a unversally valid code of conduct upheld by supernatural sanctions. Though many Nishis were undoubtedly loyal to their allies and close kinsmen, they lacked all feeling for the dignity of human beings in general. No Nishi or Hill Miri had any scruples to capture and sell as slaves men and women born free as members of families of good status, and no one seems to have considered the feelings of a person kidnapped to serve as a security for the unpaid debt of a kinsman, and no one expressed compassion for children torn from their parents. They were pawns in a game of raids and counter-raids, and their emotions and sufferings were not taken into account. Everyone was always ready to take up arms in defence of his interests and little thought was given to the rights and well-being of others. Nor was an unyielding and arrogant attitude condemned as morally wrong. As long as a man could get away with violence he retained his position in society and there was clearly some admiration for the strong man and successful organizer of raids. Even a clear breach of commitments did not affect the offender's social or ritual status, though it was likely to trigger off retribution at the hands of those immediately affected.

Among Nishis and Hill Miris there was a practice by which a man could demonstrate his dominance over an opponent or vindicate his personal honour without resorting to violence. It resembles

the *lisudu* competition of the Apa Tanis which I have described in *A Himalayan Tribe* (pp. 135-42). The scale of the competition in slaughter of mithan and destruction of wealth was much smaller, however, than in the *lisudu* of the Apa Tanis. The practice is called *lem paka sinom* and is said to be now on the decline. If two people had a serious dispute, one would challenge the other and started by killing one of his own mithan in the middle of the village, but not as among Apa Tanis at his opponent's house. The latter had to respond by killing a bigger mithan or even two mithan and the competition could go on in this way, each competitor outpacing the other. In the past people would also break Tibetan bells or other valuables in such a procedure reminiscent of the potlatch rites of North West American Indians.

In recent years there was one such *lem paka sinom* at Bidak, where the competitors were Kabak Men and Godak Togu. It was said that Godak Togu had made a nuisance of himself by beating up people for no reason except to assert his power. Kabak Mem thereupon decided to deflate his arrogance and challenged him to a *lem paka sinom.* The killing of mithan was finally stopped by the *gaonbura* of the village. Today such competitions are said to be rare and they are being frowned upon by the administration, though in fact no one can stop people killing their own mithan.

Considering the general lawlessness which prevailed for long among Nishis and Hill Miris one may ask how a society devoid of any authority system and even any deference to an accepted moral order could hold together for more than a very short time. The answer is probable that Nishi society was in equilibrium only where groups of approximately equal strength faced each other and self interest kept violence and disruption within tolerable limits. Where forces were not evenly matched a fluid situation arose, and the history of many Nishi clans illustrates how groups of the crest of a wave of martial success whittled down neighbouring communities with the observable result that clans, once populous and prosperous were dispersed and reduced to isolated families living as dependants in the houses of stronger clans. Such a fluid situation, involving periodic migrations, could endure only where relatively sparse populations operated within an extensive and only partly cultivated territory.

9

Modern Developments

In the past three decades the social and economic conditions of most of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and not least those of the Nishis and Hill Miris have undergone a dramatic transformation. Where there was insecurity and the rule of unbridled force, peace and order have been established, and tribesmen hemmed into small tracts of country by warlike neighbours threatening unwary travellers with capture and enslavement can now move freely in the pursuance of trade and wide-ranging social and political relations have replaced the former encapsulation of tiny tribal groups. The rapidity of this change effected during the life-time of a single generation is little short of a miracle, all the more so as it was achieved without the employment of much coercive force on the part of government. Indeed there are not many parts of present-day India where policemen are as conspicuous by their absence as in Arunachal Pradesh and there is at the same time so little threat to the citizens' life and property.

Among the Apa Tanis, whose society was always well ordered with a complex system of village government, the smoothness of the transition to the present political order is less surprising, but the speed with which Nishis and Hill Miris adapted themselves to a new life-style has few parallels in the development of Indian tribal societies. One explanation for this phenomenon may be an unavowed preference for security and peaceful social relations even among communities traditionally embroiled in feuds and a system of retaliation as the accepted means of protecting their interests. Not long ago I encountered the expression of such a preference among Konyak Nagas, who—remembering the days of headhunting and inter-village feuds—pointed to the newly gained security from raids as one of the advantages of the present order.

Nishis and Hill Miris have largely given up raiding and even the use of violence in pursuance of private claims is now restricted to out of the way places, where old values and practices linger

among the older generation. There a man whose wife has been abducted may still try to kidnap the offender and keep him in stocks until either the wife has been returned or he has received compensation. But such cases are now rare and result neither in killings nor the demand for ransoms.

Yet some old men deplore the abolishment of certain punishments which used to be inflicted on offenders. Thus Taba Tat, a former government interpreter and incidentally the father-in-law of the present Education Minister, did not hold back with his criticism of the "soft" attitude of government towards those guilty of adultery and abduction. "Previously", he told me, "a man who had run away with another man's wife would have been caught, and if he was unable to pay compensation, he would have been cut into pieces. Now cases of abduction and elopement have increased because neither men nor wives are any longer afraid. If government wants to reduce the frequency of such occurrences, we should be permitted to cut the offenders into pieces as it was done in the old days. Then men could purchase girls and keep them for their sons when they themselves grew old, but now nothing happens if such girls are taken away by others—the *gaonbura* try to settle such cases, but if they do not succeed the cases go for decision to government." Though Taba Tat expressed these conservative views, we have seen that in his own family affairs he had acted with remarkable tolerance and liberality (see p. 67).

While nowadays peace and a high degree of civic order extend to the entire region inhabited by Nishis and Hill Miris as also to the Apa Tani valley, individual tribal groups have made different arrangements for the establishment of a system of social controls which interlocks with the existing framework of the government administration.

Among the Hill Miris groups of villages have been constituted as *bango*, administrative units formed on the model of a similar system among the Adis. In the Raga Circle, for instance, there are four *bango*, each of which has a council of *gaonbura* and the elected *anchal samithi* members. From among the *gaonbura* a secretary is elected for each *bango*, and there is also one general secretary for the whole circle. While the *gaonbura* and *bango*-secretaries deal with disputes, the *samithi* members are concerned with development, and can make proposals for development projects to be undertaken by government.

In February 1980 about 200 *gaonbura* of the Raga Circle held a meeting on the initiative of the Circle Officer. He asked them to discuss in detail the traditional way of dealing with the various offences which give rise to disputes, and after a long debate they put forward as set of rules, which the Circle Officer recorded and subsequently passed on to the Deputy Commissioner of the Subansiri District. These Bango Rules, as they are called, are intended as guidelines for the administration of justice by councils of *gaonbura*. A slightly abridged version of these rules reads as follows:

1. Child marriage is strictly prohibited. Failure to observe this prohibition is punished with a fine of Rs 1000 imposed on the girl's parents and the man marrying an immature girl.

2. No one is allowed to marry a girl against her will. The parent giving an unwilling girl in marriage will be fined Rs 1000. A man marrying a girl (by capture) without her parents' consent will be fined Rs 1500 and the girl will be returned to her parents.

3. If a girl was married as a child against her wishes, she may revoke the marriage after the parents have made a settlement with the husband concerned according to traditional custom.

4. Fines for sex offences

(*a*) Intercourse with a married girl still in the parental house	Rs 300
(*b*) Intercourse with a married woman	Rs 600
(*c*) Intercourse with the father's brother's wife	Rs 800
(*d*) Clan-incest	Rs 1500

5. Fines for causing bodily harm

(*a*) Attempt to murder	Rs 500
(*b*) Causing a wound in assault	Rs 500

6. Fines for theft

(*a*) Theft of property from house or field according to the value of the stolen items	Rs 25-1000
(*b*) Theft of a mithan (In either case the property has to be returned to the owner)	Rs 150

7. Miscellaneous fines

(*a*) If cattle or pigs damage cultivation the animals' owner is fined	Rs 50-350

(*b*) Disregard of village rite — Rs 50

(*c*) Breach of *bango*-rules or non-compliance with fine imposed by *bango*-elders — Rs 500

(*d*) Bribery — Rs 500

(*e*) Use of poison in catching fish — Rs 500

8. *Fines for killing domestic animals*

(*a*) If the animal was killed accidentally its value has to be paid to the owner

(*b*) If the animal was killed intentionally double its value has to be paid to the owner

9. *Fines for setting fire to a house*

(*a*) The person responsible for a fire must compensate the owner for all losses

(*b*) If the fire was started deliberately the offender must in addition pay to the owner — Rs 1000

10. *Distribution of deceased man's property*

If a widow marries outside her husband's kingroup all his property goes to his sons, or in the absence of sons to his brother's sons

11. *Black magic*

If anybody performs black magic to harm another person he will be fined — Rs 500

If the victim dies then perpetrator of the black magic is to be handed over to the government judiciary (as in a case of murder).

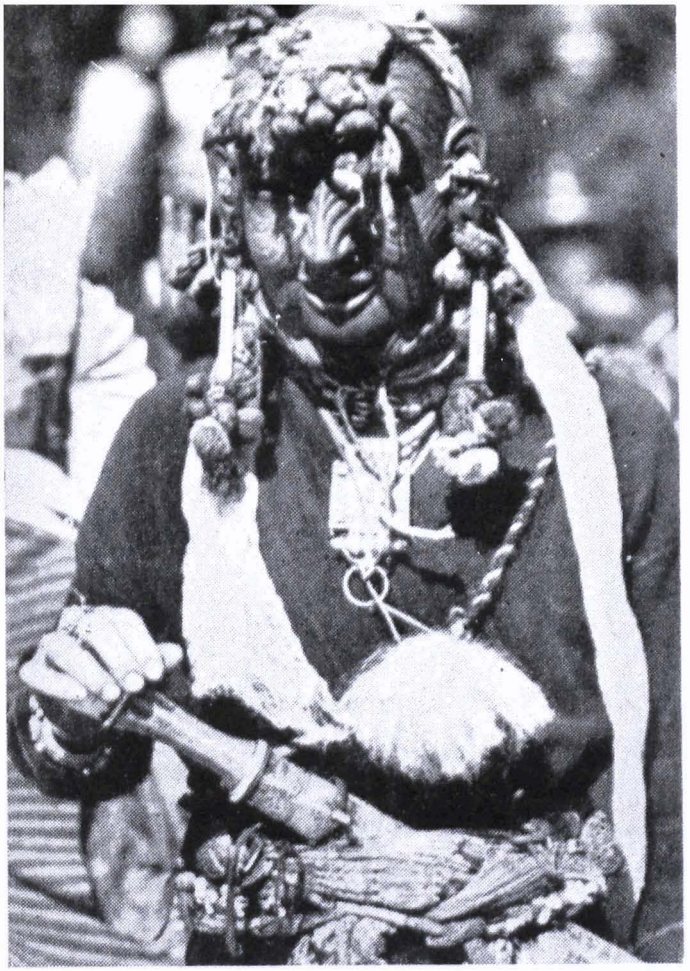
12. *Epidemics*

Anybody wilfully spreading an epidemic be fined — Rs 500

13. *Party system*

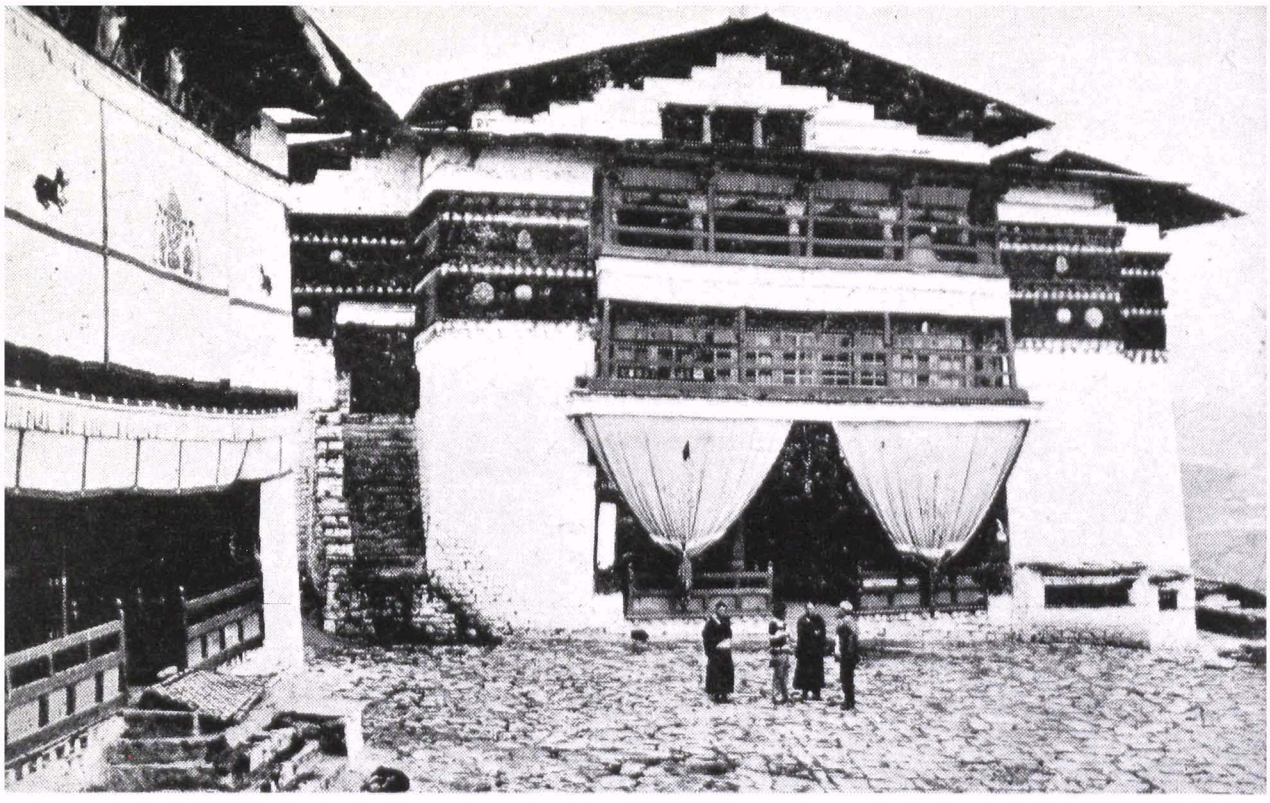
Anybody creating ill-feeling among villagers by creating factions will be fined — Rs 500

Any criminal case falling under the above rules is to be tried first by the *gaonbura* of the village concerned, then by the *gaonbura*



Sherdukpen dancer wearing
a wooden mask

Monk of Tawang in charge of the
monastery school



The main temple (*du-khang*) of Tawang monastery with the library building to the left

View of part of the Monpa village of Lishi

Monpa men of Sangti village wearing yak-hair rain-caps

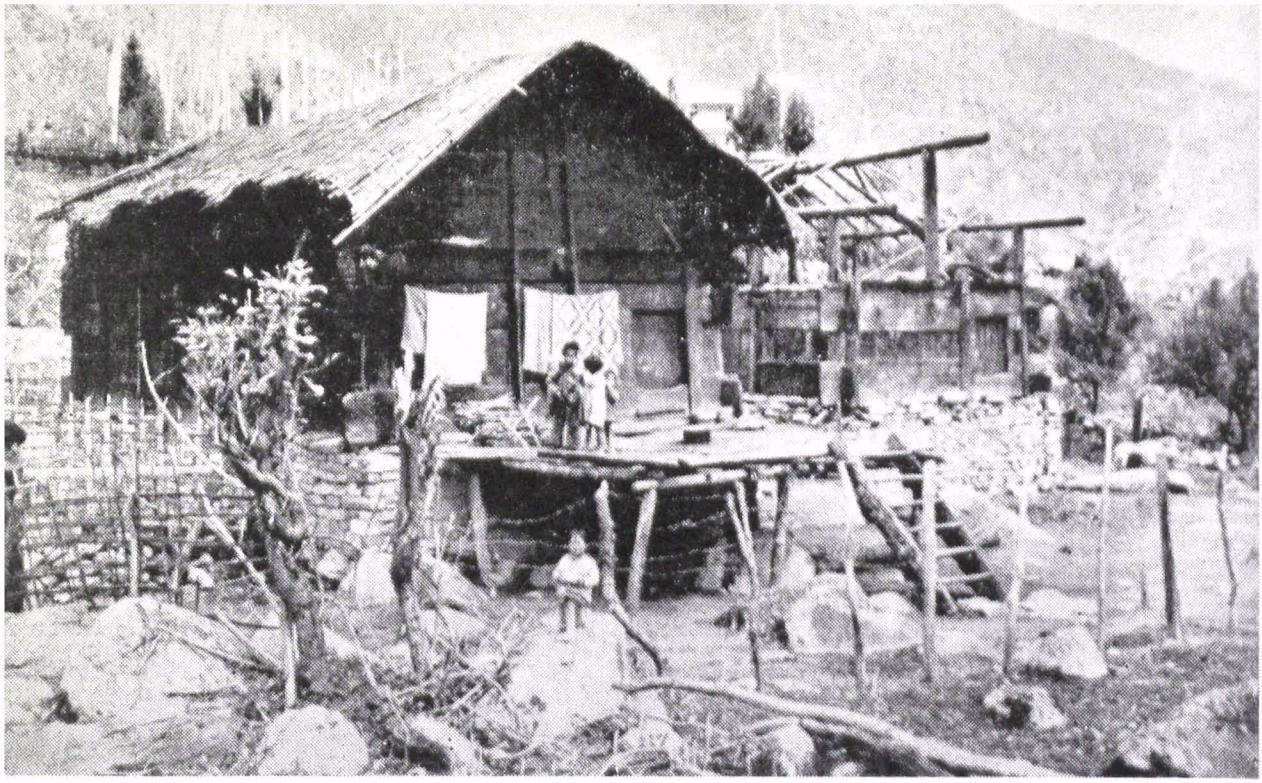
Monpa girls of Lhou village wearing rain-caps

Monpas during a festival at Lhou; Bon priests wear high, painted hats

Monpa horsemen at the Bon festival of Lhou

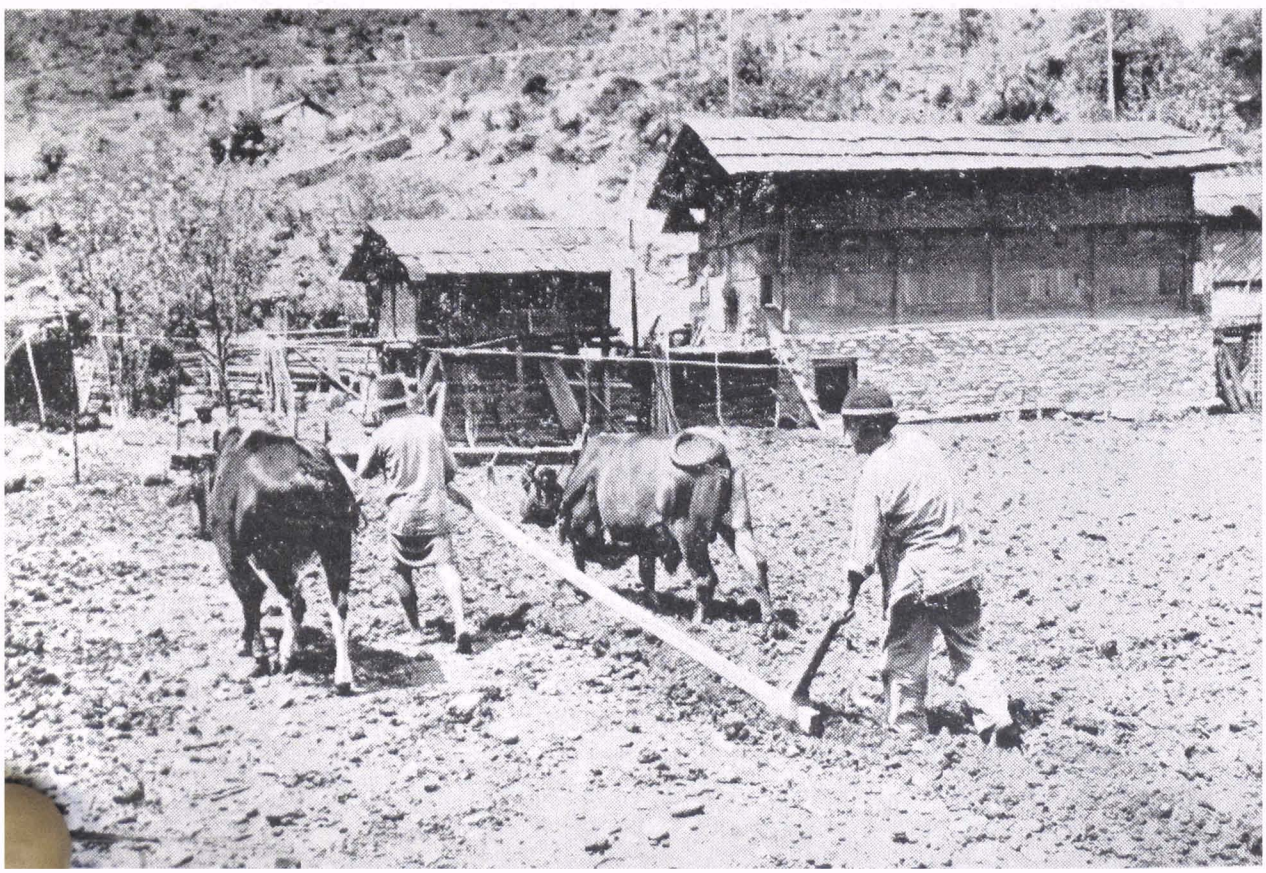
Tashi Lama, the Monpa archivist of Tawang, with his wife and child

Sherdukpen men in ceremonial dress



Sherdukpen house at Rupa

Sherdukper's ploughing at Rupa

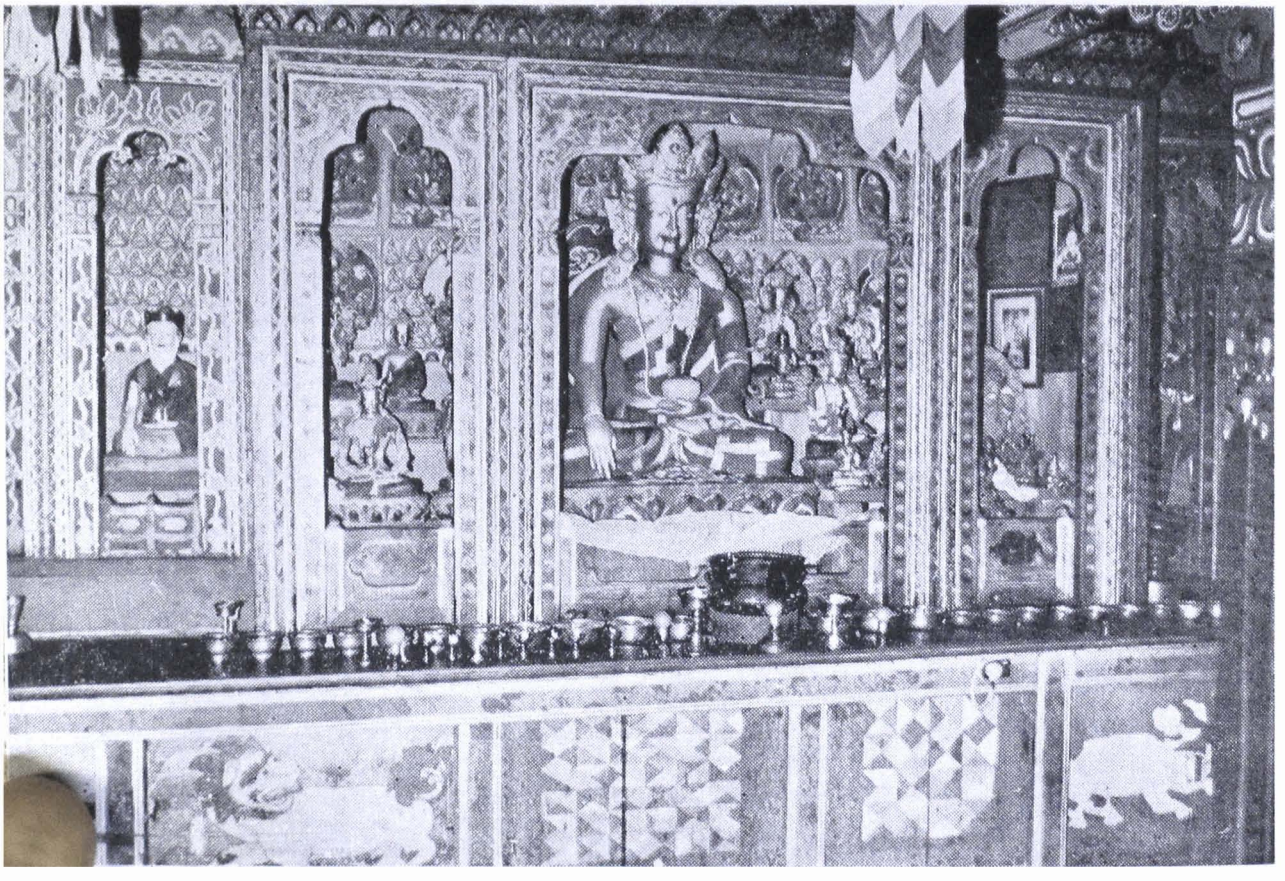


Khovas of Wangho village; the man wears a bamboo hat

Sherdukpen *gaonbura* of Rupa village and his wife

Sherdukpen masked dancers

Interior of the Buddhist temple of Rupa



on *bango* level; if it is not settled there it should go to the General Secretary. No case should be directly submitted to the Circle Officer.

The Circle Officer of the Raga Circle told me that there was sometimes friction between the *gaonbura* and some literate, semi-educated young men who looked down upon the village-elders as illiterate and ignorant. It was due to the influence of such youths that villagers often appealed against the decisions of the *bango*-elders, and the Circle Officer counteracted such tendencies by upholding wherever possible the judgement of the *gaonbura*.

The tentative codification of customary law represented by the rules drawn up by the village-elders of the Raga Circle, is only a first step towards the development of agreed guidelines for the settlement of disputes. There is as yet no sign of a unified approach to the recording of tribal custom throughout the Nishi and Hill Miri regions, and my enquiries into the tribesmen's attitude to various offences revealed considerable regional differences.

Attempts to lay down rules of behaviour suited to modern conditions have recently been made by the Nishi Youth Organization. This body, which may have been established on the model of the Apa Tani Youth Organization founded in 1973, came into being in October 1975 when four Nishi youths studying in the Pasighat College decided to form an association with the aim "to preserve and promote the traditional culture of the Nishi community". Subsequently a working committee was formed and by 1980 there was also an executive body of 24 members, and branches had been established in most Circles of the Subansiri District as well as in the Seppa Subdivision of the Kameng District. There is no formal membership, however, for all young Nishis are regarded as being automatically members of the Organization. Unlike Apa Tanis—always much more systematic than Nishis—the members of the Nishi working committee and executive body have not drawn up a written constitution, but there are some bye-laws which urge such reforms as "the abolition of child-marriage and bride-price."

There are also other differences between the two youth organizations. While that of the Apa Tanis favours inter-tribal marriage with the idea of developing a unified tribal consciousness, the members of the Nishi organization seem to be much less concerned with building up a united tribal front. Perhaps the far more

numerous Nishis do not feel in need of such a more, being strong enough to stand on their own. Indeed their youth organization seems to object to inter-marriage with Apa Tanis. This objection, strongly emphasized by the educated young men of Yazali, who were among the moving spirits of the organization, came as a complete surprise to me. They insisted that any Nishi having sexual relations with an Apa Tani would be excommunicated and no longer allowed to enter his family's house. This view is totally inconsistent with the social status of several Nishis known to be the issue of marriages with Apa Tanis. Thus Mai Höli, a leading man of Mai village, whom I knew in 1945 and met again in 1980, had an Apa Tani mother, Kago Rine, who was the daughter of an Apa Tani couple who had fled to Mai. It was said moreover that Mai Höli had Apa Tani blood also among his ancestors in the male line. None of this had affected his status in Nishi society.

The same Nishi youths who disparaged marriages with Apa Tanis expressed no objection to unions with Adis, Khasis and even Nepalis, and indeed there are several educated Nishis who have married girls from these communities. But the Nishis of Yazali had obviously a poor opinion of Apa Tanis. They told me that the term "Apa" was not, as it is usually assumed, a honorific, but that *apa* means "ghost", and that a Nishi dreaming of Apa Tanis would have to perform a rite of purification. Apparently Nishi parents say to their children: "Be quite and do not cry—otherwise an Apa Tani will come."

Whether this role of Apa Tanis as bogymen is traditional in Nishi folklore or a new development, I am not in a position to say, but the attitude of my informants at Yazali may well be an expression of Nishi jealousy of the stupendous material and educational progress of the Apa Tanis. There has been friction between the two communities in Itanagar, and it seems that elsewhere too some Nishis objected to the aggressive trading practices of Apa Tanis recently established in Nishi areas.

The members of the Nishi youth organization told me also of their concern about the activities of Christian mission. While mission schools are not allowed inside Arunachal Pradesh, these are several, both Protestant and Catholic, in Assamese towns close to the border of the Union Territory, and these are attended by many tribal children. Educated Nishis maintain that such children are indoctrinated and in many cases baptized, and that they are

then encouraged to preach Christianity among their fellow tribesmen. Thus it is said that young Nishis who completed their school eduction are provided with ample funds and charged with the conversion of Nishis living inside Arunachal Pradesh. For obvious reasons no figures for such conversions are available, but the Census of India of 1981 may provide some information on the number of Christians is Subansiri District. Whatever these may be, there can be no doubt that the Nishis are greatly disturbed by what they regard the missions' threat to their traditional culture.

While Nishis, like mos tribals, are tolerant about religious beliefs, and would not care about anyone holding ideas other than their own, they resent some of the Christian converts' actions. For it would seem that many of the Christians have been taught to dissociate themselves as far as possible from their pagan kinsmen and even their own parents. Children returning from school refuse to stay in their parents' houses, saying that devils were being worshipped there and the meat remaining from such worship was hanging in the roof for drying and smoking. Where there are several Christians in a settlement they tend to build their houses in a separate hamlet, and to refuse to participate in any of the village activities. There have even been cases of Christians interfering with traditional rites, interrupting the invocations of priests, whom they abused for their worship of "devils".

The influence of this denigration of traditional religion is so insidious that several of my English speaking Nishi informants, among them middle-school teachers, inadvertently used the word "devils" when telling me about their beliefs. Indeed I had to remind them that "gods", "deities" and "spirits" were the appropriate English words to describe the supernatural beings of their pantheon.

The educated Nishis feel bitter because they do not have the funds to counter the propaganda of the Christian missions, and see the material benefits induce many of their fellow tribesmen to forsake their traditional faith. They are not happy with the school of the Rama Krishna Mission either, but feel that coexistence of their teaching with many tribal ideas is possible, while there is no chance of an accommodation between Christianity and Nishi ideology.

The most important cause of social change among Nishis has been education. Though progress has not been as spectacular as among Apa Tanis, who had initially benefited from the proximity of the district headquarters and the early establishment of a high

school in their midst, the performance of the Nishis has been excellent. In 1979 70 appeared for the matriculation examination and 65 of them passed. By 1980 there were about 35 Nishi graduates, and in the Subansiri District alone four Nishis, one Tagin and one Hill Miri served as gazetted officers and many were working as teachers. Compared to the progress of most tribal communities in Peninsular India this is an admirable achievement, and there can be little doubt that Nishis like other tribesmen of Arunachal Pradesh are set on a road to rapid social and political development.

Already in 1980 Nishis were represented in the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh by several members of that body and one of them was then Education Minister. In the same year a Nishi contested the election to the Indian Parliament, and though he was defeated by the previous chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, the very fact that he was able to mount a campaign in a large constituency extending beyond the Subansiri District indicates that the Nishis have moved far from the days when the horizon of them did not extend beyond a single valley.

Unlike the Apa Tanis, whose political power will always be limited by the relatively small size of their community even though their commercial and educational progress has given them a disproportionately large influence in the affairs of Arunachal Pradesh, the Nishis are numerous enough to play an important role in a system where the number of votes counts for as much as commercial success. As far as one can see Nishis have not achieved as dramatic a change in their way of life as many Apa Tanis have done, but the prospects for their future development seem to be promising. They have the great advantage of being a relatively sparse population in a large region only part of which is so far used for agriculture. Though in some areas, such as the hills near the villages of Jorum and Talo, there is pressure on land suitable for slash-and-burn cultivation, on the whole there is still land available for expansion and development. By terracing and irrigation of a type which has successfully been introduced in the Tawang area of Kameng District and is common in Bhutan, the arable area could probably be increased. Even now there seems to be no shortage of food, and most Nishis and Hill Miris look well fed and healthy. While people's needs are still few there is no poverty side by side with wealth such as prevails in many rural areas of other parts of India. Consequently Nishis and Hill Miris have retained the dignity and

joie-de-vivre one often finds among tribal people who are not oppressed and exploited by outsiders.

Without statistics on the consumption and expenditure of individual households it is difficult to compare the standard of living with that in other parts of the country, and such statistics are not available. But a brief life-history of one specific Hill Miri will give a rough idea of the economic openings to which an enterprising man may have access.

Maga Talo, who lives now in Raga, the headquarters of the Raga Circle, was born in Maga, a strong village which had not been raided within human memory but was abandoned in the course of the regrouping of villages (see Chapter 2), when most of the inhabitants moved to Kemliko, a settlement close to the motor-road. Talo's father had died even before his birth, and he grew up in a household run by his mother and his father's other widow. There were three children, but the two women managed the cultivation and there was no hardship. Neither Talo nor any of his brothers went to school, for in his childhood, i.e. in the 1950s, there was as yet no school in his area. By the time he was grown up, the government had started building roads, and Talo worked as a labourer earning about Rs 2 per day. Subsequently he earned much more by taking contracts for building temporary houses (*basha*) of wood and bamboo. Seeing the opportunities which work for government offered he moved to Raga and built a house near the bus-stop. In addition to contract work he began to engage in trade, bringing commodities of every day use, such as kerosene, salt, matches, soap, tobacco and cloth from Ziro and later also from North Lakhimpur. There was as yet not much competition and he made so much money that in 1968 he could by a truck for Rs 8000 at an auction. He had it for three years, and plied between North Lakhimpur and Daporijo. But in 1971 the truck fell down a precipice owing to brake-failure and was a total loss. Talo bore this misfortune, in which luckily no one was killed, with equanimity and continued work as a contractor.

After moving to Raga he married and occupied some land suitable for *jhum*-cultivation without having to pay for it. In 1973 he married his first wife, who was from Bini, paying a bride-price of twenty mithan. For his second wife, who was also from Bini, he paid only four mithan, and for his third wife, a girl from Yukar, he also gave a bride-price of four mithan.

When I met Talo in Raga in 1980 he was still taking government contracts, at that time for earth-works on the Tamen-Tali road then under construction, and paid his labourers a daily wage of Rs 10. They were all local Hill Miris, while for many other road-projects in Arunachal Pradesh, migrant labour from other parts of India is employed.

By that time Maga Talo was a member of the *anchal samithi* to which he had been elected three years before. While he himself was illiterate, his eldest daughter, a girl of seventeen, was at school and reading in the 9th class. He had altogether seven sons and six daughters from his three wives, and all of them went to school at Raga, but also helped with the farm work. Talo's domestic arrangements were unusual insofar as his three wives all lived and cooked at the same hearth and shared a single granary. Talo had two brothers, neither of whom lived at Raga, one having settled at Kemliko and one at Nimar village.

This biographical sketch shows two features of the present social pattern. Brothers no longer live necessarily in one long-house, or even in the same village, for they do not depend anymore on each other for protection against raiders. Moreover an enterprising man can acquire wealth and status without having to engage in martial adventures such as had served the men of earlier generations as a means to enrich themselves at the expense of the kinsmen of men and women captured in raids.

Some Nishi politicians profiting from their easy access to government officials have become wealthy by doing business in the field of public transport and supply of controlled commodities such as petrol and kerosene, but on the whole Nishis and Hill Miris have not been as successful in trade as Apa Tanis. This is largely due to the fact that Apa Tanis were traditionally more skilful traders than Nishis, and also to the longer contact of Apa Tanis with government agencies concentrated at Ziro. Though some Nishis run shops in places such as Yazali so Nyapin, no commercial centre in the Nishi area rivals so far the Ziro bazaar.

It is perhaps not surprising that Nishis, who have no tradition of spatial stability, and unlike Apa Tanis never made long-term investments in land, are no match for the experienced Apa Tani businessmen capable of long-term calculations. This has become very obvious in some remoter Nishi areas. In the Palin valley, for instance, where the local population is 100 per cent Nishi, and in

the old days no Apa Tani ever dared to show his face, very little of the commercial activity is in the hands of Nishis. In 1980 there were 50-60 Apa Tani households comprising about 250 persons settled in the Palin valley. Some of the men held minor government posts or worked as contractors, but all engaged also in trading. A few Nishis took sub-contracts from Apa Tanis, but had not yet learnt to manage more complicated transactions. The Nishis' lack of flair for business has become apparent also in the district headquarters where Nishis would be fully entitled to trade in the local bazaar and a few have tried to open shops. But even though there are innumerable Nishis among the people who have to come to the government offices at Ziro, Nishi shopkeepers were unable to cash in on that captive public and lost their customers to the more efficient Apa Tanis.

A lack of ability for long-term planning was apparent also among most of the Miris of Raga, Maga Talo being an isolated exception. Attempts on the part of government to develop the area economically have not been very successful. A few orchards and pineapple plantations have been established, but the local officials told me that the Miris show little persistence in following up such enterprises. They take the money provided by government as subsidy and plant whatever has been supplied, but neglect the plantations when the subsidy comes to an end and many ultimately give them up altogether. This too may be due to the still persisting effect of the previous unstable style of life which did not favour the development of an attitude of mind attuned to a consistent pursuance of economic enterprises. With the development of education, which compels young people to apply themselves consistently to long-term tasks this attitude may change, but the emergence of the next generation may have to be awaited before it is possible to tell how long it will take before the heritage of instability and insecurity, and hence the habit of living from day to day, will wear off among Nishis and Hill Miris.

10

Religious Beliefs and Rituals

All the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have a firm belief in the dependence of human beings on supernatural powers most of whom are thought of in anthropomorphic terms. There exists, however, no body of myths and legends containing a consistent picture of the pantheon of invisible beings believed to populate the various parts of the tribesmen's environment. It is likely that at least some of the priests and seers in whose incantations many of the gods and spirits figure have such a mental picture, but a great deal of research would be required to amplify the fragments of information derived from conversations with such ritual experts. Modern technology provides the means for such research, for by recording a large volume of the chants with which priests (*nyubu*) accompany their ritual performances, many lasting for hours, it would be possible to collect a compendium of texts which linguists working with local informants could undoubtedly disentangle and reduce to writing. On the basis of such texts it might then be possible to bring order into the confusing multitude of divinities, just as the Vedic hymns enabled scholars of later ages to reconstruct the ancient Aryans' ideas of the world of gods and demons. But such an enterprise. which would certainly involve years of painstaking work, is still a *desideratum* for the future. For the time being our knowledge of the indigenous religion of Arunachal Pradesh depends still on information called from priests and laymen prepared to let anthropologists into the secrets of their religion, but often no doubt unable to express themselves concisely when questioned about abstract ideas.

In my book *A Himalayan Tribe* I have put forward the view that Apa Tanis do not think of their gods as occupying hierarchically ranked positions in a pantheon (p. 169) though it is possible to distinguish several categories of gods with specific characteristics. The first part of this statement applies also to

Nishis and Hill Miris and it is probably due to my less intimate familiarity with these tribes that I have not been able to discover distinct categories into which the various supernatural beings can be said to fall. In my work among the Minyong Adis many years ago I was perhaps more successful in isolating certain classes of gods and spirits, and an account of their religious ideas will conclude this chapter.

Nishis and Miris in the same way as Apa Tanis refer to deities as well as to minor spirits as *ui*, a term which is sometimes spelt *wiju* such as by B.K. Shukla (*op. cit.*, p. 82). *Ui* is a generic term and its meaning could be translated as "supernatural being" rather than as either "god" or "spirit".

There is no agreement among the various tribal groups about the rank order of deities, the highest position being sometimes ascribed to Doni-Sü and sometimes to Potor-Met, both these names referring to divine couples rather than individual gods.

The Nishis of the Panior and Kiyi regions were firm in their assertion that Potor and Met, the former female and the latter male, are the deities who existed from the very beginning of the world, and are the greatest of all the deities. They were neither created nor born, but came into existence long before the sky and the earth were made. One of the priests stated that they neither dwell in the sky nor inside the earth, but live *on* this earth; they are dressed in clothes made of stone and Met, the husband, wears a stone hat. They are believed to eat the flesh of mithan, pigs, goats and dogs, and these animals are sacrificed to them. We have seen that at the conclusion of *pakhe* and *dapo* rites Potor and Met are invoked and begged to watch over the observance of the terms of the pact. Despite their role as guardians of oaths, they are believed to be otherwise indifferent to the moral behaviour of human beings.

Potor and Met are believed to be the parents of two deities: Kir (female) and Lür (male). These were "born so that the world would worship them with sacrifices of mithan." The purpose of these sacrifices is to obtain wealth, offspring and good health.

Two male gods, who seem to lack female partners, are Yapum and Mlor. They dwell in the forest and accept sacrifices of mithan, goats, pigs and dogs. Their worship serves to safeguard people working or hunting in the forests.

Different from these earth-bound deities are the divine couple

Doni-Sü worshipped by Nishis as well as Hill Miris. Doni, who is male, is the sun, and Sü, who is female is the earth. They can see everything men do, even in the darkness of the night, and though in general deities take no notice of the good and bad actions of men, I have heard it said that Doni and Sü reward good people and punish the wicked, but other informants did not share this opinion but said that Doni-Sü get angry only if their cult is neglected. Miris sacrifice mainly white mithan, goats and fowls to Doni and Sü, but the pigs offered to them may be of any colour and are, of course, usually black. It is believed that people who regularly worship Doni-Sü will attain a ripe old age, and that those who sacrifice white animals will have children with a beautiful light complexion. As Doni-Sü is believed to see everything, people pray to them when any property has been stolen in the hope that they will help to find the missing articles.

Although Potor-Met and Doni-Sü are the divine pairs most frequently mentioned and obviously very much in the foreground of tribal religious thinking, there is also a belief in four male gods known as Kiri, Moru, Kite and Mote, whom some Miris consider the most powerful of all deities. They are all male and are likened to four brothers. Each of them has a wife, and they are believed to be as tall as mountains and to live in the East. They never come to the villages of men, but send Doni-Sü as their messengers. They only accept the sacrifice of fully grown mithan but neither goats nor pigs. The reason given for this predilection is that the seat of these gods is twelve days' march towards the east, and only strong adult mithan can be driven so far. Priests who in their dreams undertake the journey to the four great gods have to climb several high mountains and cross two large rivers by raft. Normally these gods are benevolently disposed towards men and grant to their devotees wealth and good health, but whosoever arouses their wrath is doomed and his whole household perishes with him.

The generic term for all the important gods is *hilo-ui*, but there is no corresponding term for minor supernatural beings associated with specific localities or activities. Among these are the Nim-Chumi, who live in men's houses and look after pigs and fowls. By giving them offerings people can assure that their beer will ferment well. Jolo is a special deity who helps priests in their work, and Dado keeps people strong and in good health.

Spirits living in the forest and known as Soni-nierom are dangerous to man and should be periodically propitiated.

The most dangerous of all spirits are the Sotu-ui, also known as Sotu-karom, whose help is sought by practitioners of black magic. A priest (*nyubu*) engaged in this evil art can harness Sotu-ui to his service, and send them "like warriors hired by the organizer of a raid" against an enemy and destroy him and his entire family. A concrete example of the belief in such attacks was given to me by Nishis of Yazali in 1980 and the description of the nature of Sotu-ui were not different from those which I had recorded in 1944.

Bengyo Talum, a graduate teacher, told me of the unfortunate fate of his father. The latter had participated in a raid and had been wounded by a spear which had entered his chest. He thought that he would die unless he killed with his own hand a prisoner taken in the same raid. Hence he killed the man in cold blood and duly recovered. While this magical remedy had worked, he subsequently became a victim of the attacks of Sotu-ui sent by his enemies. He had visions in which he saw these Sotu-ui in different shapes. Thus one night he saw a huge mithan who broke through the fences of his fields and ruined his crops. But in the light of day the fences were found undamaged and the crops unharmed. Yet, the magical persecution continued and both he and his wife died at an early age.

The Nishis believe, however, in a remedy against black magic, and this they call *sotu-tunam*. A dog has to be sacrificed, for this is a clever animal and its spirit can chase away the Sotu-ui. The people of the house and a priest all don war-dress and chase the Sotu-ui from one corner of the house to the other. If they succeed to drive the Sotu-ui back to the enemy who sent him, that man and all his family will die, because the Sotu-ui unable to get at the intended victim returns with a hungry stomach.

At funerals a *sotu-tunam* is performed as a precaution in the event of the death had been caused by a Sotu-ui sent by an enemy. Arrows are shot into every corner of the house to drive away evil spirits.

Unlike Apa Tanis who celebrate great seasonal festivals, such as the Mloko, in which the whole tribe participates, partly in the role of hosts and partly in that of guests, the Nishis have no traditional celebrations calling for the cooperation of even a whole

village. This is consistent with the fragmented structure of a Nishi settlement whose inhabitants rarely organize themselves for any joint action. Even rituals marking phases of the agricultural year are not performed on a communal basis. There is neither a spring festival nor a harvest festival. Among the Nishis of the Panior region wealthy men perform once in three or four years a rite in propitiation of deities known as Empre who live in the earth and the forest and are believed to give good crops if suitably worshipped. At that rite pigs, goats and chicken are sacrificed, but the performance involves only the members of a single household.

Similarly the Hill Miris sometimes perform a rite known as *yerin* in honour of Rint and Purte, deities dwelling in the earth believed to influence the growth of the crops. If a man had bad crops for one or two years he performs such a rite to avert similar misfortune in the coming year. Several households who all had bad harvests may hold this rite on the same day, but it is in no way a village festival.

There is however, an annual ritual performed by the owners of large numbers of mithan, and this is meant as a propitiation of Lut-ui, a god concerned with the welfare of mithan. Once a year such men collect all their mithan, give them salt to lick and tie them up in the village for one night. Then a pig is sacrificed for Lut-ui and the men who looked after the mithan get a special share of the pork. People who have only a few mithan perform this ceremony only once in three or four years. This ritual resembles a rather more elaborate ritual of the Minyong Adis, which shall be described later in this chapter (p.142).

In recent years the government in cooperation with Nishi politicians and students has instituted an annual festival known as Nyokum or Longte Yullo. This has been modelled on the communal festivals of such tribes as the Adis of Siang District and is parallelled by the Dri festival of the Apa Tanis which I have described in *A Himalayan Tribe* (p.164). The Nyokum is intended to provide a focal point for the cultural interests of Nishis from several circles and thereby foster tribal integration. Its location changes from year to year and there are sacrifices of mithan—largely to procure meat for the feasts—as well as competitions of dancing and singing. Though priests conduct the sacrificial rites, the emphasis is on secular rather than religious activities and the festival is not connected with the cult of any particular deity. A

government subsidy pays for some of the expenses.

A religious innovation which has attained some importance is the cult of Doni-Polo which is supposed to provided an ideological link between all the tribes of the Subansiri District. Educated Nishis are promoting this cult as a counter-measure to the spread of Christianity and perhaps also Hinduism, and politicians extend their patronage to this cult for the same reason. In Ziro, the district headquaters, there is a Doni-Polo hall, but this is used for cultural and social rather than religious purposes. The existence of this cult enables educated tribesmen asked about their religion to assert that they are worshippers of Doni-Polo in contrast to those professing Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity. It will be interesting to see how many Nishis, Miris and Apa Tanis will describe their religion as Doni-Polo cult in the census returns of 1981. The cult has as yet no doctrinal basis, and the name Doni-Polo, which means literally "Sun-Moon", is little more than a symbol standing for all the traditional religious beliefs of the region.

The priests of Nishis and Hill Miris, known as *nyubu*, play a role very similar to that of the Apa Tani priests, described in detail in *A Himalayan Tribe* (pp.157, 164-68, 172). They are the recognized intermediaries between men and the world of gods and spirits, and it is to them that people turn when illness strikes, bad weather ruins their crops, or there is any other emergency. Only a few *nyubu* are shamans and act as oracles through whose mouth a spirit or deity may speak while he is in trance. It is said that they are chosen by the gods who inspire them at an early age to acquire the skills of a priest. Unlike Apa Tani as well as Adi priests they do not wear special clothes even on ceremonial occasions.

While Nishis and Hill Miris, as indeed many other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, have only hazy ideas about the nature of the deities they worship, their beliefs regarding the fate of man in the world beyond the grave are far more precise. Not only priests but also laymen can give an account of the Land of the Dead and the life the departed lead there. There is, of course, no complete consistency between the views expressed by tribesmen from different regions, but the main outlines of their eschatological ideas are fairly clear.

The Land of the Dead

Nishis and Miris share with the Apa Tanis the belief that there are two or more regions to which the departed go and that the manner of their death determines their ultimate destination. Those who died a natural death go to a place called Nilitu, which lies under the earth. On the path to Nilitu the departed have to pass Porotado, the guardian of the underworld. He has a very large long-house, in which he lives with his wife Uli. He calls the departed to the verandah of his house, and there questions them in detail about their achievements in their past life, asking them how many enemies they have killed, how many slaves they have bought or captured, how many wives they have married, and how many mithan and Tibetan bells they have possessed. Success in all these activities is approved by Porotado, and the heroes of many raids and husbands of many wives are invited into his house and entertained there for several days. Poor men and those lacking martial exploits are curtly dismissed, and sent on their way. But ultimately all reach Nilitu, and there they find conditions similar to those on this earth. Rich men will be rich again, and poor will be poor. But a man of originally high status who was captured in war, sold as a slave and never released, regains in Nilitu his original high status. Those who died unmarried have to live in Nilitu in a separate place, and their lot is a hard one as they can never get married.

Yet another fate awaits those who died an accidental death or were killed in battle. They go to a place in the sky known as Suhutegigüri, which is a pleasant abode where life is similar to that on earth.

Even among Nishis there are several variations of the ideas about the Land of the Dead. Thus the people of Yazali believe that the way to Nilitu is lined with beautiful flowers and singing birds, and that when the dead enter, they are met by all their departed kinsmen who take them to their dwellings. In this account there is no mention of a guardian of the Land of the Dead, but it is believed that Nilitu is a rather melancholic place, although the departed are not unhappy. The place where the victims of an accidental or violent death go is called Talang-nyoko. There things change so rapidly that it is difficult to adjust to the speed of life. If one sows today, the grain will mature tomorrow, and if a hand is cut off it will grow again.

Yet another version of a dead person's entry into the Land of the Dead tells that on the way to Nilitu the soul (*yal*) and the priest (*nyubu*) whose spirit accompanies the soul come to Chango-sole, a kind of entry gate. There they find the path blocked by a big snake, and this they have to kill. To both sides of the path there are more snakes. The *nyubu* who accompanies the *yal* leads whatever mithan was killed at the funeral but poor people for whom no ceremony with a mithan sacrifice was performed must find their own way to Nilitu, for there is no priest to accompany them.

The Hill Miris call the Land of the Dead Ui-murü and believe that Sü, the earth deity joined to Doni is in charge of the underworld. The guardian equivalent to the Nishis' Porotado is called Chügo-sob. It is he who causes earthquakes when he moves. Like Porotado he asks the dead about their deeds on earth. If they lie, he looks at the palm of their hand, tells them that they have lied and directs them to a difficult road.

A more complicated version was given by Miris of the upper Kamla valley. According to this the dead journeying towards Ui-murü come first upon Nibi Taktoro who asks them about their deeds (slain enemies, wives, exploits in the chase, etc.) and demands to see horns and other tallies of their achievements. If a man can satisfy Taktoro, he send him along on a straight road called Jirgo, but to those who had performed no deeds of valour he gives a stick half creeper and half snake, and sends them along a difficult path known as Siru-potam. Those who follow the Jirgo road find their way blocked by Nido Hergogi, a mithan carrying the earth on his enormous horns. He too asks them for their doings on earth, but unlike Taktoro does not approve of acts of violence and war, and threatens to bar the road to those who have killed men and captured slaves. To clear the way the dead strike at him, and he falls with the result that the whole earth trembles.

There is no obvious explanation for the two contrasting ethical codes maintained by the two guardians of the Land of the Dead, the mithan carrying the earth on his horns occurs also in another version in which he is called Chegobo.

The account containing the motif of two different guardians speaks also of several regions in the Land of the Dead, each with a different name, and with different features. While those who died a violent death go at first to a separate place, they do not stay

there for ever but ultimately join the other departed. Similarly children, after dwelling for some time in a land of their own, go in the end to the place where their parents are living.

Though life in Ui-murü is a mirror image of life on earth, the seasons are reversed: during the rains the departed reap and in the cold weather they sow.

The figure of Hergogi occurs also in an account of the Land of the Dead recently given to me by Miris of Raga. But in this Hergogi is not a mithan but a creature, standing like a hill in a very narrow gorge, on whose body there are trees, bushes and grass Rich and prominent men are allowed to pass him at once, but poor men have to wait for months and may be able to pass Hergogi only in the wake of a rich man to whom they attach themselves as his followers. Similarly rich women married by *nieda* get into the underworld at once, while those who drifted from one man to the other have to wait for a long time. When a very great man arrives Hergogi trembles, and it is this trembling which creates earthquakes.

In several accounts of the Land of the Dead there are references to a three tier structure of the world. Under the world of men there is a second world to which the departed go, and below this there is a third world which rests on the horns of a mithan. This recalls the Apa Tani idea of a series of underworlds and a progression of the departed from one Land of the Dead to the other. (See *A Himalayan Tribe*, pp. 174, 176.)

The ideas about the human soul of Apa Tanis, Nishis and Miris are also very similar. The surviving element of the personality which goes to the Land of the Dead is called *yalo* by the Apa Tanis, *yaji-yale* by the Miris and *yal* by the Nishis. Separate from the *yal* is the *orum* which remains after death in touch with the living. When Nishis and Miris give food offerings to their deceased relatives they believe that the latter's *orum* come and eat them. The *orum* may be beneficial if properly cared for, but can also be dangerous and cause illness if neglected or annoyed. As Nishis are not sophisticated theologians they do not draw a sharp distinction between *yal* and *orum*, and it seems that the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Thus I have heard Nishis say that five days after a man's death his *yal* comes back to his house in order as to collect the spiritual essence of his personal belongings such as *dao*, bow and arrows, beads and bracelets. If there is a

real distinction between *yal* and *orum* it would be more logical to assume that the *orum* were supposed to visit the house.

The confidence Nishis have in the continuation of life after death explains also their funeral ceremonies which are by no means all mournful, but comprise dancing and feasting often on a grand scale.

In traditional Miri society all dead were buried near their houses, both adults and children; great men and women very close to the house, slaves at a little distance. Men killed in war were buried near the houses if their corpses could be carried home. There was no fear of the contagiousness of an unlucky death.

While today men are no longer killed in war, the funeral customs have otherwise remained unchanged. When an important man dies all the young men of the village come to his house on the first evening. A pig or goat is slaughtered, and the men are entertained with meat and beer. They sing and dance inside the house "in order to make the women feel better". The next day some young men go to fetch the poles and bamboos for the funeral, and some old men dig the grave. Nearby a ritual structure of poles and bamboos is erected. Then all assemble at the grave and the old men bring the corpse and put it into the grave. Then one or two mithan are sacrificed at the ritual structure. After the men have eaten and drunk they dance near the grave, and later some young men enter once more the house of the deceased and dance there. The feasting may go on in this way for several days. The funeral of an important woman is similar.

After one month or more another rite, known as *orum-ui*, is performed. At this a pig or a mithan is sacrificed in honour of the dead man or woman. At this rite there is no dancing, but either a mithan or a pig is sacrificed. For small children the *orum-ui* is not performed, but is held for adolescent boys and girls.

Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Minyong Adis

The religious systems of the tribal populations of Arunachal Pradesh have some features in common while they evince considerable differences in others, though none of these differences are of the same magnitude as the distinction between Nishi religion and Hinduism or Buddhism. The following account of the basic aspects of the religion of the Minyong Adis of the Siang District

will demonstrate both parallels and distinctions between the beliefs of neighbouring tribes. The information it contains is mainly based on investigations which I conducted in 1937 among the Minyongs of several villages on the right bank of the Siang river, notably Rengin, Rotung and Pangin. At that time the Minyongs had still little contact with the outside world, and it can thus be assumed that what they told me expressed traditional tribal ideas.

I was fortunate to be able to make contact with some priests and shamans, known as *mirü*, who were not only expert in ritual performances but also repositories of tribal traditions.

Among the Minyongs both men and women can become *mirü*, and they are easily recognizable by their distinct ornaments consisting of tufts of grass and blue beads worn in the hair, and a profusion of metal necklaces. Men and women whose ability to fall into trance has proved their fitness to enter into contact with the spirit-world receive instructions from a senior *mirü* and then embark independently on a career as seer and priest. In some villages there are several *mirü*, whereas in others there are none. *Mirü* of reputation function not only within their own village-communities, but are called also to other villages where their services may be needed.

Apart from divining the cause of disease and other misfortunes, and indicating the means of placating angry gods and spirits, most *mirü* are also knowledgeable in mythological concepts. The technical details of ritual have to be learnt and therefore it is necessary for a *mirü* to be apprenticed to experienced seers. Dancing, often accompanied by the brandishing of a sword, is an essential preparation for the state of trance in which a *mirü* speaks as the spirit.

From the texts of prayers recited at religious rites it is clear that the Minyongs believe in a sky god called alternatively Doing-angung and Doing-bote, the former name being used more frequently. I was told, however, that Doing-bote is the "real" name, whereas *angung* means "friend" and Doing-angung is a manner of addressing the sky god. My informants insisted that Doing-angung was greater than all other deities, and that he was inclined favourably towards mankind. While other gods fed on the offerings of men, Doing-angung was not in need of such food but liked men making such offering as a sign of respect. Most

prayers begin with an invocation of Doing-angung and there can be no doubt that the Minyongs credit him with the power to give good crops and other boons, and to avert disease. He is believed to see everything and to extend his help to mankind.

According to one myth Doing-angung existed in the very beginning of the world, but he lived high up in the sky and took no part in the creation of the earth. At present, however, he is not regarded as remote from the events in the world of men. There is the belief that certain offences against customary law arouse the anger of Doing-angung and invocations recited at the expiatory feasts are specifically intended to allay his and other deities' wrath. Thus in the case of clan-incest the village-counil (*kebang*) condemns the guilty couple to a form of excommunication which does not involve bodily banishment from the locality but bars all normal social relations with other villagers. This ban can be removed only if the offenders provide one or several mithan for slaughter at a feast to which the villagers and prominent men from other villages are invited. It is at this feast that Doing-angung, and other deities are called upon to condone the crime.

When Minyongs invoke Doing-angung they usually call also upon Shidkin-kede, the earth deity. *Kede* means "earth" as opposed to *taleng* "sky". Shidkin-kede is considered a female deity living in the earth. References in prayers do not reveal any other attributes and my informants did not enlarge on her character except to say that she was the recipient of all offerings given to the Earth.

This statement was made in connection with the myth of Shedi-Melo, two deities credited with the creation of the earth. Like many Nishi and Miri deities this is a divine couple, Shedi being female and Melo male. In the beginning of the world, before the Earth came into being, there was only Doing-angung and a pair of siblings called Shedi and Melo. While Doing-angung remained inactive high above, Shedi and Melo made the earth and the sky. As there were no other living beings Shedi and Melo married even though they were sister and brother, and from them the whole human race is descended. After bringing forth the first men, Shedi and Melo entered the earth, which now rests on their shoulders. As mankind increases the earth becomes heavier and sometimes Shedo and Melo try to shake it off, and it is then

that there is an earthquake. No rite is performed for Shedi and Melo; "they are dead and the rocks are their bones." The few prayer texts which I could record do not contain any invocation of Shedi and Melo and my informants were emphatic that offerings given to the earth are for Shidkin-kede and not for the creators of the earth and progenitors of the human race.

Many of the Minyong deities are invariably mentioned in pairs and it is often difficult to ascertain whether the Minyongs think of divine pairs or of bi-sexual deities with male and female aspects. When faced with a straight question, they will usually say that one of the pair is male and the other female, but it is doubtful whether they normally think of such dual deities as of two entirely separate personalities. Shikon-Tanum, for instance, are the names of the "owner" (or "owners") of all wild animals, Shikon being male and Tanum female.

Besides the principal deities invoked at the major annual rites, there are innumerable other gods and spirits. The Minyongs imagine the world populated by hosts of spirits, living in the air, on the ground, in the forest and in the water. There are great and small spirits, and one of my Minyong friends compared them with the hierarchy of government officials, from high officers down to soldiers, interpreters and messengers. While the spirits can see men, only the priests can see deities and spirits.

Many of the Minyongs' ritual activities are directly linked with the agricultural cycle. The first major rite of the agricultural cycle is called *aran*, and is held late in February, a time when the clearing of the jungle on the new *jhum* has been completed. For five days the entire village celebrating the *aran* abstains from all work on the fields, and there is dancing and drinking in the houses. The first day leaf-bundles of rice, rice-beer and ginger are fastened to the house-posts as offerings for the Gumin-shoin and the Agam.

Gumin-shoin are house spirits which watch over the welfare of the inhabitants of a house. Every house has a Gumin-shoin who receives the sacrifice of a pig when the house is built, but above the Gumin-shoin of the individual houses there is a great Gumin-shoin who is the guardian of the whole village.

What the Gumin-shoin are in relation to men the Agam are in relation to cattle. There is one great Agam, the deity of all cattle, described as an old man living in the forest. Moreover

there are smaller Agam who act as the guardians of the cattle of individual households, and it is for these Agam that offerings are tied to the house posts. But while at other ceremonies the Agam are invoked with prayers, no incantations are recited on this occasion.

The *aran* feast lasts for five days, and two days after its completion another rite, known as *bhombe* is performed. I was told expressively that this rite is performed in honour of the sky god and the earth deity. All men of the village assemble in front of the community house (*moshup*) and one man, who may be of any age and clan, sacrifices a chicken. Thereupon all the men gather and recite the following prayer:

> Sky god, Earth spirit, Earth deity, for you all we always celebrate the *bhombe*. Please give us good crops. To mithan. pigs and men be kind. May the crops of the hill-fields be abundant and healthy; may all men be big and strong; year after year strong rich men will perform for you the *bhombe* feast.

Soon after the *bhombe* festival the Minyongs begin sowing the rice and after some ten days, when most of the rice has been sown, a rite known as *mopun* is performed. At that time a bamboo structure (*kozon*) of the type used for most rites is erected outside the village. Next two stakes are driven into the ground and a pig is laid on its back with the head between the two stakes, and two men suffocate it by pressing a piece of wood against its throat. A chicken is then sacrificed and offerings of rice and beer are placed on the ritual structure. A small basket, made as a model of a basket used for carrying loads of rice, is filled with earth and put near the *kozon* this being done in order to obtain a good rice crop. As the man performing the rite places the offerings on the *kozon* and sprinkles it with the pig's blood, he prays:

> May the crops of the field be good, Sky god, Earth Deity. Spirits of earth and water, we perform the *mopun* rite. Pig and fowl we sacrifice, may the crops be abundant and healthy. Year after year rich men will perform the *mopun* rite; may the men be well and strong.

When the sowing has been completed fields exposed to inroads

of mithan and pigs must be fenced in, and this purely practical operation is made the occasion for a feast known as *etor*. In this case no need for the harnessing of the mysterious forces of nature can be claimed, but the Minyongs nevertheless believe that the building of wooden fences is not enough and that offerings to Agam, lord of the animals, are necessary to safeguard the fields. On this occasion too pigs and fowls are sacrificed and eaten.

While parallels for the agricultural rites so far described can be found among several of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and notably among the Wanchus, there is one rite, known as *sholung*, which is comparable only to the Hill Miris' rite in honour of Lutui, the guardian of mithan. The Minyongs' *sholung* rite is performed when the rice plants are about ten inches high, but though it is set into a definite phase of the agricultural cycle, it concerns almost exclusively the Minyongs' cattle.

Adi mithan, like those of other tribes, are usually allowed to roam about in the jungle. On the occasion of the *sholung*, however, all the mithan are brought to the village. Every household has a special open place where short wooden posts, often ending in a small fork, stand at distances of several feet one from the other. These posts are practically unworked, even the fork being sometimes a natural formation. In the morning of the *sholung* day the mithan are brought to the village and fastened to these posts, where they remain until the next morning. Every mithan owner sacrifices a pig and a chicken to Agam, praying that his mithan may prosper and increase. This is also the time when cattle owners cut property marks into the ears of mithan calves. While the mithan are tied to the posts no one except the mithan owner may enter the place, and whosoever later in the year damages one of the posts is fined the value of a mithan. That night every mithan owner gives a feast in his house at which there is singing and dancing. A special priest, known as *sholung mirü* wearing a head dress of special grass dances at this feast within a circle of dancing women.

A significant feature of the *sholung* ritual is the importance attached to the wooden posts to which the mithan are tied. The fine of one mithan for wilfully damaging one of these posts shows clearly that their role is not purely utilitarian. Among several Naga tribes forked posts used to be erected on the occasion of Feasts of Merit, and one wonders whether the forked posts used at the *sholung* festival are not perhaps a survival of similar rituals.

The *sholung* is the last of the great annual feasts. A ceremony performed after the rice-harvest known as *ampidorung* is a simple affair. No sacrifices are performed, but the young men go hunting and any animal killed is given to the old men. The interior of the community house is decorated with leaves and in the dwelling houses food offerings for the Agam are tied to the house-posts.

Besides the great annual rites connected with agriculture and cattle-breeding there are ceremonies which the Minyongs perform on occasions not associated with any particular season of the year. After a successful hunt, for instance, they give an offering to Shikon-Tamun, sacrificing a chicken and fastening its head, wings and feet to a ritual bamboo structure.

Numerous are the rites to avert or cure illness. The Minyongs believe in a host of malevolent spirits who must be bought off with offerings and sacrifices. The following evil spirits may serve as examples for the kind of supernatural beings against whom the Minyongs must be on their guard.

Banji-banmang is a spirit who lives in the forest and in the air. He is like wind and kills men by making them fall from trees and then drinking their blood.

Bhomtup-bhanlup is another evil spirit who makes people die suddenly without any apparent cause.

Bhomthup-iari kills people by striking them by lightning. Leshi-letang is an evil and very dangerous spirit who entices people into the jungle by his laugh and then devours them. Some priests can call him to a village and then all the villagers placate him with offerings.

There are also spirits whose individual names are not known and who are nevertheless dreaded by men. One such group of spirits are called *pulitalam*, and they are thought to be like wind. When an epidemic strikes a village a priest may sacrifice a fowl and address the *pulitalam* with an invocation such as the following: "We do not know your names. You may be *pulitalam* from the mountains, you may be *pulitalam* from the valley; those spirits who brought the disease shall eat this and then leave this place." The proper persons to deal with dangerous spirits are the *ipak-mirü* (shamans), for they alone can see spirits and diagnose the cause of supernatural afflictions.

A concrete case may demonstrate the role of the *ipak-mirü* in the cure of diseases believed to be caused by spirits. In Pangin

village Tasang, a man of Talo clan was ill and called a well known *ipak mirü* from Kewang village to discover the cause of the disease. The *ipak-mirü* began by making 'flowers' of bamboo shavings and putting them up on the walls of Tasang's house to be taken away by any spirits who might come. Dressed in a woman's skirt he then danced brandishing a Tibetan sword. When he appeared to fall into trance all the men present began to shout and then asked the familiar spirit of the *ipak-mirü* where the soul of the sick man had gone. The shaman discovered the wherabouts of the soul and told the evil spirits who had dragged it away that they should release the soul and take in exchange offerings of food and drink.

During the dance the spirits spoke through the shaman's mouth and said that the sacrifice of a mithan was necessary to cure Tasang's illness. Later the shaman addressed Tasang's soul as follows:

> You must not hide, you must come; now we will give you the gift of a mithan. Let this man get well. From now on you must not hide, you must stay in your own house.

From this invocation it would appear that the sacrifice of a mithan was intended to placate not only the spirits, who had captured the sick man's soul, but also the elusive soul itself which was considered very much an independent being. It almost seems that the interests of a truant soul are not necessarily identical with those of the patient and that the soul must be coaxed to maintain the link with the man's body. The same conception underlies the custom that a young married man, when taking his wife to his own house, should sacrifice a mithan for the house spirit and for the soul of his wife. The soul is considered a separate element and the sacrifice has the purpose of binding it to the new home, so that the bride's soul is comfortable and does not escape, an eventuality which would ultimately result in the illness or death of the bride.

After the *ipak-mirü* had promised the sacrifice of a mithan the gathering in the sick man's house broke up. Next morning one of Tasang's mithan was rounded up in the jungle and dragged to the village. A strong wooden scaffold was erected on a piece of sloping ground, the mithan was led below the scaffold and a cane rope with a sliding noose fastened round its neck. The rope was made to run over the scaffold and a group of men standing on

the far side of the scaffold pulled the rope and thereby lifted the mithan from the ground, until the animal hung suspended from the scaffold and soon died by suffocation.

Unlike most other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh the Minyong Adis kill most sacrificial animals by suffocation, a method of killing common among some of the nomadic peoples of Tibet, but contrary to the Nishis' and Hill Miris' method of slaughter which involved the cutting of the animal's throat with a *dao*, as well as to the method of the Wanchus and Nagas, who pierce the animal's heart with a spear in the case of cattle, and with a bamboo spike in the case of pigs.

No rituals were performed during the strangulation of the mithan in front of Tasang's house, but subsequently the *ipak-mirü* erected a ritual structure and tied some fresh, leafy branches to the bamboos. When the mithan had been dismembered he took some of its blood and smeared it on the leaves. While doing this he prayed.

> Today we gave an offering, may this ill man recover, whatever spirits may have caused his illness, may they all come here. We gave them the offering of a mithan. May they eat this mithan and let the sick man recover.

This invocation was addressed to all the spirits who might have caused Tasang's illness. There was no reference to any of the higher deities nor to the sick man's soul that had been promised a share in the offering.

I have no reliable data on the soul concepts and the eschatological beliefs of the Minyongs, but from the fragments of information which I was able to record it appears that the Minyongs' ideas of the Land of the Dead are roughly similar to those of Nishis and Hill Miris.

11

Buddhist Societies of Kameng District

The great majority of the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh share a world view and a social atmosphere that have remained outside the orbit of the great historic civilizations of South Asia. Despite the spatial proximity of Assam on the one side, and of Tibet on the other, neither Hinduism nor Buddhism impinged on these societies, most of which persisted until recently in a state of isolation from extraneous influences. However, there is one part of Arunachal Pradesh where for several centuries very different conditions prevailed and tribal societies evince the powerful cultural impact of Mahayana Buddhism in its lamaistic form. This region, which adjoins to the west the mountain kingdom of Bhutan, differs from the rest of Arunachal Pradesh both topographically and culturally. Whereas elsewhere the nature of the terrain had prevented the development of caravan routes suitable for pack-animals, in the westernmost part of Arunachal Pradesh there are climatic and geographical conditions which favoured the opening of trade-routes linking the territory both with Tibet and with the plains of Assam. Hence conditions were similar to those prevailing in Bhutan and further west in Sikkim and Nepal. Along these trans-Himalayan trade-routes Tibetan cultural elements and ultimately Buddhist monks and nuns infiltrated into the mountain region lying between the easternmost part of Bhutan and the southern border of Tibet.

As a result of these cultural and ethnic influences from the north, the region, now dominated by the famous monastery of Tawang, assumed a character entirely different from that of the parts of Arunachal Pradesh described in the preceding chapters.

The district officially named Kameng after its major river extends between the westernmost part of the Subansiri District and Bhutan. The area adjoining the Subansiri District represents ethnographically an extension of the Nishi country though its

inhabitants are referred to not as Nishis but as Bangnis, a term whose derivation is so far unexplained. From the fragmentary information available on the tribal groups inhabiting the Seppa division which adjoins the Mengo circle of Subansiri District it appears that the Bangnis resemble the Nishis in many respects, and as early as 1945 I had learnt of cases of intermarriage linking the populations to both sides of the boundary between the two districts.

The tribesmen know as Bangnis, 28,468 of whom were counted in the 1971 Census, seem to have been no less warlike than their eastern Nishi neighbours, and until recent decades they exerted pressure on such minor tribal groups as Akas and Mijis, whom they used to raid in the pursuance of material gains. As the entire area has now been pacified such martial activities can no longer be observed, but Akas whom I met in Bomdila told me that even a generation ago many Aka villages were subject to the domination of Bangnis, who extracted tribute from them under the threat of raids. According to information which I obtained in Rupa, the Akas in turn exerted pressure on their Sherdukpen neighbours as well as on the small Khova tribe. The Mijis—also known as Hrusso—were also involved in this power game being periodically raided by Bangnis and themselves demanding tribute from Sherdukpen villages.

Neither Bangnis nor Mijis or Khovas have been studied by anthropologists, but from the limited information I could obtain during a brief stay in Bomdila it appears that all these groups share many cultural features with the Nishis, and are clearly distinguished from both Monpas and Sherdukpens. Thus the Khovas, who call themselves Bugum, were until recently slash-and-burn cultivators. As they have hardly any flat land, they do not use ploughs even today, though their Monpa and Sherdukpen neighbours are familiar with ploughs drawn by bullocks. The Khovas own some cattle and unlike Nishis milk their cows as well as cross-breeds between mithan and ordinary Indian cattle. There are only ten Khova villages and according to the 1971 Census there were then only 703 Khovas. They are divided into exogamous clans and this suggests a closer link with Nishis than with Monpas. The small Khova community is strictly endogamous even though Khovas have long-standing close relations with Sherdukpens. In recent years there has been a movement towards

Buddhism, and there is a plan to build a *gompa* in the village of Wangho and to apprentice some Khova boys with Bhutanese lamas residing in Rupa.

Monpas

The main population in the western part of Kameng and particularly in the region of high altitude which adjoins Bhutan and Tibet consists of Monpas, an ethnic group of Mongoloid racial stock and Tibeto-Burman language. Their number was 27,812, at the time of the 1971 Census. The Monpas are closely akin to the people of easternmost Bhutan, speak a similar language and dress in almost identical style. All Monpas profess Buddhism, but we shall see presently that an older religion known as Bon survives in many Monpa communities.

The Monpa country is divided into three main regions : Tawang, inhabited by the Northern Monpas; Dirang, the home of the Central Monpas; and Kalaktang, inhabited by the Southern Monpas. Within these divisions there are several distinct groups which are largelly endogamous even though there is no strict ban on intermarriage. Among the Central Monpas, for instance, there are those known as Dirang Monpas and others known as Lish Monpas, concentrated in and around the village of Lish, which lies at no great distance from Dirang-Dzong. Another group is known as Panchen Monpas, and these dress like Tawang people, but, speak a different dialect.

Unlike most other regions of Arunachal Pradesh, the Monpa country and in particular the Tawang division have for long been in the light of recorded history, a circumstance due to their connection with Buddhist institutions in neighbouring Tibet. According to local tradition the Tawang valley came under Buddhist influence as early as the 11th century, when a monk from the Bumtang district of Bhutan established several villages of adherents of the new faith. The first monasteries in the area were foundations of the Kargyupa and Nyingmapa sects, and it is believed that in the 13th century the Drukpa branch of the Kargyupa sect was introduced by another monk from Bhutan.

Later, when the Gelugpa sect had attained a dominant position in Tibet, Lodre Gyatso, a lama from the Tibetan village of Mera, and hence popularly known as Mera Lama, set out to spread the Gelugpa doctrine among the Monpas of Tawang and

succeeded in this endeavour with the help of the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682). It was during this period that the foundations of the great Gelugpa monastery of Tawang were laid. Its full name is Tawang Ganden Namgyal Lhatse Ling, i.e. "Celestial paradise of the divine site chosen by a horse". The name Ta (=horse) -wang (=chosen) relates to a legend which tells how the founder's horse had led him to the present site of the *gompa*.

During the period of Tibetan rule over the Monpa country, which lasted until 1950, a place called Ghyangar, which contained a fort and lies at a distance of some 12 km from Tawang, was the main administrative centre and seat of a governor (*dzong pen*). Another fort (*dzong*) believed to be some 200 years old, lies at Dirang and this used to be the residence of two *dzong-pen*. This *dzong*, a stone building three stories high, still exists and a lama now lives in it and maintains the chapel, while the rest of the large rambling building shows the signs of prolonged neglect. The time when the Tibetan administrators collected land-revenue, paid mainly in kind, is still remembered, and it seems that they interfered little in the life of the villagers who had their own system of social controls.

Settlements and Dwellings

Monpa settlements differ from those of most other populations of Arunachal Pradesh by the greater permanence of the houses built largely of stone and thus contrasting sharply with the ephemeral wood and bamboo structures of such tribes as Nishis, Apa Tanis and Adis. Only in the extreme north of the Subansiri and Siang districts do we find high altitude dwellers who also build largely in stone because they have to cope with climatic conditions similar to those of the Monpa country.

Within the Kameng District the Monpas' style of house-building varies with the differences in altitude. Whereas the Monpas of the relatively low lying Kalaktang area build largely in wood, those of Dirang use mainly stone as building material though the superstructure of houses as well as verandahs are made of wooden planks. In the Tawang region, where settlements lie at altitudes between 6,000 and 12,000 feet, the entire outer shell of houses is usually made of stone, while wood is employed in the interior and in the shape of stout planks covering the roof.

A few examples will give an idea of the different settlement

patterns of the various groups of Monpas of which I could gain first hand experience.

Dirang-Dzong, which is probably older than any other existing Monpa village in the central region, lies to both sides of the present motor-road connecting Bomdila with Tawang, and there can be little doubt that the old caravan-route also passed through this important settlement. Numerous high, stone-built houses stand in narrow lanes, and the whole settlement is dominated by two hills, each bearing a *gompa* surrounded by prayer-flags. In another part of the settlement several houses crowd round the old Tibetan fort and a *gompa* believed to be even older than the two centuries old fort. Here the lack of level space does not permit any dispersal of houses such as occurs in many other villages.

The situation is very different in Sangti, a village lying in the broad valley of a minor tributary of the Dirang river. The 144 houses of this village are spread out over a much more extensive area. Some isolated homesteads stand to both sides of the river surrounded by their farm-land. The main village, on the other hand, lies on high ground and is thus safe from flooding. There is a formal gate-way (*kani*) typical of most Buddhist villages in the Himalayas, and a few houses stand near this symbolic structure. The dwellings of the main cluster stand close together. They are all built of stone with extensive wooden upper structures and verandahs, where much of the household work is being done. The slightly sloping gabled roofs are covered with bamboo matting. As one walks through a narrow lane within this compact cluster one is suddenly confronted by two large and solid buildings. One of them is a well-built and colourfully painted structure containing a huge water-driven prayer-wheel and above this a hall which is used for meetings. Closeby stands the *gompa* or village-temple occupying an elevated site. The frescoes in its large porch depict the guardians of the four quarters so typical of Buddhist *gompa* in many parts of the Himalayas.

Another village in the Dirang circle is Lish, whose inhabitants form a distinct group of their own, speaking a language different from that of Dirang as well as Tawang, even though they live within a few hours' walk from Dirang and Sangti. They own a great deal of land, which extends over a large expanse of gentle slopes, where stone-walls surround wheat and barley fields

improved here and there by terracing.

Above these fields stands the village of Lish, the largest settlement within a group known as Lishpa. Seen from the path leading up to it, the village looks almost like a fortress, but a closer view shows a large conglomerate of individual houses very solidly built of stone and timber. Some of the houses are very tall and stone steps lead to the main entrance door. There are extensive terraces constructed of stone slabs and large verandahs made of wooden posts and planks. These verandahs are partly covered by an extension of the roof, and like the large verandahs of Nishi houses they are often used as work-space for household chores.

In one of the largest houses, which belongs to the headman (*tsorgen*), one enters from the verandah a spacious room containing a hearth around which family members and guests gather for meals, drinking parties and casual discussions of village affairs. Behind this room there are three similar rooms, each occupied by one of the *tsorgen's* brothers, all of whom are married and share with their wives and children this large house in the same way as a Nishi's younger brothers may share his long-house. There is a difference, however, and this lies in the fact that the undivided hall of a Nishi long-house offers no privacy, whereas in Monpa houses each couple has a separate room. The large wooden floor-boards, reminding one of Sherpa houses in Nepal, give an impression of solidity and tidiness.

Lish, which comprises 108 houses, and its two subsidiary settlements Gompa-che with 100 houses and Gompa-lok with 25 houses, form a cluster known as Lichpa and this has an identity of its own and its inhabitants do not intermarry with any other village.

In the Tawang region, separated from the Dirang circle by a mountain range which is crossed by a single major pass close on 14,000 feet high, settlements and houses are adjusted to a climate far harsher than that of the central zone. Here houses are built almost exclusively of stone, though wood is used for windows and doors, and the roofs are made of planks weighed down by stones.

In this regions many large villages divided into several clusters of houses are clinging to steep hillslopes, surrounded by fields on which wheat, barley and potatoes are grown. Other settlements, such as the large village of Jang, are built on the top

of ridges, with rows of well built houses occupying the crests and spurs. Some of the tall houses with their stone walls painted a gleaming white are very impressive. They consist of three storeys; on the ground floor there is space for cattle, the first floor is occupied by the living quarters, and under the roof there are rooms for guests as well as store-rooms.

In some villages, such Kitpi which lies in a sheltered valley, warm enough to permit the cultivation of rice, houses of modest size and constructed entirely of wood stand next to major stone-built houses, and such subsidiary dwellings are used to accommodate younger sons or aged parents.

The village of Kitpi contains an extremely ancient house known by a specific name. This house, which bears the name Podum, because at the time of its construction there were seven brothers in the founder's family, is believed to be older than the monastery of Tawang to which an age of close on 300 years is attributed. This house has for many generations been in the possession of the family of the present owner Tashi Kando, a prominent Monpa and former member of the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh. Another house belonging to the same family was called Kar, but this no longer exists because the inmates moved to the house Podum. Nearby was a small *gompa* in which the Mera Lama is believed to have lived before he founded Tawang. A Buddha statue was found in the collapsed *gompa* and taken to the house Podum. This house retains its original stone structure though the wooden parts have periodically been restored. Steep stairs lead from the ground floor to a balcony and from this one enters a chapel where the recovered Buddha image serves as the centre piece of a small altar. It is well furnished with beautiful old carpets, and contains *thanka* (painted scrolls), drums to accompany the recitation of prayers and other ritual objects. The main living room, , which is used also as kitchen, lies on the ground floor. It is rectangular, the floor is made of large planks and to one side there is a hearth. Apart from some heavy wooden store-boxes and some shelves there is little furniture and two old copper cauldrons are the only articles of some value. As Tashi Kando's house is built against a slope, there is room for a cattle-shed below the main living-room, and in some parts of the house there are three storeys, the chapel occupying the highest floor.

The naming of individual houses is a common practice among

the Monpas of the Tawang region. Thus one of the other houses of Kitpi is called Lu-sima because it stands near a tree in which a *lu* (serpent spirit) is supposed to dwell.

Agriculture

Farming is the traditional basis of Monpa economy, though trade and barter used to play also an important role as long as there was free intercourse between the area now included within Arunachal Pradesh and the adjoining province of Tibet. Most villages are self-sufficient in foodgrain, but there are some whose inhabitants have to supplement their farming output by earnings from other occupations. With the Tawang sub-division the 77 villages of the Tawang circle and the 21 villages of the Lumla circle produce all the food they need, while the small circles of Zemithang and Thingbu have a deficit in food-grain. The Kalaktang region is self-sufficient, whereas the 19 villages of the Dirang circle produce only about 50 per cent of their food requirements and rely on trade with Bhutan and nowadays also on employment by government agencies to make up the deficit.

The cultivators' choice of crops depends largely on the altitude of villages. Most of the farmers of the Dirang circle grow rice on irrigated fields, maize, millet (*eleusine coracana*), wheat and barley, whereas in the Tawang sub-division rice is grown only in the lower parts of the valleys. The villages situated on the higher slopes grow mainly wheat, barley and of late also potatoes and soya beans. According to official statistics for 1978-79 in the whole sub-division 644 hectare were under rice, 610 under millet, 426 under maize, 962 under wheat, 1155 under barley, 120 under potatoes and 226 under soya beans. In recent years imported vegetables and fruit are also grown on a considerable scale, and government employees and members of the army units stationed in the area provide a ready market for such horticultural products.

The greater part of the farm-land in both the Dirang and the Tawang region is under permanent tillage, but Monpas practise also slash-and-burn cultivation, though not on a scale comparable to the *jhum*-cultivation of such tribes as the Nishis and Adis. On steep slopes, where terracing would be difficult, the forest is periodically cleared for cultivation and then allowed to grow up again. The brushwood is burnt and the soil dug up with hoes, a

task which is done by both men and women. On such plots millet and maize are dibbled whereas on ploughed fields they are broadcast.

In the Tawang region the cycle of agricultural activities is approximately as follows, though there are variations according to the altitude of the holdings.

January	:	Weeding of wheat and barley fields.
February	:	Weeding of wheat and barley fields continues. Felling of trees and clearing of brushwood on plots selected for *jhum*-cultivation.
March	:	Clearing of *jhum*-fields continues.
April	:	Clearing of *jhum*-fields and burning of brushwood. Repair of terraced fields, construction or repair of irrigation channels. Planting of potatoes and sowing of rice in nurseries.
May	:	Sowing of millet and maize by dibbling on *jhum*-fields and by broadcasting on ploughed fields.
June	:	Harvest of buckwheat. Transplanting of millet and rice.
July	:	Transplanting of millet and rice. Weeding of maize.
August	:	Weeding of rice-fields.
September	:	Sowing of buckwheat.
October	:	Harvest of wheat, millet, rice and maize.
November	:	Ploughing of wheat and barley fields, followed by sowing of wheat and barley in both ploughed fields and *jhum*-fields.
December	:	No agricultural work except in Lumla circle where wheat is sown.

Monpas of all areas use very large and heavy ploughs with iron shares attached to the plough by two iron rings. To draw such heavy ploughs Monpas employ crossbreeds between mithan and Indian cattle, for these animals are large and extremely strong. Two men are needed for the ploughing: One holds the plough and manoeuvres it in such a way as to dislodge the heavy stones found in most fields; the other man walks between the two plough-bullocks, which are kept far apart by an unusually long yoke; this man has to see that the long shaft of the plough remains fastened

to the yoke.

One of the unusual practices of Monpa farmers is the use of leaves collected in the forest for the control of weeds. The newly sown maize-plots are covered with a layer of such leaves, and while the young maize plants penetrate through this layer most weeds are suffocated and perish under the dried leaves.

Throughout the Monpa country and particularly in the Tawang circle I was impressed by the careful utilization of the land, a phenomenon which reminded me of the intensive land-use typical of the Apa Tanis. There are few patches of land which are not put to some use. However steep and torn by ravines the terrain may be it is either under cultivation or used as pasture for cattle and ponies, or is covered by privately owned forest. Wherever possible steep slopes are terraced and used for the intensive cultivation of such crops as potatoes or soya beans.

Animal Husbandry

The breeding of cattle forms an integral part of the Monpa farming economy. In the lower regions, such as Dirang and Kalaktang, mithan and cattle are kept in large numbers, and in the former there are also owners of yak who keep these animals on high pastures. Mithan are bought from Bangnis and are crossed with Indian cattle, the resultant hybrids being used for traction and also traded to Bhutan. Crosses between mithan and ordinary cattle are called *jiatsa* if male and *jiatsami* if female. They are fertile and their offspring are called *nuptsa* and *nuptsami*. *Jiatsami* can be crossed with yak, and the resulting animals are called *dzo* and *dzomu*; of these only the females are fertile.

Before the construction of motor-roads horses were the main means of transport, and they are still widely used as pack-animals both within Kameng District and in the trade with Bhutan. People of Dirang also sell horses to Tawang and to the people of Eastern Bhutan.

Sheep are kept for the sake of their meat rather than as a source of wool, though in recent years there have been government-sponsored attempts to introduce merino sheep and to interbreed them with the local variety in order to improve the quality of the wool. A large scientifically managed sheep-farm in Sangti has achieved some promising results, but the conservatism of the Monpas stands still in the way of a general switch from meat to

wool production.

In the Dirang region owners of yak keep their animals for four or five months on high pastures, where the herdsmen stay in tents or stone-huts. Most yak-owners employ herdsmen, who come either from Tawang or Bhutan and are paid an annual salary of Rs 200-300 or in lieu of cash 60kg of unhusked rice. In addition the herdsmen are provided with food and beer, and are given clothes.

In the Tawang region where some villages lie at altitudes of roughly 10,000 feet yak are far more important. There most yak owners possess stone-huts (*bro-brang*) on their yak-pastures, and keep their herds there for the four or five warmest months when the grass is most plentiful. Here too yak are crossed with ordinary cattle, and the resultant hybrids (*dzo* and *dzomu*) are greatly valued. In 1980 the price of a big yak was Rs 100 and that of a good *dzomu* between Rs 2000 and Rs 3000. *Dzo* are used for ploughing and for the carrying of loads, and *dzomu* are kept mainly for the sake of their milk. In contrast to Nishis and most other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh Monpas drink milk and also make butter.

Land-tenure

The Monpas have a complicated system of land-rights which differs fundamentally from that of most other populations of Arunachal Pradesh. The major territorial unit is called *tso* and each *tso* consists of several villages. In the Tawang circle, for instance, there are three *tso*, known as Lhou-tso, Sher-tso and Seru-tso. For this reason the whole area is known as Tsoksum (*sum*=three). In the Luma circle there are eight *tso* and in the Pangtsin circle there are six *tso*.

Smaller units which are comprised within some but by no means all *tso* are called *mang*. Thus within the Sher-tso of the Tawang circle there are two *mang*, one named after the village of Gyangar and one after that of Bomba. Whereas a *tso* consists of several substantial villages a *mang* usually consists of only one village together with a few hamlets.

Both *tso* and *mang* contain communal land, known respectively as *tso-sa* and *mang-sa*. Such common land includes cultivable land, pasture and forest. Fire-wood can be taken freely from such a common forest and timber for buildings can be purchased

at a reasonable price from *tso* or *mang* as the case may be. Most grazing land is common and can be utilized by all members of the *tso* or *mang* but there are also some privately owned pastures. Cultivable common land can be tilled by members of the *tso* or *mang* on payment of a modest tax collected by those in charge of the *tso* or *mang* funds. Parts of the common land can also be purchased, not only by *tso* members but also by people belonging to another *tso*. The price has to equal the market price for comparable land in private hands, and the trustees of the *tso* or *mang* funds can refuse to agree to such a purchase.

There is no land-revenue payable to government, but those who purchased common land must pay to the *tso* or *mang* a tax as long as they use the land for cultivation, and such an annual cess amounts to about Rs 5 per acre. Land of this description reverts to the *tso* as soon as the occupier ceases to use it for cultivation. On inherited land no tax has to be paid to the *tso* fund.

The Tawang monastery also owns land, and this land is leased out to local farmers who pay for the right to till it.

The system of leasing land from *tso* or *mang* has the advantage that progressive farmers who do not own sufficient land for experimentation can hire land and improve it by terracing or irrigation. The tax they pay for such land benefits the village community and is often used for social or ritual purposes.

The greater part of the cultivable land is either privately owned or, though *tso* or *mang* property, held on lease by individuals. Stretches of land in private hands include forests and pasture land, particularly at high altitude where yak-owners have their permanent stone-huts and spend part of the summer.

The Traditional Authority System

According to local tradition the introduction of Buddhism into the Monpa country was accompanied by the emergence of a system of elected headmen known as *tsobla*, each of whom wielded authority over an area roughly similar to a *tso* of the present time. The *tsobla* had the responsibility of controlling the maintenance of the various Buddhist shrines and to ensure that the seasonal ceremonies were properly performed. Subsequently the Tibetan authorities, who exercised sovereignty over the Tawang region, instituted a system under which monks of Tawang were appointed *dzong-pen* in Dirang and Kalaktang, and held this

position for several years. These *dzong-pen* supervised the collection of the revenue which was paid to the Tawang monastery in the shape of supplies of grain.

However, already in the 16th century the institution of *tsobla* was replaced by a system of headmen (*tsorgen*) whose jurisdiction extended either over one large village or a cluster of minor settlements.

The office of *tsorgen* who is chosen by the villagers of the *tso* in an informal election persists to the present day, and a *tsorgen* is elected for a period of three years but can stand for re-election. His duties include the civil administration of the villages of the *tso*, and in this duty he is supported by a council of village elders. He also exercises jurisdiction over civil and criminal cases with the exception of certain major offences such as murder, which are now tried by the appropriate government authorities such as the Deputy Commissioner in his capacity of District Magistrate. Men chosen as *tsorgen* belong usually to one of the higher classes, but the members of the council assisting them may be of any class.

Individual villages have also an assembly in which each household is represented by one member, and such assemblies deal with local disputes and enterprises, such as the building of a bridge or major irrigation channel.

Most disputes concern rights to land and usually involve kinsmen putting forward conflicting claims to inherited private holdings. Other disputes arise from divorce cases or other quarrels over women, or result from drunken brawls. In Tawang I was told that such minor disputes are usually settled by the *gaonbura* of the village or *mang*, and are not brought before the *tsorgen* and *tso* council.

In recent years the authority system has been somewhat complicated by the appointment of *gaonbura* whose authority is ultimately derived from government even though they follow the traditional methods of settling disputes. In the Gyangar *mang* of the Sher-tso, for instance, there was until 1978 one *tsorgen*, but because of internal disputes government was asked to appoint *gaonbura*, one for Gyangar and two hamlets, and one for the remaining hamlets.

Similarly the system of *gram panchayat* has been superimposed on the traditional village government. Thus in Tawang sub-division there were in 1980 altogether 32 *gram panchayat* with 146

members as well as two *anchal samithi* with 24 members. So far no conflicts seem to have arisen from these innovations, and the traditional *tsorgen* have usually been elected to the new bodies.

Social Stratification

In the foregoing chapters we have seen that most of the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh, with the exception of the rigidly stratified societies of Apa Tanis and Wanchus, are basically egalitarian, and that all of them, including the Apa Tanis and Wanchus, are characterized by unilineal and exogamous descent groups. The Monpas differ in both respects, for neither is Monpa society egalitarian nor are exogamous clans the basis of the social configuration.

All the Monpa groups are divided into a number of classes of different status, but within this stratified structure there are regional differences, and these will emerge from the following examples.

In the village of Sangti of the Dirang circle there are three status groups each of which comprises several sub-groups. The highest class consists of Bhapu and Serchipa. Next in rank is a class known as Phechupa. A middle stratum consists of Bagipa, Tsongkapa, Tukshipa, and Bomyakpa. These classes intermarry among themselves while Phechupa normally do not intermarry with the latter four classes, but do intermarry with Bhapu and Serchipa, even though slightly inferior in rank. The two lowest classes are Merakpa and Sermu, and the former is believed to be descended from immigrants who had arrived from Merak, a village in Eastern Bhutan.

Members of the higher classes do not share a drinking cup with members of lower classes, but there is no ban on interdining. In recent years class distinctions have diminished in importance, but previously there was a strict ban on any marriage between high and low class people, and if an unsanctioned union occurred the couple was not permitted to enter the house of the concerned high class family.

There seems to be less objection to unions with outsiders of good status. Thus I was told of the case of a Tibetan who married a girl of Phechupa class; her children are considered to be Monpa and are recognized as Phechupa. Similarly a man of Lish village had married a Bhutanese girl without arousing any opposition.

There are also status differences between villages. Thus the entire Lishpa group is considered as being of "low" status and people of Sangti say that for this reason they do not intermarry with Lish. The people of Lish do not admit that they are of lower rank and explain the absence of intermarriage with Dirang and Sangti by pointing out that their group, which consists of 333 households, is endogamous by choice, the marriage of a Lish man with a Bhutanese being a rare exception.

In general there is no village-endogamy and people of Dirang intermarry with such relatively remote villages as But and Seleri. Similarly there have been some marriages between Dirang and Tawang people. In recent years some Monpa girls have married Nepalis, but no Monpa man has so far married any complete outsider. Bhutanese and Tibetans do not fall into this category as they are Buddhists with similar customs and languages.

The Monpas of the Tawang region have a class system comparable to that of the Dirang villages, but there the highest class is referred to as Shermu and not as Bhapu. The term Shermu is to the outsider puzzling, for in Sangti one of the lower classes was referred to as Sermu, but in the brief time at my disposal I could not solve this riddle and the inconsistence may well be due to the fact that the two terms are near homophones but derived from different roots. In Tawang three groups referred to as Kam, Dhan and Ki are of middle status though Ki is of lower status than the former two. People of Kam class usually marry among themselves or marry people of Shermu class. I could not discover any tendency of hypergamy, i.e. the practice men of higher status being permitted to marry women of lower class while the opposite is frowned upon. Two classes of very low status are Shosha (butcher) and Raiyapa (blacksmith), and the former are said to be of Tibetan origin, a situation which reminded me of that prevailing among the Sherpas, who employ low class Tibetans for the slaughter of animals because as devout Buddhists Sherpas cannot act as butchers. Only members of the upper and middle classes can become monks or nuns, whereas those of Shosha and Raiyapa class can only act as sweepers in Tawang *gompa* and other monasteries.

In view of the widespread prevalence of exogamous patrilineal clans in Arunachal Pradesh it would be tempting to identify the named divisions of Monpa society, such as Serchipa, Bagipa or Tsongkapa, also as clans. This, however, would be a misleading

interpretation. Most of these divisions are named after the villages where they originated, and members of the same section may marry provided there were no consanguinous links between the potential spouses within the past two generations. Thus a man and a woman who have the same grandfather cannot marry, but descendants in either the male or the female line of the same great-grandfather are not debarred from marriage. In this respect the Monpas resemble Tibetans who also lack exogamous patrilineal descent groups.

Family Structure

The usual domestic unit is the nuclear family, consisting of a married couple and their childern, or in the case of a polyandrous marriage, one woman, her two husbands who are generally brothers, and her children. A newly married couple may live in the house of either the husband's or the bride's parents.

Premarital sexual relations between youths and girls of similar social status are not considered as in any way objectionable, and the initiative to the conclusion of marriages is hence often left to the young people. In contrast to Nishi custom the ability of a man to pay a large bride-price is not a determining factor in the arrangement of a marriage. The usual bride-price consists of one horse and one yak or *dzo*, and normally it is given as soon as the young man declares his intention to marry the girl or—if she has already moved into his house without formality—as soon as a child is born. If the man is too poor to pay the price, the claim may pass on to the next generation and his son may ultimately pay it to the wife's family. Normally a dowry of ornaments, utensils and clothes is given to a daughter when she moves to her husband's house, and wealthy people may even give their daughter some land or cattle.

The Monpa term for a marriage arranged by negotiation is *zeroo* in the Tawang dialect and *phunban* in the Dirang dialect. A love marriage concluded with or without the parents' consent is called *leh* in all dialects, and the term for elopement is *krigu*.

If a marriage is formally celebrated the members of the groom's party go to the bride's house carrying with them beer and liquor, grain and ceremonial scarfs (*kata*). From the bride's house all those included in the marriage party, led by a lama belonging to the groom's kingroup, go in solemn procession to the groom's house, and on the way they stop at the houses of kinsmen and friends,

who offer scarfs and entertain the party with drink. In the groom's house there is a feast and it is usual for the groom's relatives to invite the entire marriage party to their houses and ply them with food and drink.

As among other populations under Tibetan cultural influence, such as for instance most Bhotias of the Nepal Himalayas, a man marrying a girl whose parents have no sons, may be invited to join his wife's family as resident son-in-law (*makba*) and if he accepts this position he is given a share in the property of his parents-in-law. For a *makba* the bride's parents pay to those of the *makba* a bride-groom's price equal in value to a normal bride-price.

While a *makba* and his wife may remain permanently in her parents' house, a husband who took his bride to the house of his own father usually builds as soon as possible a house of his own and sets up an independent household.

Divorce is easy, and the most usual cause for divorce is the wife's dissatisfaction with the treatment she received at the hand of her husband or her mother-in-law. If the wife wants to leave her husband's house she is given the dowry she brought with her. A husband's infidelity may also be a cause for divorce, and if a wife is unfaithful her husband may ask her to leave his house and join her lover. If a husband divorces his wife without good cause, the bride-price is not refunded, but if a wife unreasonably deserts her husband, she or her parents have to pay the husband double the bride-price he originally paid. Similarly a man who abducts a married woman has to pay the husband double the bride-price he had paid for her.

Inheritance

The rules of inheritance vary from region to region and in minor details even from village to village. The distribution of a man's property begins usually before his death. Once his sons are grown up and married his land is divided. One share remains with the father, a somewhat larger share goes to the eldest son, and the remaining land is divided equally between the other sons. After the father's death the land which he had kept for himself is distributed among the sons, but all his movable property goes to the youngest son. These are the rules prevailing in the Dirang region.

In the Seru-tso of the Tawang circle all sons get shares of the father's property, but the eldest son's share is larger than those of

the other sons. Middle sons are expected to enter a monastery, but if any such son returns to secular life he can claim a share of the family property. The parental house goes normally to the eldest son, and the younger sons can either stay in it, even if married, or build separate houses on the family's land. In the absence of sons the daughters have a claim to their father's property, and no consultation with the male kinsmen is required at the time of division.

In the Bomba *mang* of the Sher-tso most of the land goes to the eldest son, and even the movable property is largely given to him. If there is a middle son he is likely to become a monk, and the youngest son gets one plot of land and a share in the movable property. If there are no sons the eldest daughter gets the entire property and her sons will ultimately inherit from her.

In Kitpi and the surrounding hamlets the sons inherit nearly equally though the eldest son may get one or two plots more than his brothers. As the eldest son is expected to remain in the family house during his father's life-time his marriage is normally arranged with his parents' consent, and the bride is expected to bring a dowry to the house of her parents-in-law. If the eldest son marries without his parents' knowledge they may still allow him to bring his wife to their house, but they will see whether she fits into the family and if they do not approve of her, she and her husband may be asked to leave the house, and the father may or may not give the eldest son a share of the land.

An eldest son staying in the parental house and managing the family property may build a separate house for his aged parents, and in this case his father will retain one or two fields. These will ultimately go to the eldest son who will pay for the father's funeral.

The youngest son has three options : (1) He can join the eldest son in a polyandrous marriage; (2) He can build a separate house with the help of his eldest brother; (3) He can marry a girl who has no brothers and enter as *makba* his father-in-law's house.

An eldest son will never be allowed to become a *makba*, and the second son should become a monk and for this reason is not likely to become a *makba*. Any third, fourth or fifth son may become a *makba* and thereby relinquish any claim to the parental property.

All such rules are adjusted to the actual situation in a family

and this may necessitate a deviation from the customary practice. Thus in the family of Tashi Lama the eldest brother died before he had any issue, the second brother became a monk but later left the monastery and went as *makba* to Lumla, the third and fourth brothers married one wife in a polyandrous union and took over the parental house. Tashi Lama, the youngest son, who is in government service and works in Tawang as Research Officer, has built a house of his own and purchased a nearby plot of communal land.

It is not unusual for several brothers to remain unmarried. Such a situation is exemplified by the family of Tashi Kando of Kitpi. Tashi Kando was married and had three children when his wife died. He did not marry again. He has three brothers, one of whom is a monk in the Tawang monastery. Another had gone to Lhasa as a monk, but had returned after the Chinese had occupied Tibet and monastic life had come to an end there. He now lives at Kitpi in the family house and is engaged in trade. The youngest of the brothers, who is also a monk, has gone to India to study in one of the settlements of expatriate Tibetans. He was already thirty when he left for India. Thus only one brother out of four got married, and he did not remarry when he became a widower. He now shares the ancient family house with his eldest son and daughter-in-law and their small children.

Monastic Institutions

Mahayana Buddhism is central to Monpa cultural life even though remnants of the old Bon religion persist side by side with orthodox Buddhist practice. Monasteries and nunneries are the focal points of religious life, and in the Tawang region they were until recently also of great social and economic importance.

The great monastery of Tawang, modelled in every respect on the monasteries of Tibet, represents one of the most prominent institutions of the Gelugpa sect south of the Himalayan main range. Unlike many of the monasteries of Ladakh, which recently entered a phase of decline, it is fully operational and novices continue to be recruited from most villages of the Tawang sub-division.

The *gompa* is built on a high hill, which rises to the west of the modern settlement of Tawang, and drops on the other side precipitously into a deep wooded valley. Between the monastery

and the modern settlement there is a large accumulation of single storeyed houses which form a village known as Shyo and are inhabited mainly by people of low class such as butchers and blacksmiths.

A steep path leads from Shyo to the monastery. The first building one passes on the ascent contains a large water-driven prayer-wheel. The facade facing the *gompa* is decorated with a large array of animal skulls and horns painted blue and with some sentences in Tibetan letters inscribed on the foreheads. The purpose of these skulls is probably the warding off of evil spirits.

A short distance from this prayer-wheel stands a small gate-way, and behind it a much larger gate in the style of a *kani* with elaborate frescoes on the interior walls and the ceiling.

After passing through this gate-way one finds oneself in a paved street of small houses inhabited by individual monks. They are built of stone like the houses in the villages and have roofs made of wooden planks. These houses are painted in plain white, while the two gate-ways have rafters and protruding eaves painted in red and blue.

A further ascent passes a large building with brightly painted window frames. It is a school built in 1970, and though the teachers are all monks not only the Tibetan sacred scriptures are taught. There are also classes in English and mathematics and these follow the syllabus prescribed for government schools. In 1980 about 80 pupils attended this monastery school.

Next to the school the main *gompa*-building stands on the highest point of the hill. A large court-yard extends between the *du-khang* and another building which contains the large library. A flight of steps leads from the paved courtyard to a porch decorated with frescoes of the guardians of the four quarters. A massive door leads in to the main hall. There four rows of stout wooden columns carry a large gallery while the centre of the *du-khang* has no second storey and is covered only by the main roof. All the columns and the walls are richly painted.

Along the back wall there are large glass cases containing statues of Buddhas, saints and divinities. In the centre there is the lower part of a colossal Buddha statue, the head and upper part of which extend into the upper storey. This statue, which was made in Tawang, is fashioned of brass and painted. In front of it

stands a smaller statue representing Tsong-lhamu, a female deity.

On the upper floor there are numerous halls and rooms containing altars and statues, including a great collection of tiny Buddha statues known as the "thousand Buddhas". On this floor one comes face to face with the gigantic Buddha image which extends over two storeys. The private apartments of the Rimpoche, the reincarnate abbot of the monastery, are also on the upper floor.

The library housed in a separate spacious building contains a complete set of the Kanjur (Tibetan canon) and many other works, partly obtained from Tibet and partly printed in Tawang from wooden blocks.

In 1980 the number of monks (*drapa* in Monpa, *thawa* in Tibetan) was 265, but only on rare occasions are all the monks in the monastery at the same time. Such an occasion is the Dumdzur, a festival celebrated once in three years when all the *gompa* buildings are repaired and newly painted. In 1980 the government contributed Rs 6,000 to this festival, and out of this sum new clothes for the monks were bought.

For the ordinary maintenance and the subsistence of the monks the *gompa* depends on the tax (*khre*) paid by the 110 villages of the Tawang sub-division. Every village pays according to its acreage an amount of grain from each crop grown. This is collected in the main store of the *gompa*. Hence the families of monks and novices do not have to provide for their subsistence, and this situation contrasts sharply with the system in the monasteries of Nepal where monks depend on the contributions of their relatives and no son of a poor family can afford to enter a monastery unless one of the better-off monks undertakes to feed him. A monk of Tawang may in addition retain private property in land and yak, and use for his own consumption the income from such property.

The houses in which the monks live are maintained by the villages of the sub-division, and it is also the responsibility of these villages to maintain the wall which surrounds the entire *gompa*. The work invested by a particular village in the maintenance of a house does not entitle the monks from that village to occupy that house, but houses are allocated by the abbot and other *gompa* officials.

The organization of the monastic community of Tawang is

similar to that of monasteries—Gelugpa as well as Nyingmapa—in other parts of the Himalayas. Next to the reincarnate abbot generally referred to as Rimpoche, is the *loben* who presides at rituals in the absence of the abbot. Immediately below him ranks the *umse*, who leads the recitations and prayers. Next in rank is the *chipa* (librarian) whose office in a large *gompa* is of considerable importance. An official known as *nyepa* (=*nierwa* in Tibetan) is responsible for the economy of the monastery and the keeping of accounts. Below him ranks the *geko* (= *gerku*) who is charged with keeping discipline among monks and novices (*getsul*). All these offices are held by monks for a number of years, but rarely for longer than five or six years. The lowest of the officials is the *kongnier* who fulfils the role of sacristan and is responsible for keeping the interior of the *du-khang* and other rooms of worship in good order, and particularly for the daily change of water in the bowls which stand on the main altars symbolizing the offerings due to the divinities.

When a novice is admitted, the abbot himself cuts the hair on his head and gives him a new name which he will bear as long as he remains in the monastery. At the age of eight, nine or more years a novice may take the *rabdzung* vow by which he commits himself to the monastic life. After taking this vow the novice becomes a monk (*drapa*) and is bound by the rules applicable to all monks. From then on a boy engages in serious studies and at the minimum age of twenty—but usually much later—he can be ordained as *gelung*, a position which carries considerable prestige because only monks of scholarly achievements are admitted to the ordination.

The division between the monks' religious and secular activities is strictly maintained. When a monk goes on a visit to his village, he must change his monk's habit for a set of lay clothes. He usually keeps these with a friend in Shyo village and leaves his monk's habit there while he goes to his village or visits relatives in other places.

Even when going out to cut wood novices leave their lama robes at the gate-way and put on trousers, and on returning they change back into lama garments.

If a monk of Tawang leaves the *gompa* and marries he must pay a fine to the monastery. The cousin of one of my informants was suspected of having a love affair with a girl, and though his misconduct was not proven he was expelled from the monastery. As he had no property of his own his father had to pay a fine of two

quintal of grain and five loads of fire-wood, and had also to offer *mangse*, i.e. tea and *tsampa* to all the monks, and entertainment costing about Rs 2 per monk.

Monks of Tawang are deputed periodically to the minor *gompa* which are dependent on the Tawang monastery. There are 14 such colonies of the main monastery, and all of them get a share of the income derived from the tax paid by the 110 villages of the Tawang sub-division.

There is also one nunnery, known as Gyawang *ani gompa* which is subject to Tawang and gets for the subsistence of its inmates a part of the income of Tawang. But another nunnery, known as Bramdhung *ani gompa*, which lies about an hour's walk from Tawang, has no institutional link with the monastery and hence does not receive any subsidy. In 1980 the 40 nuns living in this nunnery depended on voluntary gifts offered by nearby villagers and pilgrims visiting the *gompa*. This nunnery comprises a *du-khang*, a communal kitchen, and numerous houses of nuns clustered closely together. Even at the end of April there was still snow lying in the shadow of the *gompa*, and it is obvious that the nuns spend their life under harsh conditions and in great isolation. For the nunnery does not lie close to any track linking one village with another, and hence only people setting out to visit the *gompa* ever relieve the monotony of the nuns' existence.

The monks of large monasteries such as Tawang have far more contact with the laity than the nuns of Bramdhung, for in such monasteries various ceremonies commissioned and paid for by laymen take place. Such a ritual is the Lama-che Tsokor, the greatest rite celebrated at Tawang. A village may request the performance of this rite and contribute large quantities of butter, flour, rice and tea, materials which are partly used for the preparation of *torma* (sacrificial cakes) and partly for consumption by the monks in the intervals of the celebrations. The final part of the Tsokor is a rite of blessing known as Wang, which is performed in the courtyard of the monastery.

Apart from the Gelugpa *gompa* of Tawang there are also some *gompa* of the Nyingmapa sect in the sub-division. Thus at Lumla there is a Nyingmapa *gompa* with a reincarnate abbot. This *gompa* has no direct link with Tawang, but so great is the dominance of the Gelugpa sect in the region that the abbot of Lumla must be recognized as a reincarnation by a Rimpoche of a Gelugpa monastery.

Another Nyingmapa monastery with a reincarnate abbot is at Khemey. The monks of these two monasteries are not bound by vows of celibacy and many are married. Even a reincarnate abbot may marry and have children, but when he dies and his next reincarnation is recognized and installed in the monastery, the wife and children of his previous incarnation must leave the *gompa*, but may take possession of any private property the late abbot had in any other village.

Both Gelugpa and Nyingmapa monks are occasionally called upon to perform a *gyewa* rite for a deceased man or woman. The effect of this rite, at which large-scale charity is distributed, is to smooth the departed person's way to Devachen, the western paradise. Such a *gyewa* is very similar to the equivalent rite celebrated by Sherpas, and is described in detail in my book *The Sherpas of Nepal* (London 1964, Delhi 1978).

The word *gyewa* or *gewa* has also the plain meaning 'merit', and the Monpas have very clear ideas about the acts by which merit can be gained. Meditation is one of the means of acquiring merit, particularly if performed over a long time in the form of *tsam*, i.e. isolation in a hermitage for 3 days, 3 months and 3 years. Merit can also be gained by such practical acts as the construction of *mani*-walls, prayer-wheels, additions to a *gompa*, or even of a road or bridge benefiting the public.

Sin (*digba*) is any act harming other men or causing suffering to animals. One of the serious sins is the killing of a cat, and it is said that this sin cannot be expiated even by offering as many butter-lamps as there were hairs on the body of the cat. The killing of crows is also *digba*, but for a butcher the killing of animals is not sinful. Sexual relations between a monk and a nun are very sinful, but love-making between unmarried lay-people is not sinful, and Monpas even believe that any one who interferes with such relations commits a sin by causing unhappiness or embarrassment to the lovers. This broadminded attitude to interpersonal relations which do not harm anybody else's interests or feeling reminds one of the similar tolerance observable among Sherpas and other Himalayan Bhotia populations.

Bon Religion

Besides the orthodox Buddhist religion based on the sacred Tibetan scriptures, there is a cult of local deities. The practices,

connected with their worship are referred to as Bon, a term used also in Tibet and the Tibetan-speaking parts of Nepal to describe a faith different from Buddhism and often considered as pre-dating the introduction of lamaistic ritual.

Close to many a Monpa village there is a sanctuary consisting usually of several flat stones or a stone structure used for the burning of incense, where rites in honour of local deities are performed. The priests of this cult are called *bun* in the Tawang region and *phramin* in the Dirang area. They have no connection with lamas and the Buddhist *gompa*, worship the local deities with animal sacrifices and also offer eggs, meat, fish, rice and beer to various spirits and local gods.

Besides these priests there are also shamans known as *yu-min* who are subject to possession by gods and spirits, and who prophesize while in trance. Both men and women can become *yu-min*, but it is not possible to combine the function of a lama with that of a Bon shaman. *Phramin* and *yu-min* are believed to be able to see the soul of the departed and know where they go. In this respect their function is similar to that of the priests (*nyubu*) of the Nishis, and it is not unlikely that the Bon cult represents a survival of an archaic local religion which was overlaid by Buddhism. In the village of Lish, which has now two Buddhist *gompa* well stocked with Tibetan books, I was told that until three generations ago Lish had only Bon priests and neither lamas nor any Buddhist shrine.

In Sangti all the villagers celebrate in January a Bon rite known as Chis-söbo. This rite is performed at an open-air sanctuary at the foot of a nearby hill. The priest presiding over the ritual comes from the neighbouring Kasu village, but all households of Sangti participate in the dancing and feasting, even those of married lamas. In the houses of the villagers the feasting goes on for five days.

In the same month the people of Sangti perform the Buddhist rite of Nyungne, which aims at the remission of sins and involves fasting and the circumambulation of the *gompa*. This shows that the same people participate in Bon and Buddhist rituals without considering them mutually exclusive.

At Lhou, a large Monpa village of the Tawang circle, I had the opportunity of observing a Bon festival know as Phla. This is performed every April on a large grassy slope where two Bon sanctuaries consisting of groups of large flat stones are situated. The arrangements for the feast, at which hundreds of participtants

are entertained with food and drink, are made in rotation by the individual villages of the *tso* including Lhou.

A large crowd of men, women and children was milling around on the grassy slope, and there were several camps where food was being heated on open fires and millet beer was dispensed. At one of the Bon sanctuaries several priests were installed. They wore high cylindrical hats with a pattern in red and yellow, and jackets of red woollen cloth tailored in Tibetan style. Another group consisted of men wearing a headgear made of the skins of long-haired goats dyed a golden colour. This headgear surrounded their faces and covered their shoulders and backs. They were dressed up as warriors wearing swords and spears. Apart from these masked men there were several small boys gorgeously attired with jewelry and wearing wide-rimmed pointed hats slightly reminiscent of the headgear of the so-called black-hat dancers who form a feature of certain Buddhist ritual dances.

Most of the men in the crowd were dressed in various shades of red and magenta. The jackets and trousers were tailored either of woollen cloth or raw silk cloth dyed in similar colours. Only a few young men, largely college educated, wore western style suits or coats in subdued colours.

Among the women there was no sign of any departure from traditional Monpa dress. Women of the Tawang region wear exceedingly attractive clothes, all made locally though partly from material imported from Bhutan. The predominant colour is a mellow strawberry red which is the product of vegetable dyes. The woollen Bhutanese material of which shirts and skirts are made has a pattern of vertical white stripes on a strawberry background. Above it most women wear a loose jacket the whole back of which is embroidered in several subdued colours used in the making of elaborate designs which include geometrical patterns as well as representations of animals arranged in bands. Similar jackets are worn in Eastern Bhutan.

Some girls and also older women wore small black caps made in the village. Most men and several women wore yak-hair caps with four horn-like projections which serve to channel rain-water away from the face.

There was a great deal of merry making and laughter and the women moved freely among the men. Both sexes had obviously imbibed large quantities of beer and their mood was entirely

unrestrained. Towards the end of the day several men wearing flat round caps in Tibetan style mounted horses and rode around the grassy slope though without staging any proper race, such as the Bhotias of the Mustang region of Nepal stage on certain festive occasions.

Before the crowd dispersed to continue the feasting in their own houses there was a gathering at one of the Bon sanctuaries and at this it was decided which village would be responsible for the arrangements of next year's festival.

I had no opportunity to observe any of the ritual part of this Bon festival, and my informants were reluctant to say much about it, while they had freely talked about the Buddhist rites celebrated in the Tawang monastery. I felt that this reticence was due to a feeling that the archaic Bon cult is not as respectable a religion as orthodox Buddhism. It also seems that the monks of the Tawang monastery have a negative attitude to the Phla festival and the Bon rites in general, though they must be fully aware of their importance in the cultural and social life of Monpa villagers.

Sherdukpens

The Sherdukpens are a small tribe numbering in 1971 no more than 1635 individuals. Though in their own language they call themselves Senji-Tonji they prefer to be referred to as Sherdukpen by outsiders. Senji is the indigenous name for Shergaon and Tonji for Rupa, Shergaon and Rupa being the only prominent settlements in the tribe's territory. The Sherdukpens are concentrated in a single valley drained by a stream which originates in Bhutan and flows into the Tenga-chu at no great distance from Bomdila. Their habitat is in the nature of an enclave between the Monpa region of Kalaktang and that of Bomdila, but even though they are also Buddhists and share certain cultural features they are very different from Monpas and insist emphatically on their ethnic identity.

Tribal history traces their origin to a Tibetan prince Gyaptang by name, who is believed to have emigrated from Beyalung, the place of his birth, and to have established himself first at But, today a Monpa village, where the ruins of a fort are still to be seen. Local history has that Gyaptang imposed his rule over a large area, including some territory in Assam, and received from the inhabitants a tax paid in grain.

There can be no doubt that the Sherdukpens have old connections with Assam, for at Sapai Jergaon, near the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, there is still an area of 130 acre which remains under the control of Rupa, the Government of Assam levying no land-revenue on the area in question. Sherdukpens go there once a year and stay with the local people. Two new Sherdukpen settlements have sprung up in the same area.

The Assamese used to refer to the Sherdukpens as the Sat Raja, i.e. the Seven rajas. Five of them were from Rupa and two from Shergaon, each representing one of the major clan.

Like the Monpas the Sherdukpens are divided into classes of different social rank. But whereas among the Monpas there are several classes whose ranking vis-à-vis each other is not clearly defined, the Sherdukpen system divides society into only two classes, each of which consists of several socially equal exogamous clans. The upper class is known as Thong and this comprises the clans of Thungdok, Thungshi, Thungo, Krime, Mosubi, Wangdza, Klengtung and Lamaguru. The latter clan is descended from a man of Thungo clan who went to study in Tibet and on his return called himself Lamaguru. Most of the clans within a class can intermarry, but Thungdok cannot marry Klengtung, and Thungo cannot marry Lamaguru because the latter clan is descended from a Thungo man.

The lower class is referred to as Tsao, and within this class there are the five clans of Megedzi, Shindzadzi, Dingla, Monodzi and Midzidzi.

Until recent years each of the two classes was strictly endogamous, but this rule has now been relaxed, and there have been some marriages between Thong and Tsao, even though such unions are still viewed with some disapproval.

There are certain hereditary links between individual Thong and Tsao clans, a system which is reminiscent of the traditional relationships of certain patrician Apa Tani clans with commoner clans dependent on them. Thus the Thungdok clan has a special relationship with certain families of the Megedzi, clan, and in a similar way Krime is linked with Dingla, and Mosubi with Shindzadzi. The dependent clans do not have to give any tribute to their patrons, but when the latter call them for some work, they are expected to obey such a summons. Conversely the patrons are under a moral obligation to come to their clients' assistance if they

are in any difficulty. These links between certain clans of different status find also expression in allocation of animals received as gifts at the time of weddings. Thus at the wedding of a girl of Thungdok clan one of the animals—mithan or sheep—given as presents by the groom's party is passed on to the client families of Megedzi clan.

Sherdukpens do not pay a bride-price in the usual sense, but men of both upper and lower class are under an obligation to give the head of any animal they kill in the chase to their mother's brother, and this gift known as *ru* is considered as a belated payment for their mother to her natal family. The payment of *ru* to her kinsmen begins only after a woman's death, and if a man does not hunt he may give cattle or valuables in lieu of *ru*. After the mother's brother's death his sons or even grandsons may be given *ru*, and in this way the links between the two families are perpetuated.

All Sherdukpens consider themselves as Buddhists, and in Rupa there is a large and well appointed Nyingmapa *gompa* in which the usual Buddhist rites are performed. But the three lamas in charge have come from Bhutan, and in 1980 there was no Sherdukpen training as lama in any of the *gompa* of Kameng District. When a Wang rite is to be performed lamas from Dirang or Tawang are invited, and today lamas from the Tibetan refugee settlement of Tenjigaon are also available for such celebrations.

Buddhism appears to be of relatively recent introduction, and an older indigenous religion centring in the worship of Khik seems to be much more deeply rooted in Sherdukpen tradition. The main rite in honour of Khik can only be performed at Rupa on a site outside the village. The feast known as Khiksaba is celebrated in November or December and lasts for seven days. Without performing this feast and giving offerings to Khik Sherdukpens may not partake of the grain from the new harvest.

The priests conducting the rites of the Khiksaba are Sherdukpens and are called Khikzizi. They are invariably of the Megedzi and Dingla clans, both of which belong to the lower class but traditionally furnish the priests for the cult of Khik. The villagers of Rupa decide who should be trained as Khikzizi while it seems that they take no interest in the training of Sherdukpen youths as lamas.

Apart from these priests of Khik there are also Sherdukpen

shamans. These are called *ranmat*, and perform the same tasks as the *yu-min* of the Monpas undertake.

In the old days the Sherdukpens played an important role in the trade between Tibet and Assam, but recent political events have deprived them of their role as middle-men in this trade, though they continue to have some trading relations with both Tawang and Assam. In Assam they sell chillies, oilseeds and radishes, and buy rice and cloth. They sometimes sell ponies to Monpas of Tawang and maintain a cattle trade with Bhutan. They buy cross-breeds between mithan and ordinary cattle from the Bangnis of the Seppa area and sell some of these to Bhutan.

The origin of the Sherdukpens is still obscure, but it is not unlikely that in the remote past immigrants from Tibet, still remembered in the tale of Gyaptang, settled among local tribal populations similar perhaps to Akas or Mijis. Initially there may have some miscegenation between the two ethnic groups and the Sherdukpens' system of exogamous clans, which is not likely to have had its roots in any Tibetan social environment, can perhaps be explained as the result of the influence of a local pattern of society. The continued involvement in long-distance trade, on the other hand, may be indicative of the Sherdukpens' Tibetan roots, while the establishment of Buddhist institutions may be due to the impact of more recent activity of Tibetan, Bhutanese or Monpa lamas. As middle-men in the trans-Himalayan commerce between Tibet and Assam they represented perhaps a phenomenon similar to the Thakali traders of Western Nepal, who also occupied a key-position midway between two disparate economic zones.

Recent Developments

While familiarity with the people of the Subansiri region over a period of more than three decades enabled me to analyse the process of economic and social change among such tribes as Nishis and Apa Tanis, I lacked any previous knowledge of the area when I visited the Kameng District for a few weeks in 1980. A comparison between past and present conditions among Monpas and Sherdukpens can therefore not be based on personal observation, and documentary information about these tribes is so scanty that any reconstruction of recent developments must largely remain guess-work.

The most important single event affecting the social life of the entire region was probably the replacement of ecclesiastical system

of administration of Tibetan style by Indian secular rule in the early 1950s. Even though there does not seem to have been any conscious attempt to deprive the Buddhist hierarchy and in particular the monastery of Tawang of their influence in social matters, the mere establishment of the Indian administration and a novel educational system diminished the importance of the monastic authorities, and led to the emergence of a secular elite rivalling the clerics who had previously been the only educated literate class. Today there are many Monpas and Sherdukpens who have received a school education and some have studied outside Arunachal Pradesh and obtained academic qualifications making them eligible for posts in the administration of Arunachal Pradesh as well as in the newly introduced educational system. Alone in the Tawang subdivision there were already in 1979, 36 schools with 68 teachers and 1297 registered pupils. By 1980 twenty Monpas had university degrees, while among the much smaller Sherdukpen community there were already twelve graduates. Awareness of the outside world is now widespread, and this is at least partly due to the rapid improvement in communications.

Motorable roads built in recent years now link Bomdila, Dirang, Tawang, Lumla, Rupa and Shergaon with the plains of Assam. While previously the journey from Tawang to the foothills took a minimum of seven days on horseback, it can now be accomplished in a single day by jeep or car, and both trucks and buses ply regularly along this route.

While communications have improved, long-distance trade has suffered a setback because of the closing of the border with Tibet following the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962. Before the Chinese occupation of Tibet both Monpas and Sherdukpens were active in the trans-Himalayan trade. Most of the Tawang Monpas used to go on trading trips to Tibet while the passes were open in the summer months. They usually went as far as Tshona in Tibet, which could be reached from Tawang in about four to five days' journey. There they traded with Tibetans, some of whom had come from Lhasa. The Monpas sold chillies, vegetable dyes such as madder, peaches, handmade paper produced in Tawang and husked rice. In exchange they obtained salt, wool, woollen cloth and *churpi* (a hard, cheese-like milk-produce). For three measures of rice they obtained about two measures of salt which was in great demand among the tribal populations of Arunachal Pradesh. In the months

of December and January many Monpas and Sherdukpens used to go to Assam where they bartered Tibetan wool and blankets for rice.

The loss of the trade with Tibet has been made up by an expansion of economic ties with Assam and by the Government of India's massive investment in Arunachal Pradesh. Alone the road-building programme provided employment on a large scale, and irrigation projects benefited the Monpa economy more directly. The introduction of improved crops and varieties of fruit has created new possibilities for agriculture and horticulture, and wheeled traffic has made the marketing of their products outside Arunachal Pradesh feasible.

Monpas and Sherdukpens have made enormous strides in the spheres of education and politics. Both tribes have their elected representatives in the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh and a Sherdukpen served for several years as Chief Minister of the Union Territory and occupies now a seat in the Indian Parliment.

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Glossary

Anchal samithi: regional council established under the *panchayati raj* system of local government (Hindi).
ani: Buddhist nun (Tibetan and Monpa).
ani gompa: nunnery (Tibetan and Monpa).
bango: administrative unit consisting of a group of villages (Adi and Miri).
bon: indigenous pre-Buddhist cult (Monpa).
buliang: clan dignitary, village councillor (Apa Tani).
dao: sword-like weapon, used as universal cutting implement.
dapo: peace treaty; friendship pact (Nishi, Miri and Apa Tani).
drapa: Buddhist monk (Monpa).
du-khang: main assembly and prayer hall in Buddhist monastery (Monpa).
dzo: male yak/Indian cattle hybrid (Monpa.)
dzomu: female yak/Indian cattle hybrid (Monpa).
dzong: fort (Monpa).
gaonbura: village elder; headman (Assamese).
gingdung: mediator; go-between (Nishi).
gompa: Buddhist temple or monastery (Tibetan and Monpa).
gram panchayat: statutory village council (Hindi).
guchi: commoner; member of lower class (Apa Tani).
guth: patrician; member of upper class (Apa Tani).
jhum: hill-field made by cutting forest and burning it; slash-and-burn cultivation (Assamese).
kata: ceremonial white scarf (Tibetan and Monpa).
khozon: ritual bamboo structure used for sacrifices (Minyong).
kotoki: government interpreter (Assamese).
lem paka sinom: competition between litigants involving slaughter of cattle (Nishi and Miri).
lisudu: competition between litigants involving slaughter of cattle (Apa Tani).
maje: bell without clapper used for ceremonial exchanges (Nishi).
makba: son-in-law residing in father-in-law's house (Monpa).
mang: territorial unit (Monpa).
mipak: lower class (Minyong).
mirü: priest (Minyong).
mishing: upper class (Minyong).
mithan: *bos frontalis*, a kind of domesticated cattle (Assamese).
morung: men's house; bachelors' dormitory (Assamese).
moshup: men's house (Minyong).
nieda: marriage concluded with full rites (Nishi).
niera: slave (Nishi).

nin-asa: relationship established by ceremonial exchange of valuables, especially *maje* (Nishi and Miri).
nin-orum: relationship established by ceremonially concluded marriage (Nishi and Miri).
nyubu: priest (Nishi and Miri).
pakhe: rite accompanying conclusion of peace-pact.
posa: traditional payment by the government to tribesmen whose entitlement is hereditary (Assamese).
phramin: Bon priest (Monpa).
rimpoche: reincarnate lama (Tibetan and Monpa).
ropi: rite performed after killing an enemy, tiger or leopard (Nishi and Apa Tani).
seer: Indian measure of capacity (Hindi and Assamese).
sotu: black magic (Nishi).
tado hale: marriage performed with minimal caremonial (Miri).
thong: upper class (Sherdukpen).
tsao: lower class (Sherdukpen).
tso: territorial unit (Monpa).
ui: god, spirit (Nishi).
in-murü: land of the dead (Nishi).
yal, yalo: soul (Nishi).
yu-min: seer, shaman (Monpa).

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