

# **ENTICING FRONTIERS**

**Sequel to Alluring Frontiers**

*By*

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## PREFACE

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Spread over 83,000 square kilometers area in India's North East is a vast mountainous territory called Arunachal Pradesh — the land of the dawn lit sun — the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency.

I entered the territory in early 1952, when it was still a mysterious, foreboding land with abounding jungles, gurgling rivers, awesome mountains. It was soon after the great earthquake of 1950 that the devastation wrought was manifestly visible in ripped hills. There lived in isolation dozens of tribes about whom very little information was available to out-side world.

The hills were kept as barriers till late forties. There were only periodical forays by body of troops to subdue the tribesmen and development in road communication or primary education, that was limited to frinze areas of garrison stations in the foot hills.

With the re-organization of the territory as North East Frontier Agency in 1948, a gradual process of consolidation of Administration was started with the formation of six districts — each under a Political Officer. The primary objective at the time was to extend the influence to the interior areas.

A process in developmental activities started with building up of porter tracks, extension of primary education, establishment of health units.

In 1954, Dr. Verrier Elwin, a distinguished scholar was brought in as Adviser to Tribal Affairs. It was Elwin who became the architect of the new policy and his "Philosophy for NEFA" spelt out in details on how to approach and appreciate the Tribal problems. The new policy had proved a success as existing socio-religious institutions of the tribes were least disturbed and there was no social tension on the wake of developmental activities. The remarkable impact of the policy was evident during the war in 1962 when people rallied behind the Government inspite of severe crisis.

But after the departure of Dr. Elwin, a Policy shift was discernible as some found the process of development was too slow and not in keeping with the need of the time. Since then, Dr. Elwin's "Philosophy for NEFA" remained only an academic interest.

With the shift in the policy, the special cadre of Indian Frontier Administrative Service was discontinued with the induction of IAS. The Officers belonging to IAS being in All India Service, not necessarily for frontiers alone thus served for fixed tenure. It is debatable, however, on this switch over in the context of peculiar need of the Frontier Administration.

The memoirs of early years in North East Frontier Agency — was described in "Alluring Frontiers". The 353 pages book which was published in 1986, ran into second edition. The present book is the continuation in the narration of the experiences spanning over further twenty years in the Frontier when it was named as Arunachal Pradesh.

The present book would not have come so soon but for the encouragement received from my well wishers who wanted me to continue the story. Amongst them are Nari Rustomji, Dr. Goldwin Phira, Dr. I.M. Simon, Dr. G.N. Gogoi, Dr. D.K. Bora, Dr. D.K. Duarah, Jren Manik Syiem, Prof. C.K. Singh and Pijush Kumar Sen — whose evinced interest ultimately made me to complete the writing.

I am particularly indebted to Prof. C.K. Singh of the Department of English, Government College, Itanagar, for painstakingly going through each chapter and correcting the errors that had crept in.

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Tarun Kumar Bhattacharjee

# 1

## Prelude

A train pulled up in North Lakhimpur Railway Station of Upper Assam during a rain-soaked day in mid Seventies. I was on my way to the frontiers to a place called Ziro, the Headquarters of Subansiri District – 5200 ft above Mean Sea Level, nestling in a beautiful valley of irrigated rice fields, pine, bamboo groves, clustered hamlets of colourful tribe – the Apa Tanis.

The Erstwhile North East Frontier Agency by now transformed into Arunachal – the land of the dawn lit sun. It has gained the status of union territory with a representative Government, functioning under the advice of a Lieutenant Governor. Bureaucracy headed by a Chief Secretary and half a dozen Secretaries under him, mostly drawn from the Indian Administrative Service as new Policy thrust, apparently demanded able Administrators with wide ranging experiences.

The train was an express – newly inducted into the feeder line which ran from the junction station of Rangia in Lower Assam to Murkongselek – a 400 Kms stretch. Somewhere in the Middle of this stretch is North Lakhimpur, the gate way to Ziro.

Seven years I was in another hill, away from the frontier. The hill, an elongation of Patkai range named Borail, is the home of about a dozen tribes each having distinct identity. Foremost amongst them is the Dimasha Kacharis who had turbulent history. Their kingdom once included vast areas of plains and hills. It was in Dimapur, the Capital of Kachari King, the relics still preserved the hoary past. Driven by powerful Ahom King, Dimapur was abandoned for a more secure place in Maibong in the hill. Later, the Capital shifted further down to the plains of Barak Valley in Kashpur where

it remained so till the British annexation in 1835. The hill portion of the erstwhile Kingdom with the predominance of the Dimashas was formed into a sub division with Head Quarters at Haflong, nestling in the shadow of the Borail range. A railway line – a master-piece of great engineering feat traversed the hill over 180 Kms through a series of tunnels, via ducts and loops. The longest tunnel is 587 meters at Mahur Saddle close to Haflong. The railway line was constructed at the turn of the Century – a concomitant enterprise of the expanding British investment in coal and tea in Upper Assam. The gigantic effort at the time could be imagined and attributed to the sheer determination of the Engineers who worked on the line. The terrain was most unfavourable being in the very high rainfall area, abounding jungles, where herds of elephants roamed freely. It is told that there was a casualty for every slipper laid, yet the indomitable spirit survived. The line was completed by 1905.

The scenery on both the sides of this railway track is truly magnificent. Evergreen forests, rolling landscape, gushing streams, chirping birds and at times one could be lucky enough to see an elephant majestically sliding down the hill slope.

The garden planters and the railway officials selected Haflong as an ideal retreat from the sweltering heat of the plains. They had a beautiful rest house on the hill top, constructed an artificial lake lined by pine trees and a convent for education of their children. The convent run by the sisters of Mary was one of the best in Assam. When I came in 1963, it still maintained the pristine glory.

The exclusiveness of the place, alas! did not last long. In the late sixties the Government conceded to the demand to up-grade the sub-division to a district with consequent posting of dozens of officers, opening more offices, construction of roads and buildings. The virgin beauty is now no longer to be seen but is just a talk of the past.

16 Kms from Haflong is Jatinga – an idyllic settlement of the Jaintias of Meghalaya who had migrated some decades now. Hard working and tenacious, they have beautifully laid a village of tin roofed buildings with compounds dotted with flowers and fruit trees. Almost every house-hold had an orchard with banana, pineapple,

orange and spices. Delicious oranges fetched a lucrative price, and no wonder, the people of Jatinga were far more well off than their neighbours.

But the main attraction of Jatinga was the strange phenomenon of bird's flight that seemingly descends annually in the recesses of the houses during autumns, sucked in by the wind into the blind alley of the valley. The people used to run with powerful petromax lamps and staves to hit at the helpless birds which fell easy prey to their merciless on-slaught. Once I observed the trapping of the birds in the house of the headman Klintiwel Suchiang. The birds only arrived during the dark nights. Suddenly, to my surprise, I found scores of birds descend on every conceivable place. It was an exciting moment as the beam of the powerful lamp temporarily immobilized them and they soon succumbed to heavy blows. At that time, I too felt like other nature lovers that something should be done — sooner the better, to save the birds from total extinction. It was said that just before I left Haflong, the migration recorded an all time low.

Half way to Jatinga is Longkai — a Jemi Naga settlement divided in two parts — one part is Christian and the other following the traditional faith. The difference is obvious — reflected in their out-look. Christian Jemis rigidly adhere to the church, and on sundays it was a treat to see colourful processions winding through narrow streets on an improvised church building. While in the other parts of the village, various taboos and ritual associated with belief were still followed. A fundamentalist outfit opened a centre in an apparent bid to stem the tide of proselitization, but the appeal of the church was attracting attention of more and more people except in Dimasha Kachari villages.

The Jeliang tribe inhabits large tracts of land spread over three states. The legendery leader of the tribes is Rani Gaidiliu, fire — brand of yesteryear, who was banished to prison by the British Administration for 14 years for her alleged subversive activities.

The Rani was the follower of Jadonang — the mysterious man who proclaimed himself as a messiah. He promised a heaven for the faithful and threatened to cast spell on any one defying him. He had a sacred temple and had amassed huge wealth. Jadonang was arrested and hanged for committing murder. At that time the Rani was too

young and for that reason was let off. She dashed off to the hills and soon after great unrest spread to the land. People were dazed by her mystique power and was even seen dancing before the empty throne. Ultimately, the government captured her and sent her to prison.

I had a chance meeting with Rani Gaidiliu, draped in a black apparel, eyes hidden behind the dark glasses, the Rani was flanked on either side by body guards. What surprised me was that despite her advanced age she was least mellowed and was even vehement in her demand for exclusive Zeliang land. The Rani, though not a convert yet, had tremendous influence and appeal for her people.

100 Kms west of Haflong is densely wooded region where the river Kapili has its source. Rani splashes the wood and the ground with extensive down-pour, exceeding 7000 mm a year. So dense is the forest that it has remained largely unexplored. Even the daring hunters could venture only around its fringe areas. Rich in flora and fauna, it is a naturalist's paradise. But alas! how long would it remain so is but only a guess. The hydel project that was in schedule has not yet even begun, but the prospective treasure hunters had already started their work and set up lucrative trade and business in and around the beautiful spot.

## Ziro — The Fascinating Land

A dense fog spread a blanket in early morning hours when Arunachal express pulled in near the platform of North Lakhimpur. A few kerosine lamps threw a desparate glow on the station corridor. A ghostly figure that emerged in semi-dark platform, to my Luck, turned out to be a porter who readily lifted the luggage for dumping into the paddle ricksaw waiting outside. The rickety wheeler raced forward over the narrow street and stopped at the Inspection Bungalow, three kilometers away, where I had reserved my accommodation.

The lounge was crowded with a Film shooting/producing unit, getting ready to depart for the hills for shooting a film — “Mera Dharam, Meri Maa” — the faith eternal. The film was being directed by well-known Maestro Bhupen Hazarika. The artistes were mostly young Apatani — boys and girls. Vivacious and Jolly vibrating with the excitement for their maiden venture.

A Jeep screeched to a halt. It had come from Ziro to pick me up. A smart young man came forward and introduced himself as Dipankar Deb Roy — the Circle Officer, then on a special assignment with the film unit shooting Mera Dharam, Meri Maa.

I was going back to the frontiers as Extra Assistant Commissioner — an exalted position in the district hierarchy.

Dipankar was informative. He drew a vivid picture of Ziro and its surroundings and smiled mischievously as he concluded : a place nice to live in — away from the heat and dust of the plains.

Yes. It was away from the heat and dust of the plains as the Jeep raced on a beautiful metalled road towards the hills.

We followed the bank of Ranga river — so named due to its muddy colour, but in the hills it is called Panior. Swollen by monsoon rains, it was now furiously churning its way down, continuously threatening its fragile bank.

We passed through lush green tea gardens, patches of forest till we arrived at Kimin — the gate-way to Ziro. An Assam Rifles Battalion is stationed here, living in olive green sheds, lined on both sides of the road. Slowly but steadily the place is now transforming into a township with government offices, business units and commercial firms.

It was on the basis of the findings of the Miri Mission — the exploratory survey team which visited the Khru Kamla basin in 1912–13, that a Policy decision was taken to create three separate Administrative units for the hills. Thus the western section called Balipara Frontier Tract in which Subansiri area formed a part, had its headquarters at Charduar in the foot hills under a Political Officer. A forward post was located at Kimin from where Periodical forays were made to the hills. In 1946, the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into Se-La Sub Agency and Subansiri Area. The Headquarters of the Political Officer, Subansiri Area, at first, was at North Lakhimpur with the base camp at Kimin, but later in January 1950 this was shifted to Kimin under the charge of Political Officer, P.G. Menzies. As the Administration pushed further to the interior of the hills, the Political Officer moved his headquarters to Ziro in March, 1952.

In the year 1951, the plains portion of the Balipara Frontier Tract, the Tirap Frontier Tract and the Abor Hills district were transferred to the Administrative Jurisdiction of Assam Government. The aforesaid areas minus the transferred plains portions of the Frontier Tracts together with the Naga Tribal areas were, therefore, renamed collectively as North East Frontier Agency. In 1954, Subansiri Area was named as Subansiri Frontier Division, but in 1965 the name was further changed to Subansiri District with re-designation of Political Officer as Deputy Commissioner.

The movement to the hills was restricted by inner-line. Beyond this line was Tribesmen's domain, where any one venturing required a Permit and might also involve risks. The line was drawn with the



primary intention to prevent marauders pilfering the forest wealth. The system which was introduced in late nineteenth century still continued as this checked unrestricted movement and safeguarded the interest of the tribal people from unbridled exploitation by outsiders. This had a benign effect as culture and tradition of the people remained largely insulated from corrosive influence.

My driver Nur Khan knew every inch of the road – he must have run thousand of times since he took up his job in early fifties. He narrated many blood chilling incidents which had almost resulted in his sure death, but Providence had always saved him. Once a bull elephant had suddenly appeared on the road. He was behind another jeep. The driver must have panicked and honked furiously that enraged the rogue, and it charged in all fury and almost threw the jeep in a mighty kick down the precipice. Without waiting for a moment, Nurkhan reversed his vehicle and drove as fast as he could to safety.

On another occasion, a whole hill broke down sweeping down trees, boulders and mud and throwing a dozen vehicles into the Panior river. But Nur Khan escaped with the blessings of Allah as he was in the far end of the convoy.

The serpentine road followed the Panior river half the distance fording it four times. The road just enough to maneuver – negotiated narrow bends and formidable gorges. Army Engineers, who had constructed the 110 kms of this road in 1954, must have encountered enormous difficulties, as huge casualties had mounted in every stretch. Every where there are memorial slabs bearing the names of the pioneer road builders – grim but glorious tale of sacrifice.

We approached Yazali – a valley with narrow neck across Panior river. The place is fast developing with shops and buildings coming up. But a master plan is now on anvil to project the damming of Ranga river to generate electricity, and the huge lake will impound water that will bury Yazali for ever.

The road now made a continuous climb towards Ziro. There were grandiose views on all sides – Nishi Long houses perched on the slope of the hill, a river zigzagged through the fold of the valleys, forest of Pine, Rhododendrons, Oaks sprawled majestically. As we moved up, the air definitely became cooler with fragrant smell of

breeze blown over the coniferous belt at Yachuli. Here at Yachuli, the forest department has a beautiful bungalow set amidst nature. An experimental Tea Plantation is being tended, nursing hope for a large scale cultivation in coming years.

With meadows, brooks, murmuring streams, rolling landscape, clusters of pine and rhododendrons and above all, the cool air would make Yachuli an ideal retreat.

We had climbed over 5000 ft to the saddle of Joram when a magnificent view of open Plateau unfolded before the eyes — what an enchanting sight to the travellers! The miles of farm land, interspersed with small hillocks, bamboo groves patches of pine, meandering streams — all appeared in large canvas as if to fulfil the artists' dream.

The beautiful tarred road zig zagged, made a descent to the valley floor and straightway headed to Hapoli — the district headquarters. The former Government settlement, now called old Ziro, lies seven kilometers further to the North West of Hapoli.

The headquarters station Ziro is fast developing with rows of tin roofed buildings, offices, business establishments and lateral roads. Everywhere the extended farm land spreads its tentacles, encircling the Government buildings, leaving very little space for expansion.

I arrived at circuit house — an imposing building standing on a beautiful hillock over-looking the sprawling valley. Opposite the circuit house, on another hill, is the residence of the Deputy Commissioner.

Some one with a touch of beauty had planted roses on the terraced slope — its bloom now full, spreading fragrance to the surroundings. The approaches were lined with pine and eucalyptus — stately trees slowly gaining heights.

A diesel generating set produced electricity for fixed time till mid-night. The power was insufficient to meet the ever growing need. Fluorescent tube lights illuminated the streets that gave a fairy tale view from the height of the circuit house.

I found a cosy retreat in a spacious room in the quiet building. At that moment there were no visitors, but at times rooms seldom remain empty.

When the night advanced, all the lights were switched off. And outside, it was pitch dark enveloped in an eerie silence.

I woke up next morning when a streak of light filtered through the curtain. The heavy fog evaporated and the entire valley was bathed in bright sun light. Far away in the plains, I could imagine of the sweltering heat and exasperation – electric fans now continuously whirring. But what a contrast here over 5,000 ft; summer is pleasant in Ziro.

I made my way to the Deputy Commissioner's residence. A man, I thought to be a gardener, was tending the flower garden. I was about to ask him to announce my presence to the Deputy Commissioner. Suddenly he turned around and what a surprise – the gardener was no other than the Deputy Commissioner himself.

Jren Manik Syiem, now in Indian Administrative Service, had just taken over the charge of the district. It was about twenty years since we had met last, but space did not matter. He had remained as unassuming as ever. Always meticulous in duties, he seldom wavered from principle. Many a time, people witnessed the amazing sight of the diminutive figure of the Deputy Commissioner slowly treading along the road to the office – a distance of half a Kilometers from his residence. On a number of occasions he packed off his wife in Public bus instead of in the government vehicle, while going on vacation to home town. What was interesting, that despite the provision of working hand in his official residence, both husband and wife did never mind doing the small works and other house-hold chores.

After preliminaries, the Deputy Commissioner gave me briefing specifying my duties which included the important function of Judicial Magistrate – a responsibility of a considerable importance in dealing with the ticklish problems of Law and Orders.

My immediate senior was Badrul Hussain – the Additional Deputy Commissioner. He had just been selected in the Indian Administrative Service and was in a great hurry to leave the place.

Badrul Hussain was an interesting person – very fond of talks, mostly beating his own trumpet all the time about his great contribution in the field of administration, but in reality, I felt he was an escapist who left most of the job to his subordinates.

I had my Juniors – all Circle Officers vested with the magisterial powers. Foremost amongst them was C. Rohluta – a Mizo from Aizawl who had been at Ziro for twelve years and knew every nook and corner of the place. As Block Development Officer, he dealt with various welfare programme but functioned as well as the town magistrate. Rohluta was an Agricultural Graduate with First Class Honours, but the enchanting lure of the Administrative Service had brought him here, I soon found in him a mine of information which availed me well in dealing with the people smoothly.

Dipankar deb Roy, a smart young fellow, was very handy in all matters who shuttled on and off with multifarious duties.

Gocham Talar belongs to hill Miri tribe of Kamla Valley – fifty Kms from Ziro. He was hardly in his teens but proved quite efficient in dealing with Judicial cases.

Lod Kojee – an Apatani Officer was initially posted in a foot-hill station but had come to Ziro now. Always cheerful Lod Kojee soon found his interest in Welfare activities and became a youth Co-ordinator in a Government department.

In office, we had Mohammed Omar, the Head Assistant who told me tales of yester years when the Administration had not come to the hills.

Rajen was the upper division clerk who dealt with the establishment matters but was available for any job – Jack of all trades and master of his own job. Nair and Phukan were the Judicial Assistants who maintained the case records so well that my court function was made easy.

Bini Jaipu was the Political Assistant – a quasi Government functionary in the district Administration. He had no formal education but because of long service, he had gained considerable experience. The post of Political Assistant was a special cadre to give recognition to these dedicated interpreters who were senior enough but did not have scope for further advancement in their career.

Bini Jaipu – a hill miri of Kamla valley was an interesting person. He might have been around sixty but his appearance betrayed his actual age. He was still very much active and his exploits with

women was a legion. He had that time fourteen wives – all serving him dutifully; It was interesting to see how often he faltered counting in finger tips the number of children he had; One of his daughters – Bini Maya, was a talented girl who had earned quite a name. She had even joined the Police Force and became a Sub-Inspector, one of the few women in the post in male dominated service, but subsequently left the Government Job and dedicated herself in welfare activities. Bini Jaipu was talkative. It required little prodding to make him narrate the tale of his many exploits. But once he landed himself in sure trouble – possessing cartridges without a valid license – a serious offence in the eye of law. He was crest fallen when summon was issued for appearance in the court. I was then trying Magistrate, and somehow managed to release him with a warning though the Deputy Commissioner did not like my action.

After 7 years of absence from the Frontiers, it was really a trying time to get myself again acquainted with the works of the administration. Ziro was notorious for crimes and most cases came within the purview of First Class Magistrate. After the departure of Badrul Hussain, his functions also became my additional charge, but I was lucky to have very understanding colleagues and we developed enough team spirit in our day-to-day works.

I used to spend long hours with Rohluta, discussing our Court functioning – the pros and cons of the problem involved. The law I found to be quite a dry subject, but there was no alternative as the cases could not be disposed of by summary trials, nor the village council could be effective. It was a Hobson's choice for me and had to do the Job whether I liked it or not. Earlier, when it was North East Frontier Agency, the law courts functioned only for the trial of heinous crimes, but the Parliamentary democracy now had brought a sea change in the system. There had been steady erosion of the power of traditional village council and many of the petty crimes required the interference of the law enforcing Agencies of the Government.

To read and reread and go through minutely criminal procedure code, Indian Penal Code, Evidence act, scores of file cases was too much for the nerves. Yet we could ill afford to be complacent as

litigants rushed to the High Court with an appeal and, if there were serious flaws in the trial, the magistrate got the shock of his life, his power was seized – a disgrace no one would like to face.

Within a couple of days of my arrival, I was given a separate residential quarters where I shifted at once. The house had four rooms – dining hall, an attached kitchen, bath, toilet and a portico besides some space for gardening. It was isolated from other residential areas but nearer to police station, as my Magisterial function required constant touch with the police. Hardly a few meters from the house was the sprawling paddy field where seedlings long transplanted were now gaining steady growth. From early morning, farmers mostly women came in hordes bent double, removing the weeds and covering the still vacant plots with millet or rice plants. The astonishing speed with which they worked gave instant idea and following their example instinctively I too began to develop my garden which I intended to cover with vegetables and flowers. Unlike the other areas, there is no torrential rain in Ziro and temperature seldom exceeds 26° celsius even in peak summer. Sometime later when my crops matured and flowers began to bloom in riot of colours, what an enchanting view it offered; I never had such satisfaction and joy before when I saw the fruit of my labour that I had put in the soil. Mother earth is really bountiful and beautiful. I then felt the truth and magic of nature.

## Dwellers of the Plateau — The Apatanis

There is a tale in Apatani folk lore that once upon a time an animal *Buru* Lived in the Sub-terranean passage in the enormous marshy land of the valley. Its size was not known but it resembled half lizard and the other half a snake with a wide gaping muzzle, lined with razor sharp jaws. Its tail was adorned with deadly spikes and its feet too had razor sharp claws. It moved with ease in land and in water both and crunched any obstructions on its way. With its powerful claws, it could dig tunnels forcing the water to rush and submerge the land. The helpless beings who were on the land over the marshy expanse fell in to the flooded water only to be swallowed by *Buru's* unsatiated hunger. It was a voracious eater and devoured its prey with great relish.

*Buru* was apparently at ease and was basking in a place called *Taley Sibing* where Biri Takar, a warrior threw a spear at him. So powerful was the throw that it pierced through its body, but *Buru* did not die and began to give a hot chase to the assailant that almost killed him out of fright and exhaustion. Had not the fibre haversack been caught in the sharp claws of the *Buru*, he would have been a dead man and sumptuous food for the dreaded one. Biri Takar managed to run to safety after this narrow escape and called all the people who rallied at once and clubbed the beast to death.

The tunnels dug by the *Buru* still remains and there is a popular myth that the dreaded beast did not actually die, but is hibernating in one of the numerous subterranean passages.

Such is the story of *Buru* — a fact or fiction — but the large marshy land, which was once its abode, has now turned into a prosperous land.

The picturesque valley, covering twenty five square kilometers of area, known after its present day inhabitants, the Apatanis, lie at a height of 1,700 meters. Surrounding the extensive paddy field are the settlement called *Lemba* where 25,000 people live in congested villages. Of these, Hong, Hari, Kalong, Tajang, Reru and Lempiya lie on the eastern edge while Michi Bamin, Mudan Tage, Duta and Hija are on the western side. The biggest village is Hong with more than 2,000 houses.

Each village has distinct parts showing a definite pattern of arrangement for individual clans. Thus, there are several villages within the greater village. Each clan settlement or *Lemba* centres round *Nago* – shrine where traditional rites are performed. The importance of *Nago* was enormous in the yester-years during war or chase when slain enemy's hands were kept for elaborate display.

The *Lapang* – a raised wooden assembly platform is the communal meeting place where important deliberations take place. The *Lapang* is not bound by walls and so people can see all the participants in the assembly.

In every village, there is a high pole called *Bobo* which is erected during the festival of *Mloko*. The pole is in average 50 ft in height and is dragged from the Jungle and set up near the *Lapang*. A long cane rope is hung down from the head of the mast to a stake driven hundred feet away on the ground. Long line of young boys and girls then pull the cane in rhythmical motion vigorously swinging it back and forth. When sufficient momentum is gathered, then one young man jumps in and starts the daring aerobatics on the rope, soaring high over the ground.

From the top of the hill, an Apatani village looks beautiful with closely knit houses in endless chain, tended groves of bamboo and pine. On approaching nearer, one cannot but be surprised to see hundreds of houses raised on high piles of wood with gabled roofs of straw, thatch or split bamboo slanting down to touch each other, leaving very little space in between. The houses are lined up on both the sides of the narrow streets on a continuous stretch till the streets open up on the broad road. A few by-lanes divert to the groves of pine and bamboo forest, situated not so far away. Obviously, there is great fire hazard at times, but people are oblivious of constant threat and continue to live huddled together.



The houses are on raised wooden piles with both ends fenced with bamboo. Notched ladders of wood are placed at both ends to provide access to the house. The width of the house is so narrow that it hardly exceeds 15 ft but its length may be longer, depending on the size of the family.

The house consists of a single room and two open verandahs on either end. These verandahs are fenced with bamboos. Only a small portion in the front of the room has an enclosure for grinding, husking and for keeping poultry birds. The entire floor is made in the centre which is a raised wooden tray filled with earth where iron tripods are placed to serve as oven. There is a free passage leading to the doors. The latrine, called *Nekang*, is in the left side of the room. The entry is provided through a small door to narrow passage of the latrine. The pigs are kept in the latrine enclosure which serve as scavengers. All the droppings and other waste matters are thrown into the enclosure which are devoured by the pigs.

The family consists of parents, unmarried sons and daughters. The sons, after marriage, set up separate houses and it is the duty of the father to see his sons well established in the new houses.

Only hereditary properties inherited by the father is bestowed on the eldest son, but any other possessions acquired by his own resources and initiative are divided among the other sons too. The youngest son, who looks after him, may get some more share.

Daughters, however, do not inherit properties; they can only retain the ornaments and clothings, but in many cases, the father helps his married daughters with some property if she is not adequately provided by her husband.

Polygamy is no doubt admissible, but it is rare to find a man with more than one wife. Exception is only seen in case of childless couple, but in normal situation, to take another woman when the wife is able is an affront and may be avenged by her relations.

There are certain restrictions in marriage alliance. Patrilateral or matrilateral cross cousin marriages are not permitted. Clan exogamy is strictly adhered to, although society is more liberal in its attitude to sex and free mixing of unmarried boys and girls are not normally frowned upon by the parents. A boy or a girl is free to

choose the partner provided such relationship is not within prohibited zone. Bride price is not something obligatory to formalise a marriage.

Divorce is permitted in the Society by mutual agreement. If there are children, the boy goes to the father, but the girl may remain with the mother taking her maternal clan name. Equally, the society is flexible in its attitude to the unwed mother. The illegitimate child known as *Hpia* is not discarded but accepted in the mother's clan.

An Apatani woman is most assertive in her sphere of work. She can even sell grains or livestock or share equal responsibilities in the field. Her husband might not enter into a deal without her consent. It is amazing to see how she works which far surpasses the output of men. She has got also remarkable aptitude to control the economy, and for this reason, it is true that an Apatani is seldom found in tattered clothes.

The distinguished feature in both men and women are the tattoo marks on the face. In men, the mark is a horizontal line drawn across the underlip and a straight line drawn from it upto lower point of the chin. The women are tattooed with blue lines from the top of the fore-head to the tip of the nose and a number of lines, also drawn from the tip of the lower lips to the base of the chin. The women wear round black wooden nose plugs on each side of the nose.

The men tie up their hair in a knot just over the forehead with a brass skewer driven through it horizontally. The women gather their hair from sides and tie them on the top of the head in a bun. They wear a hand woven skirt, beautifully designed with red or blue border, reaching upto the knee, and a jacket of same intrinsic design. Weaving is an art in Apatani women. Though cotton is not grown in the valley nor wool is locally available, these are brought from outside and dyed indigenously and woven in the portable loom in their houses.

Women wear the heavy wrapper of mixed cotton and wool with red or blue bordered line. It is during the festive days that men and women come out in their best costumes and draperies. But surprisingly, ornaments are few except small bead necklaces in contrast with the prolific preference of the neighbouring tribes.

## The Innovative Farmers

Any one visiting the Apatani Valley cannot but be highly impressed with the way that every bit of land there, is turned into productive purpose. Extensive area of valley Land has been converted into well tended gardens where pine and variety of tall slender bamboos are grown. Even along the narrow strip between the houses, a few fruit trees will stand, corns or millets are grown. Nowhere there is useless jungle or waste land. Even the unproductive land is rendered useful for homestead, road or burial ground.

The way the entire population is motivated to preserve the useful plants – be of bamboo, pine or fruit trees might be reckoned as unparalleled. It is significant to note that no one wilfully destroys a plant, not only out of fear of punishment, but also due to belief that the act will invite supernatural wrath.

It is interesting to see that systematic plantation of bamboo or pine is a precise routine for every Apatani house-hold because removal of each plant must be ensured with simultaneous re-plantation with two or more plants to avoid a future scarcity condition. Within a couple of years, a well tended bamboo plantation would meet all the constructional requirement. Were it not for the total understanding of preservation of resources, the Apatanis would have been in distress all the time with a large population concentrated in a small area.

Rhythm of life in the valley pulsates vigorously with the advent of Agricultural season. The rice fields extending to many miles, are watered by a highly ingenious irrigation system hardly seen anywhere else. All available potential water channels in the upland surrounding the valley area are tapped for full utilisation to irrigate the terraced

fields. The terraces are not even. On higher grounds these are narrow and retrieved gradually from hill side — a constant operation due to mounting pressure on land. The tapped water in the stream is partly diverted to these terraces but rest is channelled through ducts to broader fields. The water is not allowed to rush down the slope thus preventing the soil run off - an intelligent way of conservation. The overflow in the terraces is quickly drained off through bamboo or wooden pipes. The channels are dug deep in the valley land and led to the dams built with strong reinforcement of wooden posts and bamboo matting to give enough resistance from caving in due to onrush of water.

The valley area presents a very peculiar situation where climatic factors play an important role in the process of soil formation. Because of several hundred years of accumulation of run off materials from the catchment areas, the land is full of organic matter content along with silt and clay deposits. An immature soil profile is commonly seen without having distinct horizons but prominently in organic matters on the surface, and sub-surface soil is the chief-characteristic of the soils of the valley.

Due to Low temperature, the process of mineralization of organic matter is slow which has resulted in maintaining the soil fertility even after continuous cultivation. Further, the system of recycling the vegetative part of the crop replenishes the loss due to crop uptake even though decomposition of such organic matters is a slow process.

Though extensive area is dominated by single crop-paddy. cultivated every year, the yield has not shown any noticeable decline. This suggests that the crop receives all the nutrient requirements from other sources also — possibly the dissolved humic acid contained in the irrigation water received from the catchment areas.

There are two types of paddy fields — permanent and seasonal. In permanent paddy fields, the land is kept under constant wet condition throughout the year to allow the stubbles to rot and decompose. This greatly increases the texture of the soil along with humus content. A late ripening variety of rice — which has sweet and glutinous characteristic is the principal crop grown here. In the seasonal fields, the water is drained out soon after the harvest is over. The field is freshly hoed and water let in before the planting

season. The let in water from the channel slowly spreads over the field to make the soil soft for puddling. Each ripening variety which has also glutinous characteristic, but less in yield, is grown here.

Agricultural season starts from March, soon after *MLOKO* festival. Before the actual tillage operation, all the preliminary requirements are attended to with great care. These include reinforcement of dams, repair of channels, ducts, preparation of nurseries for seedlings etc.

Nursery bed is prepared by repeated puddling of land till it turns into thick paste. The plots are also manured to sustain a healthy growth. The seeds are then broadcast evenly.

Before the transplantation of seedlings, the terraces are also thoroughly puddled. The tillage is done by an iron spade, but in former days when iron tools were unknown, wooden forked hoes were used. The enormous labour involved in breaking the clods could be easily guessed, but an Apatani farmer did the job any way.

If the terraces require development with change of bund or levelling, an indigenously devised flat wooden tray is used to carry the lumps of soil. Plough is not used nor any hand operated cultivator. It is apparent that much of the labour could be effectively reduced with the improved tools.

For transplantation, the seedlings of early maturing variety are planted. First 2 or 3 seedlings are put in a hill at a distance of 20 cms. Later, the late maturing variety are transplanted in permanent paddy field.

Even after the transplantation of rice is over, there is no slackening of operation as field must be cleared of weeds. This work is done periodically, at least three times or even more, to maintain healthy growth of the rice plants. All the gaps in the field are meticulously filled up with fresh transplantation. On the bund or higher ground on the edge of the field, finger millet '*elusine coracana*' is transplanted; vegetables, tobacco, maize along with late maturing variety of finger millet are however grown in the garden plots.

when the grains are ripened, the harvesting is done by cutting the stalk below the ears by knives. Sometimes, grains are stripped

from the ear by hand. The grains are separated by thrashing against a wooden board and finally taken to the granaries in carrying baskets.

All Agricultural operations are done by people themselves. There is total involvement in works, as good harvest must be ensured. Women are more active in such jobs of dam construction or channel renovation besides their routine operation in the field. It is interesting to see groups of women, with small work baskets on their backs and hoes with long handle, trip along the path descending on the field long before the sunrise. They work feverishly bending only forward and are seldom seen whiling away their time. In busy season, they maintain two shifts – going back to the village to attend the domestic works but return again to the field.

To break the monotony, the Apatanis have devised a very effective system known as *Patang* which in fact is a voluntary association of boys and girls of same age group of the village. Members of *Patang* vary according to size of the clan and many agricultural tasks are performed by them without wages but only with the offer of mid-day meal and drink by the owners of the field. *Patang* is an effective system by which many distressed families are also helped.

An Apatani farmer is innovative. This is exemplified by his highly successful venture in paddy-cum-fish culture which has opened a new era of economic prosperity. From storage tanks in the field, high yielding variety of grass carps are released to the field just after the transplantation of rice. The fish attain quick growth simultaneously with rice plants and are ready for market within a short time.

## Forgotten Past

Seven Kms. from Hapoli is old Ziro. A beautiful metalled road now pass through it and winds farther north to the bank of Subansiri. How strange it appeared now that hardly 26 years before, the place was almost a grim battle field when government troops had first arrived to establish a post. Before that, the Apatanis lived in their own world in intrinsic system of tribal administration, dominated by patriarchs. Though instant justice was in the code, but most perplexing was the way how they lived hundreds of years with apparent manifestation of primitive behaviour yet avoiding serious blood-shed which would have been unthinkable in case of other tribes.

A long concrete run-way of an Air field now stands on the very place where the Government troops had landed in early Fifties.

Arben Swer, the short plumpy fellow from Cherrapunji, now serving as Agriculture Inspector, was narrating to me the incident to which he was a witness. Arben was then a low paid employee in Political Officer's establishment at Kimin. P.G. Menzies, the Political Officer, deputed him to Talo to assist the Base Superintendent, Dharmeswar Barua, camping at Talo – two stages short of the Apatani Valley. A move was made to push farther to a place called Kore, not far from the valley, to establish a post. A post was soon opened there with half a section of Assam Riflemen.

There was apparent lull since no one apprehended any trouble, as the Apatanis since the visit of Furer Heimendorf – the well known Anthropologist, were quiet for sometime. Nishis had already come under Administration's control after the establishment of a post at Talo by the Assistant Political Officer, Lt Col Betts.

But things were otherwise. Trouble was brewing silently. A secret

patrol from the Apatani village of Hija made a discreet recon of the advance post. No one spotted them and they slipped off as stealthily as they had come.

The plan was then hatched in no time to surprise the post guarded by only a few riflemen. Sturdy warriors from Hari village were drafted who took up the vantage position over-looking the camp.

It was just before dawn when hordes of warriors descended with murderous war cry — Ho Ho, Hi Hi, and with sharp edged spears and bamboo torch.

The guards were taken totally unaware. A man was hit by a spear in the neck. All hell was let loose at once. It would have ended in a bloody massacre but for an alert rifleman who managed to grab his weapon and fired a few shots at the attackers. There were instant casualties quite unexpected by the invaders. Greatly unnerved, they withdrew at once, carrying away the dead and wounded and vanished behind the mountain range.

Carrying the wounded rifleman, Arben with a Nishi guide then left at once for Kimin. But reaching the Panior river at Pitapul, he found the suspension bridge already cut off by the Apatanis. When they tried to ford the river, the poor wounded rifleman was swept away by the strong current. Finding no other alternative, he managed to enlist the help of one Taba Tat, Headman of the Nishi village of Belo, who collected a large number of people from other Nishi settlements of Chula and Chot. In record time, they constructed a cane suspension bridge which enabled the party to cross the river and they arrived at a place called Sher and next day marched to Kimin and informed the Political Officer of the grim tragedy.

An expedition was immediately planned with Political Officer, P.G. Menzies, leading the party with a body of Assam Rifles. Nishi villagers came forward to lift the loads. The large foot-convoy then moved out towards Apatani Plateau. To deceive the tribesmen, dozens of ammunition boxes were also carried to show them the enormous reserves of ammunitions carried by the troops.

The convoy moved very fast — covering the distance in two days to arrive in the valley. Thousands of grim faced Apatanis watched them from a distance. A challenge was thrown by the Political Officer to show off the Power of gun. It was Padi Lailang, the grand patriarch



of Tajang village, who stepped forward with the muzzle Loader and fired a shot. But when he was asked to repeat the performance after soaking the gun in water – this time he failed. His gun would not work.

Then on command, the troops gave spectacular demonstration of fire power with light machine guns and rifles and repeated the show after dipping the weapons in water channel. After this demonstration, the Political Officer shrewdly pointed towards the dozens of dummy ammunition bags where hundred thousand bullets were kept and this made a sure impact on the tribesmen who found the futility of a confrontation with such a formidable force. The leaders of the conspiracy were then apprehended and remanded to custody.

This was history of a few years back. Standing on the concrete run-way of the long air field, I wanted to visualize the scene, but only the mute trees stood as witness to the events of the horried past.

Padi Lailang – the grand Patriach of Reru village, the architect of many events of by-gone days, surprisingly remained agile and active inspite of age. He had that rare personality of the inborn leader who seldom fade away with time. What was amazing that he perceived the change and grabbed the opportunity with remarkable alacrity in business enterprise. What was more, he had the added satisfaction to see his son Padi Yubbe making a debut in Political field and occupying the exalted position of Deputy Speaker in the territory's Assembly House.

It was Furer Heimendorf who had introduced Padi Lailang to the outside world. 42 years ago from now, Heimendorf had visited the valley, trekking the wild mountainous country still beyond the reach of the Administration. There in the valley, the Apatanis responded to his friendly approach and offered him and his wife shelter for several Months. It was Padi Lailang who had impressed him the most with his domineering personality and imposing bearing.

I had met Furer Heimendorf in 1970 while he was on track to Zemi Naga Country in North Cachar hills. There I had found his love for the Apatanis, manifested in every talk, and he referred several times about Padi Lailang whom I had not known at that time. But when I visited him, a few days after my arrival at Ziro, the grand patriarch at his residence at Reru and I found every word true what the learned professor had told me about him.

## Dree — The Grand Festival

It was almost a month since my arrival. The beautiful blue sky now frequently turned dark gray with the advance of monsoon. Heavy rains washed away a portion of the Kimin-Zero road, dislocating vehicular movement. I went there to arrange some relief to the stranded people. The slide was enormous — an entire hill had broken down rendering it impossible for the bulldozers to pass through. We arranged transshipment on either side to move the marooned people. This portion of the road, known as 22 miles, was unpredictable during summer months. It was a dauntless job for the Border Road Task Force to open up the communication every time it got disrupted.

When the weeding operation was over, the festival of *Dree* drew nearer. People were in gay mood every where as grand preparation was made for ceremonial observation in the festival ground near Hija village.

The origin of *Dree* was narrated in a tale. Abu Lubo and Ane Doni, the husband and wife were the descendants of great ancestor *Abo Tani*. By dint of hard labour, they raised a good crop and thus became rich. But once it happened that crops were attacked by the pest and was totally lost. Situation became so bad that they were virtually reduced to starvation. Some how, they managed to survive by borrowing food from others. Borrowing of food from others was known as *Dree*.

To forestall any further calamity, they decided to perform a ceremony by sacrificing fowls and animals and did not know what to call it and so gave it the name as *Dree*. With this observation of the festival in a befitting manner, spirits were propitiated and were satisfied and they became prosperous once again.

Since then, it turned into an annual event known as *Dree Mudu*.

The festival is followed after the transplantation of rice is over in the month of July. In former days, there were elaborate rituals followed by songs and dance. Much of the ritualistic parts are now minimised and festivals observed in a common ground where all the villages join together for a grand function. *Dree* is the only festival amongst the Apatanis in which the entire community can be involved in common gathering and participation.

Observation of the ceremony in individual villages is done with elaborate preparation. A representative body called *Dree Kholi* is formed to organise the festival in orderly manner. Days ahead of actual festival, they go round – collecting food and other requirements. They consult the leading priest who examines the omens in eggs and livers of the fowl to find the auspicious time for the celebration.

When the date is announced, then sufficient rice beer, meat and other food items, firewood are stored, as visiting the cultivation or the jungle during the festival for collection of green substances is a total taboo.

On the day of celebration – the leading priest along with his companions chants the sacred hymns – *UI-Bardu*. Later on, the Priest attired in ceremonial dress, carrying a branch of bamboo with a chicken fixed on it, rice beer in a bamboo container, goes around the cultivation fields continuously chanting hymns. In the meantime, *Dree Kholis* prepare the altars where the priest subsequently comes, makes a sacrifice of a fowl and takes out the liver to find the omen. A pig is also sacrificed, and from its liver omen is read. There are two other altars where a dog and a fowl are sacrificed. The sacrificed meat is then distributed to the *Dree Kholis*.

During these days, every one tries to entertain the other with best of rice beer and meat. Young boys and girls go around and collect cucumber and cut-pieces are distributed to all.

Fun and frolick also forms a part of the festival. All the young people participate in games of tug of war, high jump and wrestlings. Girls perform the *Biididu* – the traditional song and dance.

It was 4th July. The sky was mercifully clear. Hundreds of people had crowded the festival ground near Hija village of old Ziro. The boys and girls draped in their best, turned out to show the spectacular performance which would spread over three days.

A Minister of the Government had been invited as the Chief Guest, who had arrived a day earlier. After hoisting the *Dree* flag and inaugural speech made by the Minister, the elected priest commenced his ritualistic function by invoking the spirits in continuous chant, followed by sacrifice of fowls, pigs and cows. The priest and his companions made a show of all the rituals in grand finale.

The interesting part of the festival was folk dance — *Biidudu*, where girls stood in two lines facing each other.

They synchronized the movement by moving forward with tripping steps, swinging back and forth and clapping their hands while doing so. When the dancers came face to face they returned again to their original position dancing backward in the same movement and rhythm. The dance was accompanied by song. At first, the dancers of one line started singing — one sang a line of a song, the others repeated it in a chorus. When the dancers of the one line had finished, the other party picked up the song and thus continued dancing and singing alternately.

Half a dozen cows were slaughtered along with pigs and fowls. There was uninterrupted supply of rice beer along with the food packets. The organiser had seen to it that festive mood must be kept in high pitch.

The Minister, though a tribal, belonged to another district. He was visibly upset seeing the slaughter of cows which surprised me greatly. It is interesting to note that no one feels anything about the killing of pigs or mithuns, but why in case of the cows it should be different.

## The Wayward Days

We were aware of the Deputy Commissioner's puritan habits but did not know his abominable dislike of gambling.

One evening, he wrang me up — telling me in his dialect, 'kem khalai' — arrest the gamblers. It was his way to pass any instruction to me in his native language so that no one could know exactly what was passed on. I had some access to the language, so it worked effectively.

For seven years, I was on deputation to a regimental out-fit where command was the first lesson one should learn.

Obeying the orders of the Deputy Commissioner, I at once dutifully marched off with the police officer to the house of the official where a grand gambling session was supposed to have been organised. We saw four persons playing cards and a few loose coins lying on the table. So this was enough proof and all four of them were bundled off to the police station.

It was hell of a situation soon after. Breaking into the private house and arresting persons who were playing the innocent game of cards — under what section of the penal code this had been done — would the Hon'ble Magistrate be kind enough to point out! I was at my wit's end.

Police some-how rescued me from the predicament — releasing all of them on personal bond.

Next morning, my friend Krishan Kumar, the District Research Officer, shot an angry letter. Those four officials were unduly harassed and he had never expected such a thing from me.

Krishan Kumar was doing some research works on the Apatanis. Unfortunately, all his valuable findings were lost during transit which could never be retrieved. It was surely a great loss; as I had seen his works pain-stakingly built up after months of studies.

At another time, the Deputy Commissioner told me to clear a den of vice from the market. Obeying the command again without verification, I took the police one evening and raided the apartments, bundled off seven girls to the police station.

The place was called Gandhi Market, initially made with a laudable idea to commemorate the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi. A big cemented arched gate still adorned the place but every one called the place Gondhi-foul; because of cesspool, dirt and crowded apartments all around.

Soon after the arrest of the girls, a group of young men turned up and claimed them as their sisters with whom they were staying. The police had no business to break into their private apartments. Surprisingly, all the girls said the same thing without showing any sign of nervousness.

I was in a jam again. It was impossible to verify as all of them were Apatanis and surely had a right to visit each other. In their social system, free mixing is not a taboo and so how could we interfere in their custom?

We had to release the girls for want of sufficient proof of way-ward activity. But one salutary effect was seen-for some time there was no girl to be seen in the Gandhi Market. All had gone away for fear of some more raids.

There were reports of some rowdies indulging in burglary. After stealing the valuables, the burglars locked up the door from outside and so repeated shouts of the inmates could not arouse the neighbours for help.

Ziro had been developing steadily in business and commercial activities but along with it, vices of modern civilization have also crept in. Cheap cinema films are mostly responsible for the erosion of moral values and the denizens of this area too have not escaped their evil effects.

A few years later, there was an interesting incident at Along, in West Siang district when a group of boys picked up ideas from a film of daring robbery. They even made the under ground closets and filled them with the stolen articles. Since these boys were following the episode of burglary scene in the film, there were obviously slips and all of them were subsequently caught.

We resorted to night patrolling, yet thieves remained elusive. But one day, our informer noticed a young boy wearing an oversized jacket merrily going round shopping with a bundle of notes. The poor fellow gave a slip and he soon landed in the police lock-up. From him we got the names of all other gang members and they too were arrested.

Bamin Kano, a budding entrepreneur had engaged an orphan boy in his orchard. He had no other duties except to keep watch over the garden. The boy was hardly 10 or 11 years of age, apparently very obedient. But the garden became a safe hide-out for his nocturnal missions.

To his ill luck, recovery of stolen goods led to his arrest. I was amazed when the police dutifully hand-cuffed his small hand and brought him to my court. The boy was very pleased when the hand cuff was removed, telling it hurt him so much! When I asked him why he took to crime, he replied without batting his eyes — ‘sir, Hunger! But be kind to me, do not send me to a far away jail where I will be tortured!’ The small cute boy drew my sympathy and I decided to send him to an educational institution outside and asked one of our office clerks to keep him for the night. It was arranged to send him to North Lakhimpur the next morning. The behaviour of the boy was so good that the clerk was highly pleased and leaving him behind in the house, he went for shopping. But after an hour on his return, he found his box opened, the purse containing his savings missing, but no trace of him. The police was at once informed, but no clue could be found of his whereabouts.

The boy had a sad story of neglect and cruelty from the beginning. His father had divorced his mother and had married another woman. The mother also left being unable to bear the pang of poverty. To support himself, he took to petty crimes.

Much later, we heard that the boy, as a grown-up young man, had become a real desperado. Once he was caught, but escaped again.

I had by now a few Apatani friends who were intelligent and forward looking. The foremost amongst them were Bamin Kano and Tasso Grayu who had the quality of leadership. Bamin Kano even visited America and brought with him a lot of experience. Tasso Grayu also became a successful entrepreneur.

Tailang Bakhang, a young man of Kalong village, had established a bakery from where bread was supplied to the entire town. He had very high business acumen and one of his successful enterprise was the Pine Express – a passenger bus-service on Ziro-North Lakhimpur route. Taro Talang of Hija, Liagi Hormin of Hong were most successful agriculturists – they had perceived the change and entered in big way in vegetable and fruit cultivation. Hage Muda and Gyati Taka were businessmen of repute.

Kuru Hassan of Reru village was a smart young man in the Indian Air Force as a Ft. Lt. At that time he was attached to a helicopter squadron based in eastern sector. He would have surely gone up far, but domestic compulsions forced him to leave the service.

Hage Lodor was the first medical graduate from the community. He had his education in Medical College, Bangalore, a prestigious Institution in the country.

There was another bright young man Bamin Tada who was in final year in the same medical college.

What was striking at Ziro at the time was the spontaneity with which the people responded to education. Every village had primary or middle schools where hundreds of children were enrolled. There was so much of rush for admission that the government was hard pressed to open new buildings and post additional teachers. A Higher Secondary School also functioned at Ziro, even then scores of Apatani boys and girls went outside for their education. Viewing the scenario one can foresee, it would not take long time for Ziro to attain higher percentage of literacy much ahead of the record in other districts of the territory.



No less interesting was diversification in traditional Agriculture. Many forward looking Apatanis like Bamin Kano had already seen the change and opened an orchard in the land long considered unsuitable for Agriculture.

40 Kms. from Ziro, in south east, is an extensive virgin land called Tale valley situated on an average height of 7000 ft. The valley is a promised land of the future.

The Apatanis believe that their fore-fathers, while coming from North, first settled in Tale valley. There they stayed for some years till a mysterious tremor blocked the Penge river which flowed through the valley. This resulted in flood and subsequently the vast area turned into a huge marshy land. They then moved out to the plateau land below where they ultimately settled.

Tale valley is still a vast marshy land bordered by majestic growth of cedar, fir and blue pines. The place had been extensively surveyed by the experts who suggested draining out the water to make it suitable for settlement. Some experiments were carried out with cultivation of potato, maize and paddy. Except paddy, the other two crops showed good promise. Settlers brought from valley land below however could not stand the harsh climate and all of them left despite liberal incentives.

I could not actually reach Tale valley and returned from half way as there was no road further. Even then the beauty of the land-scape was simply overwhelming — there were stately pines, cedars, rhododendrons and above all a cool mountain air. Here and there were sparkling meadows, narrow scooped up valleys, hundreds of blooming flowers in violet, pink and white. I could guess, what would be Tale valley when travellers eventually reach there.

My companion was Lei Khandu — the new Circle Officer who was from Dirang in the West Kameng District. He found here so much of similarity with his own land that he was greatly excited with joy. We both agreed that the place would be a popular tourist resort in not too distant future.

A few kilometres from Hapoli, on the South East, is Siro — a lovely picnic spot. Siro is now fast developing as more land is being retrieved from the hill side, for building terraces for rice cultivation.

The area belongs to Hong — the largest Apatani village. Hong is relieving pressure of its population by opening new settlement towards Siro.

Lod Kojee, the Circle Officer, now as Youth Co-Ordinator, had been active in reform movements — to rid the society of superstitions. Group of educated youth formed an association who go round the villages educating people to stop child marriage, tattooing the face. Tattooing was a deep rooted custom among the Apatanis. Their otherwise beautiful face is distorted by tattoo marks. Especially in girls, the black wooden plugs in the nose are definitely incompatible when they go for modernization. The youth association had imposed penalty on the defaulters, but it was the awareness in people that made a gradual impact. Many young children now no longer bear the tattoo marks. The new generation of the Apatanis — boys and girls, look more fairer and hand-some.

Lod Kojee's sister-in-law was Koj Yami — an agile lady always vibrant with enthusiasm. Her prominent tattoo marks was somewhat damper in otherwise a beautiful face. Though a twice divorcee, Koj Yami still maintained a trim figure. She had joined politics and became an important member in women's wing of the ruling party. Being intelligent, she was effective in organization.

Koj Yami, one day, came to me in utter desperation. Her problem was Rohluta, who least bothered to settle her land dispute case. The Apatanis' penchant for litigation is almost proverbial as I had experienced in dealing with cases. Nothing can be settled easily as endless haggling goes on which definitely tells upon the nerves. In former days, instant justice was the way, even capital punishment was not uncommon. They had arbitration body — the Institute of *Buliang*. Each clan in the village is represented by a *Buliang* who is a man of ability and must have an imposing personality. Though the institution of *Buliang* is not hereditary yet appointment of persons are only from high status, who possess power of command.

There are three types of *Buliang* — *Aka Buliangs*, who are experienced but infirm due to age, *Yape Buliangs*, who are the active persons and participate in all discussions. *Ajang Buliang*, who assist the *Yape Buliang* and some act also as mediators. *Buliang* normally do not meddle in personal matters unless it becomes a serious threat

which endangers peace. Appeal is preferred to *Buliang* only when parties fail to come to a mutual settlement. *Buliangs* then try to patch up the differences through conciliation, but at times might resort to co-ercive measures too, if all attempts fail.

Now the institution of *Buliangs* has crumbled down under the weight of grass root democracy – called the Panchayati Raj. The idea of the Panchayati Raj was to involve people in democratic process of government so that people are actively associated in developmental works. But in reality, politics crept in and the leaders are selected not on proven ability of command and personality but by universal franchise. The system has thrown open the gate for all aspirants, and, as a matter of fact, any one can stand for election to the Panchayat body and may be elected by popular votes.

Time has changed now as the traditional village council is inactive, and all types of cases are brought to the court keeping the magistrates quite busy in endless litigation.

Koj Yami's allergy to Rohluta was however understandable. He, at first, tried to settle the case through mutual agreement but she did not agree. Since then, Rohluta did not pursue any further. Every time she met him, witty Rohluta brought extraneous matters which considerably irritated Koj Yami.

She now came to me with a complaint against Rohluta and pleaded my good office to settle her case.

Some how, Koj Yami liked me, as I gave her patient hearing. I actually went to the disputed spot in old Ziro near Reru village and found some justification in her complaints. With the help of the police we made the demarcation. So long I remained in Ziro, there was no further trouble, but I was not sure whether she ultimately got the possession.

One late evening, Koj Yami really created a flutter. She suddenly dashed into my room in highly agitated mood, dressed in almost transparent nighty. She asked my immediate help to rescue her shop from some rowdies. I was embarassed – if any one had noticed her in my house in such clothes then gossip would start.

I got her out some how and called the police to go to her shop at once. When the police reached there, the rowdies had already

left smashing her furniture and looting the valuables. Subsequently, all of them were arrested and punished. Koj Yami was grateful for my prompt action, but I had the wit to tell her not to entice me any more with such tempting dress!

A middle aged fellow fully attired in traditional Nishi tribesman's dress of wicker work helmet with a beak of a hornbill fastened over it, bun of plaited hair over the fore head — a skewer struck to it horizontally, wearing a long coat, dashed into my office chamber in an agitated mood. He was Zilla Parishad Member and was denied circuit house accommodation as well as transport. He, as a member of an exalted body, was entitled to such facilities in keeping with his position.

Since the introduction of the Panchayati Raj — the grass root democracy, the public representatives elected to district council called Zilla Parishad were entitled to circuit-house accommodation when on official duty. Since he was not on such duty, he could not avail himself of the facility. The official did not give him the accommodation, hence his pent up anger released in a fury. The more I tried to reason with him, the more adamant he became. Ultimately, I had to give him a threat saying that I would inform the police, then only he marched off and nothing happened afterwards.

It however left a bitter taste and we agreed how this neo leaders could be truly functional in grandiose programme of grass root democracy.

It was some time later, when I visited his village in Khru valley, that I found him a changed man — profusely apologetic for his past misbehaviour. He entertained me lavishly in his long house. This is a grand side of tribal psyche — no bitterness lingers unlike in the civilized world.

A case was brought to my court by a Nishi of Joram against an Apatani of Hari village. Joram is the nearest village bordering the valley. The Apatanis rear cattle not in their own land, but they give the cattle to the Nishi hardsman in return of payment of one calf out of three calves born. The Apatanis have extensive rice fields and surely large number of cattle would play havoc if they kept them near. The ingenuity of the Apatanis is certainly praise-worthy — they never allow any cattle to cause damage to their field and forest.

In this case, the Nishi of Joram did not get the promised payment of mithun calf. The owner had refused to pay saying that one of his mithuns had died due to negligence.

The breach of an agreement is a serious matter. In former days retaliation would have surely followed but cases were now forwarded to the court instead. One thing I observed – the Nishis are straight forward and agree to a genuine decision.

The case was ultimately given for adjudication by both the Nishi and Apatani elders. Fortunately, all found the Hari man guilty and payment due was realized from him.

There was considerable ill feeling between the two tribes due to uneven development. The Apatanis have learnt the system of trade and go as far as upper Kamla and Khru valley with cattle bought in the plain's market and derive a very large profit from sale in the Nishi villages. They are also engaged in other trades as well.

The shrewd manoeuvres of some of the Apatani businessmen irritate the Nishis. Once a case was brought to my court where complainant, an Apatani, said that his due money was not returned by a man even after three years. When the accused was called, it was a great surprise to hear from him that the sum of Rs. 100/- had become Rs. 400/- within three years which he now owe to the Apatani creditor. To meet his immediate need, he had borrowed the money at the fantastic rate of 10% interest per month!

As he had no money, obviously it was not possible for him to pay the amount though he agreed to do so in the near future.

I had to be tough with such arbitrary money lending and ordered return of the principal amount with reasonable interest. Later on, it was found that the Nishis in dire need borrow with whatever condition imposed and so apparently it was not an one sided affair.

The gap might eventually narrow down with spurt of developmental activities in the Nishi areas.

The large stream in the valley – "Kele", a sluggish channel, hardly a few meters in its broadest expanse, follow the contour till it reaches the edge where it rushes in torrents in its downward course. Even after meeting the irrigation need of the extensive rice field, it

held sufficient water. The water is tapped at Mai — some 20 Kms. from Ziro for generation of electricity. A three megawatts micro-hydel project is being commissioned which would meet the demand of the valley area and beyond.

Mai is a Nishi village, a few kilometres away from Yachuli — the idyllic location where extensive plantation of pine had been taken up by Forest Department. The population being sparse, it is just a fond wish that the beautiful place will remain undisturbed for ever.

A metalled road winds up to Mai — thanks to the hydel project. The village belongs to the in-laws of Joram Begi — the young man from Joram. Joram Begi had just obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree and was going for post graduation course in the University. He was the first graduate among the Nishis of the area and holds the promise of a successful career. He struck me at that time as a boy with matured understanding and quite positive in his approach to the problems of his community.

When we arrived at Mai, Joram Begi and his in-laws received us warmly with mug-full of millet beer. We had also sumptuous meals later in the long house.

With electricity coming to the village and road already constructed the Mai will be a visitor's delight amidst grandeur of nature.

Ziro was agog with the arrival of luminaries — all high dignitaries of the government had come from territory's capital town of Itanagar. A seminar was being held on rural development, and so the officials from other districts also had come.

Leading the luminaries was K.A.A. Raja — the Lt. Governor of Arunachal Pradesh. A colonel in the army, he first came to the frontier service in 1954 and served in different capacities till his appointment as Lt. Governor. He had something unusual with him — to get the job done any how bulldozing the way. As the Political Officer in a district, he accomplished a miracle-constructed 100 Kms. of motorable road over the difficult terrain in the hill, mobilizing every one within his area.

He had weaknesses too — a penchant for publicity. Every where cement slabs bear his name — inauguration of projects or buildings.

Jokes were exchanged later that long, long years after, the archeologist digging for historical findings may come across hundreds of slabs bearing the name of K.A.A. Raja and wonder who that mighty king was!

Though his contributions in various fields are recognized, being one of the pioneer officer and later functioning in the highest office of Lt. Governor, yet he had in him certain draw-backs. Some thought, he had developed parochial interest furthering the prospect of only the chosen few. Deeply rooted in traditional belief, he had also strong views on religion and many sycophants took the cue and concouraged fundamentalism in the name of protecting the simple tribes from alien religious influences.

It was long way from what Verrier Elwin thought prudent – to follow a policy in the frontiers that people should develop according to their own genius. But after his death his philosophy for N.E.F.A. only remained an academic interest.

In the seminar, the Lt. Governor initiated talks on rejuvenating the traditional village council. Krishan Kumar, District Research Officer, had made a detailed study on the Institution of *Buliang*. Being an Anthropologist, he had both perception and clarity, but the Lt. Governor wanted his own way and interrupted him frequently. In utter desperation, the poor fellow made a hasty retreat. As expected no one came forward to give the views and the Lt. Governor was obviously very pleased projecting his own ideas!

Dull official life in Ziro was sometimes enlivened by comic characters. They provided enough fun.

We had instructions to speedily dispose of pending works and a target date was fixed.

Sishupal Singh, District Agriculture Officer, was a perpetually worried man. His problem was the staff who just did not listen to him. However best he tried to rouse the patriotic sense among his staff, he always met with disappointment and found all his efforts going in vain. The files never moved!

So he decided to lock them up whole day upto late evening. To maintain a strict vigil, he himself mounted guard, moving up and down the corridor!

The witty staff then decided to teach him a lesson. They prepared lengthy notes with so many ifs and buts that would keep the District Agriculture Officer busy for a whole week!

Next day, we decided to make a grand feast at his cost. He was quietly told that he had been charged with a serious offence – wrongful confinement and torture. The case had been taken up by Rohluta.

Expectedly, Sishupal was terribly upset. Could we do something? That settled the matter! He was told to arrange a grand feast and we would see then what could be done!

As told, Sishupal dutifully arranged sumptuous meals for all of us. Witty Rohluta then called him aside and told him, being a colleague, he did not actually register the case !

An Apatani village is never free from fire hazard. With so much combustible materials within narrow confines, it became an instant inferno with a spark released from a careless hearth. The fire leaps up devilishly as bamboos crackle in enormous heat.

But something defies the Apatani character. None is complacent in such a situation. Entire village is galvanized into activity to beat the fire so effectively that its spread is checked upto a limit, thus saving dozens of houses. Yet people never give up their clustered houses and move apart. Mercifully the granaries are always away from the house and all is not lost in a fire.

In a fire accident, it is obligatory on related kin groups to render help and assistance to the persons who suffer. Meat and food items are specified and no one can deviate from responsibility. Perhaps for this reason, an Apatani village life has never been dull or depressed amidst calamities.

Another system which deserves a mention is the tie of friendship – *Buini*. *Buini* is inherited and renewed every year during the festival of *Mloko* where individuals exchange large slices of bacon.

I witnessed a fire accident in Duta village in one late evening. The cause was a careless spark released from smouldering hearth. There was a drinking bout and perhaps no one was alert.



When the fire leaped beyond the roof, it was too late. Within minutes, two dozen houses lining the narrow streets were engulfed in devastating fire. It was impossible to go near — the heat was just unbearable with bamboos providing the instant fuel.

Despite commotion, we were surprised to see hundreds of men and women relaying buckets full of water, beating the fire with staves, dismantling the houses still away from immediate danger zone. It was almost orderly drill minus the howlings. Within an hour, the fire was brought under control from further spread but by then thirty houses had already gone.

While people re-built the houses — the government also provided substantial help. But help or no help, an Apatani village will remain always prone to fire hazard.

The fatal casualties in road accidents invite instant retaliation. It is not similar to rowdyism but can be ascribed something to exorcise spirit's influence causing harm. Immediate reaction is to destroy the wheels by sharp weapons, though in the process the whole vehicle also may get severally damaged and the driver too is not left unscathed.

One day, we got information that one government vehicle had knocked down a boy, though not fatally. The driver in panick fled away, leaving behind the ignition key. We immediately moved into the place and luckily the crowd was small and we managed to bring the vehicle back without any harm.

The Hij village Buliang, Dani Kuniya, was also a gaon — bura — the head man.

Dani Kuniya was a patriarch — descendant of wealthy forefathers who wielded considerable influence in the valley. His tall frame and reddish glow exuded grand personality which made him an instant leader.

I was introduced to him by his brother, Dani Ribiya, who was at Haflong. Many an evening, I sat in his house, sipping rice beer, hearing the tales of yester years which are no longer repeated any more.

He told me of *Lisidu* — a competition to restore one's pride and prestige which was badly damaged by a rival person.

The challenge was thrown at the rival by slaughtering one or several mithuns, even breaking the valuables like brass metal vessels or Tibetan bells in front of his rival's house. The opponent then would resort to similar action, thus killing and breaking go on till one of them get exasperated and accepts defeat. In such a duel, the kinsmen also lent support by offering the mithuns which might at times reach the staggering number of more than 100!

The killing of large number of mithuns might have been abhorring, but the tribe had clearly devised a system to put a check on limitless wealth in the hands of few people.

*Lisidu* did not result in blood shed, but *Gambu* was indeed more sinister. It was a fight between two villages with deadly weapons. The dispute which aroused strong feelings must be vindicated with a fight to over-power the rival.

It was in march 1972 at the time of *Mloko* festival, a serious controversy arose between Tajang and Reru village over the naming of a school.

The school was sanctioned by the government which was proposed on a location called Lempiya. Originally, three villages – Reru, Tajang and Kalong were collectively called Bula. Since the school had been sanctioned in the area which now fell within Tajang village, they insisted the name should be after their village which was then vehemently opposed by Reru people who demanded that it should be named Bula.

The dispute flared up in open conflict when both sides flexed their muscles. Kalong sided with Reru in their fight against Tajang which was started at 9 a.m. on the appointed day. Spears, arrows and long staves were freely used.

One Ngilang Grayu of Tajang was killed by a poisoned arrow. Though this was the only fatal casualty, the list of injured was staggering. Tajang had 100, while Kalong and Reru had 200 injured. Besides, at least 100 houses and granaries were destroyed.

The fighting came to an end in the afternoon when the government rushed troops who fired several shots in the air which frightened the combatants who then quickly made a retreat and dispersed.

This was the last *Gambu* in the valley. It is unlikely, any such combat will again take place in future as people understand the folly of such fights and prefer going to the court for redress of their grievances.

Dani Kuniya offered me a lump of black salt – indigenous to the valley. This salt is supposed to have medicinal value. The taste though slightly bitter. I was inclined to believe that goitre which is endemic in rest of the hills was conspicuously absent in the valley. Could it be due to the intake of this salt? It can be found only by a detailed study.

The salt is extracted from three species of grass – *Tagiyang*, *Tari*, *Heiya* which grow in marshy land. The grass is burnt and its ash is washed with water through a strainer. The residue is collected in vessel. The vessel is then put on a fire. The water finally evaporates leaving dark crystals of salt.

The grass were identified as '*Blechnidium Melenopsis*' and '*Polygonam Hydropiper*' and contains pH 9.

A girl burst into my chamber one day with a complaint against one of our officers for false promise of marriage. This was my first experience with an educated Apatani girl who now belonged to the new generation, acutely sensitive about their prestige and privilege.

The officer, who belonged to the valley while on an assignment in another district, had met the girl who was posted there. He developed intimacy with her and promised to marry her and even exchanged presents, though he had a wife at home. Now, after coming back to his own place, he back tracked the promise, as his in-law threatened him with dire consequences. Though polygamy is not a restriction, yet if the wife belongs to a reputed family, her relations would not let it go and might take revenge as well.

The girl was extremely vituperative and told in no uncertain term that she was not a clay doll that one could play at will. Now or never – the decision must be made – the officer must take her, come what may.

I was in a fix. Against her tirade, the fellow behaved like a lamb and made a weak defence that since he was in government service and rules don't permit bigamy, so he had no alternative.

This gave her such a violent fit that she was about to pounce upon him like a wounded tigress, but for me the situation was saved. Some how, I cooled her temper down and asked her to give me time. Only then, she left with an ultimatum that next day would be the day of final reckoning.

No sooner had she left than another drama unfolded. The in-laws party, led by two elderly men, entered my room and abused the poor fellow threatening him with dire consequences.

I felt profound sympathy for him — he was so literally scared to go out. Perhaps the girl might be lying in wait, so I put him in my jeep and took him to my house where he stayed till late evening.

Later, I heard that the poor girl was badly beaten by his in-laws.

Greatly humiliated, she then left the district and went to her posting place and thus the matter ended to the relief of all.

## Along the Kamla — The Route to the North

As the monsoon retreated, I planned a tour to Upper Kamla and Khru Valley in Northern Subansiri.

It was late October — the best time for trekking in the hills. Our party included Shantimoy Mazumder — the Circle Officer — who was taking me to his headquarters at Tali, four days foot march from the motorable road.

A Jeep picked us up and raced through the valley over the tarred road, winding its way to the bank of Subansiri. On both the sides of the road, golden yellow rice was swaying in the breeze, spreading fragrance. Hardly few days from now, the sprawling field would look barren when harvesting is done and the Apatanis get themselves busy with the festival of Mloko.

We passed the clustered villages — Reru, Tajang, Kalung, Lempiya and entered a stately forest called *Pine Grove* which now houses the Border Road sector Headquarters. Soon we crossed the saddle, pines or slender bamboos retreated behind yielding place to a different kind of vegetation.

Terrain, unlike Ziro, has more ravines but the ingenuity of the resourceful engineers succeeded pushing the road through the rough hill face. Here and there the road maintenance gangs had pitched up their camps — the only human habitation, albeit temporary amidst the dense forest.

A group of men were waiting for us at 25 Kms. post. They were from Liniya village — a Nishi settlement some distance from the

road. A handsome youngman, Taniya Sala, arranged an Impromptu reception with bottles of rice beer. Taniya sala is a budding leader building his support base which will see him through in the district council election.

We departed on foot from the forested cover to climb to a small hill. There before us lay bare in immaculate white, a magnificent array of mountains towering into the blue sky. The sun light deflected on the snow, produced a golden hue and offered a glittering spectacle of beauty and splendour.

Tanya Sala told us, this was the 22,000 ft. high Gorichan in the border of Tawang.

We covered the distance of 50 Kms. and arrived at Tamen on the bank of Kamla.

The river originates in snow range of the North and traverses a 120 Kms. course till it meets Subansiri in South East. On its way it receives the water of Khru, another snow fed river.

Kamla was now placid. But its dark blue colour indicated the depth and discharge of large volume of water. A 400 ft. suspension bridge spanned the river at Tamen offering uninterrupted vehicular traffic.

In summer, the river rises 10 to 15 ft. easily and rushes in violent fury.

We moved 14 Kms. further up to Raga which is a circle headquarter. The road is a marvel of engineering feat, as it cuts through the sheer precipice going down to several hundred feet to the Kamla river. On the steep hill face, only the grass grows as rocky formation does not encourage the growth of big and bushy trees.

Because of road communication, Raga is slowly emerging as a busy township with school, hospital, government offices and marketing centre. Most of the buildings are now permanent structure with tin roofs. Electric lines are already drawn to receive the power from Mai hydel project.

This is the hill Miri region — a tribe, not so long ago was turbulent in nature but now slowly veering towards a settled life. Unlike the Apatanis, the cultivation is *Jhum* — slash and burn method

where seeds are dibbled to raise the crop and field abandoned after two years to revert to jungle growth for seven years. The return from *Jhum* is, nevertheless insufficient and coupled with their system of living, a hill Miri village shows abject poverty. We went to Gocham – a few Kms. from Raga, a projected Model village, where scattered houses will be regrouped to receive the benefit of the Government Developmental Programme. A water supply line had been laid and a primary school had started, though not many children were keen to receive education. But Ratan Tama, the first hill Miri representative in National Parliament, who accompanied us, was full of hope. He had his education in far away place and saw the changes and was now eager to do something for his people.

We preferred to stay at Tamen to visit an interior village on the upstream of Kamla. Earlier, the Administrative Centre was at Tamen which had no sufficient land for a township, being situated in a pocket. During the hot season, it is also exceedingly sultry.

The narrow valley had strips of Land where crops could be raised on permanent terraces. There were groves of banana and papaya, lemon, though cultivated haphazardly, yet providing some income. How nice it would be if people raise the orchard in a planned way.

The hill Miri representative in the territory's Legislative Assembly was Nido Techī – a man around forty, simple and of unobtrusive nature. Yet like all Political Leaders, he held ambitions and was eager to extend the support base, and my visit to his area naturally gave him an opportunity to further his interest. His wooden house with tin roof was enough indication of affluence which he had painstakingly acquired through business and trade.

Nearest to Tamen, a Kilometre away – on the road side, is the Boya Simla – a village with hardly a dozen houses. The village belong to Boya Tamo – a young educated man with abundance of self-confidence and initiative. He is very active in development works, especially in the field of education of village children. Boya Tamo is definitely stealing a march over Nido Techī who is his rival in Political arena.

10 Kms. from Tamen, on the upstream of Kamla, was Taya Simla where Nido Techī had arranged a meeting. We followed the

narrow contorted path running parallel to the river through dense bamboo and scrub forest. There was a rapid through which water rushed forth in tremendous force — how easy to generate electricity if some one knows how to tap it!

After an exasperating march, we climbed over to a small plateau where half a dozen houses on raised piles appeared. An impressive crowd of men, women and children had gathered to greet us, not all of them were from Taya Simla, many had come from distant villages of La, Taya, Runga, Rito — all situated in obscure corners — never visited by any officials.

Over the steep hill across the river, a thin line was seen — the road to Raga. A 600 ft. cane suspension bridge hung precariously over the river to provide traffic. Strings were loosened but people moved with ease and alacrity as if it did not matter.

Hill Miris live in 125 villages in Khru and Kamla Valleys. The villages are small, perched on the slope of the hill which give a wide view of surrounding area. Apart from defence, the other consideration is the availability of water. The hills are mostly stiff and rugged; the cultivation follows the traditional slash and burn method which gives a poor return.

The village is a cluster of houses not far from each other.

The house is raised on stilt of wood and rise over the ground 6 to 10 ft. depending on the incline of the land. The floor is made of split bamboo and thatched roof has gable ends. The walls are made of roughly dressed timber. There are open balconies on both ends. The inside of the house is a big hall with 2 or 4 fire places which serve as a living room for the entire family. The hall could be 40 to 60 ft. long and 30 to 40 ft. wide.

The front balcony is for keeping fowls in a side while the rear one is used for keeping Pestle and mortar.

Over the fire place are three bamboo trays all suspended from the ceiling. The first one over the fire place is meant for drying grains, the next is for fire wood and the third one is for keeping smoked meat or fish.



Trophies are hung on one wall of the room. The outer wall is used for keeping water in bamboo tubes and utensils. Men's wear consists of a cloth now mostly mill made bought from the market, which fall half way above the knee, the upper ends gathered near the chest and fastened with a pin. A loin cloth is used for privacy. Several thin strips of canes are wound round the waist. A black head-gear made from fibres of wild palm adorn the head more as protection from rain while on outdoor. The hair is gathered in front of fore-head and made into a knot through which a skewer is passed. Above the knot, there is a skin cover which distinguishes them from their neighbours – Nishis or Apatanis.

Women's dress consists of a petticoat extending upto the knees and fastened in the waist by a belt of leather studded with brass knobs as well also fabric of cane work. Around the bosom are the cane belts and a piece of cloth covering the breasts.

The hair is parted in the centre and hangs down on the back • in plaited tails. Ears are adorned with silver discs. They wear long chain of small and large multi-coloured beads around the neck. Men put a cane garter on the leg while the women put this on ankles.

The most valuable and prized possession is the tongueless bell called *Maji*, believed to have come from their ancestor – the *Abotani*. Only under compelling circumstances do they part with this article. Another similar prized possession is a metal plate called *Binam Talo* used as a gong to signify one's wealth.

There are two forms of marriage system. The first is Nyido – the arranged marriage. The bride price is either paid in full or in instalments as agreed by mutual consent. However, after acceptance of bride price, it is incumbent on the parents to send the girl to her husband in due time.

The other form of marriage is by elopement. The man may elope with a girl without the knowledge of their parents. But later on, this may receive social recognition if bride price is fully settled. The amount of bride price will be in relation to the status of the girl's father. If she belongs to a wealthy family – the payment will necessarily be heavy.

The religious belief of the Hill Miris centres round *Si-Donyi* – the earth and sun. *Donyi* – the mother is the Protector of life and bestows happiness and prosperity. Every-thing is ordained by *Si-Donyi* and is rightly propitiated in appropriate ceremonies. There are several myths and legends through which the creation of the world and appearance of man is explained. One such myth narrates that, at first, there was nothing but water. Then a tree *Teri-Ramula* grew-up where a worm found a place which then began to devour the tree and its droppings fell into the water which subsequently emerged in shape of land mass. The tree fell on it. The posterior side of the tree became the outer crust of the world and exterior side became the sky. The trunks turned into rocks, and branches in-to hills.

Besides the benevolent God, there are innumerable spirits – mostly malevolent who must be appropriately propitiated to avert a calamity. The propitiation is done by the Nyibu, the priest, who knows exactly how to communicate with the spirit.

Hill Miris believe in the existence of land of the dead – *Neli* – which is deep inside the earth. From the land of the spirits, the soul travels to the land of the dead. The other world is mere continuation of this world, but only under changed conditions. So, for the dead, all material things required are provided – drink, food and other essential requirements of life, and for the transportation of these, monkeys are also despatched as they are considered as valuable help in negotiating difficult path.

Main festival of the tribe is *Boori-Boot* which is celebrated for three days during the month of February. The festival signifies good living by cultivating unity and prayer is offered to *Boori Abo* for bestowing wealth and prosperity on the people.

The place for celebration and propitiation of deities is selected by the priest who invokes the spirit by offering sacrifice of animals.

On the second day, Mithuns are sacrificed at the altars of different deities. A symbolic effigy *Ri-Gi* is made with leaves and bamboo scappings. The priest leads a procession of men and women, dressed in traditional costumes, amidst continuous chanting. Girls carry the rice powder in brass plates on their heads and throw the powder on the gathering, while men continue the dance and song

as they move towards the altar. At the time of sacrifice, every one sprinkles rice powder on each other.

A community feast follows on the third day – the day is observed with great fun and frolic as the girls try to smear everyone's face with rice powder.

The most significant place in Hill Miri village is *Lopu* – which is a central place where all important meetings and deliberations take place. The *Lopu* is a wooden platform without walls. In former days, captives in raid were kept at *Lopu* and warriors had to stay here till completion of fixed period of taboo.

Punishment for failure to fulfil an obligation is a serious matter. This is mostly related to marriage, and the offender is kept captive by encasing his legs in heavy logs of wood called *Lipiya* which has three holes. Strings are attached to enable the person to lift the log for essential movement.

Observing the Hill Miris almost in their original set up was an interesting experience. But the wind of change must come as no development is possible if the scattered settlements are not grouped together in bigger villages. We tried to convince the people of La, Taya, Bunga and Rito villages-all with the small population to merge into one to get the developmental assistance. Animated discussion continued for hours – sometimes generating heat but no unanimous decisions could come. To abandon the village, where they had stayed for generations, was not an easy task.

Apparently peaceful though, but underneath, vengeful attitude still persists as was evident in the case of murder of Lumi Tagum by La Tagung. The murder was sequel to clandestine affair where Lumi Yari, wife of Lumi Tagum, connived with the murderer to banish her husband. La Tagum escaped to the jungle but was apprehended by two persons of La village – Mini Tat and Mel Eka, who handed him over to the government. In former days, he would- have been secure in *Lepiya* and released after payment of heavy compensation.

Though the *Murderer* was certain to receive the punishment in the court of law, the aggrieved family would not reconcile without compensation. Failure to provide such compensation would most likely result in reprisals leading to more murders.

Conjugal life was often disturbed either by frayed temper or because of incompatibility. While these are natural in all societies, yet a funny incident happened in Chimir village when an aged woman, Lumi Yamin, having eleven children, deserted her husband Lumi Tara and ran away with a man much younger than her age. All efforts to bring her back failed at the time and the fellow who had eloped with her had to pay heavy compensation.

We had winded up our visit to Taya Simla with a grand feast and dance. A mithun was slaughtered for entertainment of guests. Though the people are now gradually abandoning their traditional dance for more enthralling Ponu dance of the Adi tribe, I was keen to see their original performance.

They stood in a circle holding their hands. One of them sang a line and others repeated this in a chorus by swinging the hands back and forth, standing in one place and moving anti clockwise alternately.

Next morning, we left the road at Tamen and followed the footpath which went to further north in upper Kamla valley.

The track never followed easy gradient. There were frequent tortuous climb and descent through a forest of bamboo and wild banana plants. These wild banana plants look majestic with tall brown stem rising several feet high. Bunches of fruits were hanging down but none could be relished as all are full of seeds. In shadowy recesses, there were tree ferns with finely divided leaves and spiral loops at the pinnacle.

Near Dugi village, Mazumder showed me the place where two men were brutally murdered in their sleep. They belonged to Tumer village near Tali, some sixty Kms. from Tamen. Little suspecting any one following them, they had a quiet rest in jungle clearance.

The assassin came stealthily and finished them with sword blow and vanished without leaving any trace.

The motive was plainly retaliation for breach of marriage contract. There was Strong suspicion that the culprit might be from Dibuk or Khoriyaran the unruly areas across the Khru river. The relative isolation of the area offered the assasin a good refuse, but

government was determined to pursue the case and sooner or later he would be nabbed. Sometime later, an Administrative centre was opened which greatly helped restoration of order.

Before this twin murder, in another daring move, the people of Dibuk stealthily came through a cane suspension bridge on Khru river and lifted the betrothed girl from her parents' house at Niling village. The desperados took the girl with them and then cut the suspension bridge over the Khru river to stop the pursuers. After a long protracted negotiation that followed, the girl was eventually restored to her husband.

After covering a distance of thirty Kms. a small village with hardly ten houses came to sight. Nowhere, I could see the difference in living condition. At first sight, it appeared all were in abject poverty. Yet people were happy and never bothered for sustained cultivation unlike the Apatanis.

After a night halt in squalid surroundings, we had another gruelling march of eighteen Kms. to reach Guchi village which was half way to Tali. The track became more and more difficult as distance tended to be reduced by heavy climb and descent.

Some how, the Guchi presented a better look than the other villages. The isolated settlement was grouped – a task not so easy.

The teacher of the primary school, Mohan chandra Gogoi however, had different idea altogether. He felt only rigid Administrative measures would force the people to abandon their age old superstitions. I could understand his feelings as hardly twenty children gathered in his school, but that too not regularly. How difficult it is for a teacher to impart education in tradition bound society, yet with the patience and understanding he might succeed.

Next day, we walked sixteen Kms. to reach Gomba village. Near a swift flowing small river, we had to wait two hours as the bridge sagged precariously because its two cane ropes had snapped. Porters hurriedly cut the bamboos to tie the foot board. The river, hardly of 100 ft. span, rushed through narrow opening of the steep hills.

The river was called “Murkong Koro” or money-eater because of an interesting incident. A few years back, a cash escort party was forced to stay in the jungle. To pass the time, the men indulged in

gambling. The leader lost heavily and paid from the government cash he was holding. Next morning, he volunteered to carry the cash box across the bridge but while crossing he slipped off the box to the river to save himself. His cunning trick however did not click as subsequent inquiry revealed the crime and he was duly punished.

In the villages, I saw preponderance of skin disease in which flakes of skin come off giving an ugly appearance. This might be due to vitamin deficiency coupled with unhygienic living, but this I never noticed among the Apatanis. It was identified as *Sobborhic Dermatitis*. The government took control measures by free issue of *Grisobin* tablets which greatly reduced the occurrence.

During the night, a sudden cloud-burst brought heavy rain. The water dripped through the banana roof giving us enough of discomfort. Next morning when we moved, the path was muddy with pools of water. The terrain became rough on approach to Tali. The Kamla river, which we had left at Tamen, came nearer — its roar now heard from a distance. The hills rose abruptly and the clouds rolled through in unending waves. Across the hill lies the valley of Subansiri three stages from Tumer village. People have marriage and trade relations there, and every time they performed not so easy journey across the rugged hills. How near it would be when a road is built up!

Developmental program, launched by the government, brought teachers and Agricultural field staff to the villages. Leaving in isolation with minimum of facilities, the task was challenging. To adjust with the situation is not always easy. Many suffer from loneliness. To see the clouds passing, mysterious deep forest, chain of hills going far beyond the horizon, loud yell of the river might be romantic but it requires imagination to understand the nature's boundless mystery.

Ram Chandra Chutia — a post graduate in linguistics, is one such man. He was a teacher in primary school at Chartam — 13 Kms. from Tali. He could not say what made him come here. But surely the adventure had lured him.

Ram Chandra has thirty children in the school — all of them below twelve years of age and would bolt away as soon as classes were over. The village lies a kilometre away from the foot track to

Tali and could be approached by a steep climb. His school and the house were just beyond the village. Since it did not fall near the main foot track, no one visited him unless it was a necessity.

He stayed alone with his wife a young lady from plains of Assam, who had never been to hills earlier. Once a month, a pay escort party would pass through the school to hand over the pay packet. Ram Chandra would drag them to their house built with thatch and bamboo and would plead with them earnestly to stay on for a while. But no one could oblige him as they had urgent duty.

We were in a hurry to reach Tali, yet too far. But Ram Chandra came down three Kms. to the bank of the river where he waited for us since early morning. Eventually, when we turned up some hours later, he would not listen to any excuse of our shortage of time and dragged us up the hill to his house. He and his wife were so excited with our visit that so many words came out simultaneously. He arranged a meal for us, and only then were we allowed to go.

Yet he did not suffer from depression. Often, he used to pen nice little thoughts woven in beautiful poems which one day I hoped would find eager readers.

Spread on a saddle of spur over 4000 ft. was the township of Tali, the headquarters of Shantimoy Mazumder. A hill rose to some height on the eastern side below which a dropping zone lay where dakotas come to eject the precious food stuff and other essential items.

Junior functionaries of various development departments of the government are stationed here. There was a middle school with eight teachers. The school had eighty students who received free education and stipend. Besides the hostel facilities, they were provided with uniform, blankets, mosquito-nets and text-books as well. In fact, all essential requirements were given free to each student.

There were few girl students, but only in lower classes. It was a good sign, however, of the awareness for girls' education.

The medium of instruction is English as no local language had been developed to impart education in the dialect. The teachers were mostly from far away places of the country who had no experience in the hills earlier, nor knew about tribal life. To them

the job bristled with problem of adjustment and thus they remained isolated from the people among whom they had come to stay.

The river Kamla flows some distance from the township. A cane suspension bridge brought the villages on the other bank much nearer to Tali. Raid and ransom, which were so common earlier now seldom occur as administration's grip is felt every-where.

Situated at 73 Kms. from nearest road head, Tali had to be sustained by air dropping. The erratic weather condition often makes a sortie abortive. To bring the essential supplies by human transport was just not possible because of enormous cost. The need for development brought government officials to strengthen the respective organisation, but one just had to forego comfort — always one or the other commodity not being dropped or stock having run short. There was expectation of the villagers also. They crowded the small station ready to buy any-thing. Though education was free and the students were provided with stipends, but since they could not bring food from home and the supply was met from government issue, they often faced difficulties.

All the government buildings were temporary structures with bamboo and tatch. The floor, was mud plastered. The posts were provided with rough dressed wood. There was chronic scarcity of roofing materials as palm leaves were not in abundance.

The most trying time was for the doctor. He had to manage dispensing, operations in a building hardly suitable for the purpose. Many medicines, exposed to humidity, were rendered useless after some time. His treatment, therefore, was more of psychological nature; his very presence was a moral booster.

The policing was done by a platoon of Central Reserve Force. Their duties also included regular pay escort to Ziro and back which took about a month. Not being hillmen, the tall lanky policemen had to struggle hard to adapt themselves to the vigorous conditions of the region.

Some of the officials had their families with them. Their children grew up in the out-posts and never saw a motor car or tin roofed buildings, but know the aeroplanes. From the drone heard, they could exactly say whether the incoming plane was a carabou, dakota,



otter or a helicopter! Their parents drew pictures to explain how a motor car looks!

Mazumdar had both courage and conviction. Added to this was his impartial way of dealings which earned him good name. People developed confidence in him since they found he could do no wrong.

It is the approach – the most pertinent factor which determines the success of an Administrator in the frontiers.

The people of Tali area are Nishis who have marriage relations with their neighbours – the Hill Miris.

The villages are on the hill slopes against a background of densely wooded forest, Unlike the Hill Miris, the Nishis prefer to build their houses which stand apart from each other. There is no common assembly place like *Lopu*.

The cultivation is done by *Jhum* – the slash and burn method. There is no starvation, nor is there ill nourished condition in any village.

The house is a long hall supported on raised wooden struts. The width varies from 15 ft. to 18 ft. but the length may depend on the number of hearths.

The roof is thatched with any available materials – dry banana leaves, cane or palm leaves, grass or straw. The walls and platform are made of flattened bamboos. In one end of the house is wooden platform, partially covered for a shrine – visible in bamboo shavings and leaves representing the god of chase. The other end is a small extended platform where pestle and mortars are kept for pounding grains.

Within the house, the fire places are in a row. Over the fire places are suspended trays where grains, firewood and dried meat are kept. The main hall is used for sleeping, where partition is made with mats to afford some privacy. The inside of the house remains dark, filled with smoke as outlets are not provided.

The Nishi long house accommodates the entire family consisting of man, his wives and unmarried children as well and also brothers, cousins, their wives and children who are closely related. Polygamy is practiced and man can acquire a number of wives, but the eldest

wife has a special privilege as the husband stays with her. Each wife has a separate hearth and a separate plot of land where she can raise crops also and rear poultry and pigs, and these can be her own.

Though brothers and cousins share the same roof, they maintain their independent living by having separate cultivation plots. But they are from same lineally related families and, therefore, they are obliged to render mutual help either in cultivation, hunting, chase or social and religious functions.

The marriage is by negotiation. Though like the Hill Miris, there are stray cases of elopement of the girl, and bride price in all cases must be paid. The bride price paid by husband bestows on him the absolute right on his wife. There are occasional tension, therefore, when a betrothed girl runs away with her lover or she might not like her suitor. The responsibility, however, always rests with the father of the girl or with her brothers to return her to the lawful husband, even by extreme coercion, as marriage deal once arrived cannot be nullified without the payment of heavy compensation.

According to Nishis, there is one supreme being, the *Ane Duini* – the Sun mother – who is ever compassionate, benevolent and protector of all beings. It is *Duini* who nourishes them by abundant crops, domestic animals or to beget children. But to *Duini* there is no separate prayer nor a sacrifice on his name, though in joy or distress she is remembered by various expressions and songs.

The spirits, mostly malevolent, are in constant prowl and life is subjected to worries and misery, unless they are appropriately propitiated. The identification of the spirits rests with the *Nyibu* or priest who reads omens in pig's or chickens liver as well also in eggs. After the proper identification is done, the *Nyibu* starts the long dialogue and enters into a deal which involves sacrifice of mithuns, chickens and pigs.

The Nishis believe that there are three worlds – *Sichi* – the earth, *Nyedo* – the sky celestial, and *Uinyoko* – under world (*Hades*). The first one is the abode of human beings, the second the abode of god and the third is the region one goes after death. They believe that souls-orum, after death make journey to *Uinyoko* or land of the dead situated below the earth. The *orums* continue to lead

the same life as in their previous world with cultivation, house and kinsmen.

There is great deal of fear as they might occasionally try to visit the home in form of ghost and it is only the priest with desperate pleading who can stop such visits.

The dress of man consists of a loin cloth and a coarse silk or cotton cloth. This is held in front, reaching above the knee and ends passed below the armpits, received crosswise over both shoulders and fastened together in front of chest with a pin. Around the neck there are strings of beads in different colours and size which are mostly inherited. A number of thin cane strings are worn around the waist, and woven cane used as garters, put in the legs below the knee.

A big sword and knife are always carried in bamboo scabbard. This may be wrapped in monkey skin also.

The head-dress is of woven cane with a horn-bill beak, dyed red, fixed on it. It is decorated with feathers of horn-bill and the talons of an eagle. The hair is plaited and made into a bun near the forehead and wound with yellow thread. A metal skewer of few inches length is passed through it horizontally. Around the hair is worn a thin band of woven cane, studded with small metal bells. In the perforated ear holes, decorated earrings are also put.

The hair of the woman is parted in the middle and plaited around the head. They wear many bead strings of different colours along with metal bells and brass chain. In ear lobes, they wear lead rings and couple of rings of brass and silver in the wrists. They wear a cloth of coarse cotton or silk. The lower portion reaches up to the knee while the upper free end are tugged over the right shoulder and tied at the waist with a ribbon. In the waist they wear a belt of cane, decorated with disc shaped metal ornaments.

Like Hill Miris, the Nishi man or woman don't tattoo their face or legs.

The most important festival of the Nishis is *Nyokum* which is celebrated during the month of February, coinciding with the beginning of agricultural season. Traditional faith and belief of the people find expression in narration. Gods are invoked by appropriate sacrifice of animals.

It is told that god *Dojing* was once angry with *Abo Tani* – the ancestor of Nishis. As a punishment, he confined his two daughters – *Kupa* and *Komang*. To appease him, *Tani* propitiated him by sacrificing animals. Only then his temper cooled down and both the girls were released. He asked *Tani* to propitiate him in this manner every year and he would be blessed with a good harvest. Since then this has been celebrated in a festival and is called *Nyokum*, before the advent of cultivation season.

At first, *Nyokum* was celebrated by individual families in their houses, but later people found it convenient to observe the festival collectively.

The festival starts after the chief priest finds out the appropriate time after reading the omens in the liver and eggs of fowls. The reading also indicates how many animals are needed for the sacrifice.

When the date is thus found, the chief priest gathers his associates and commences the ritual by chanting the religious text which continue for two days and nights. He narrates, in detail of all episodes – beginning from their descent from *Abo Tani* and various journeys and difficulties faced due to hostility of the spirits. He offers his prayer to god appealing him to be gracious enough to bestow peace and prosperity on the people.

The chief priest is dressed in glittering apparels and helmet made of tiger's skin with a beak of the horn bill fixed on the helmet. A fan made out of eagle's feather is held in right hand which he swings on either side while chanting the hymns.

The eagle's feather is known as *Mayab*. It is the true medium to attain the supernatural powers during the ritual. *Mayab* represents the spiritual aspect of *Nyokum* festival.

The thick mist that lay over the valley mysteriously evaporated with streaks of sun rays which broke through the screen of the forest.

Leaving *Shantimoy Mazumdar* behind in *Tali*, I moved forward on my journey up the valley towards the north. Far below, the *Kamla* winded its course – the roar percolated through the dense forest. Gigantic trees covered the hill – slopes some of which reached more than 150 ft. high. Here and there, I spotted wild rubber-plants

with thick leaves – the latex oozing out from the sword cut inflicted by some passers-by. There were also the aromatic plants '*Dhuna*' – *resiniferum*. Species of *Bahunia variegata*, *Castanopsis indica* and timber trees of economic importance – *Ternanalia myrocarpa*, *Dipterocarpus macrocarpus*, *Mesua ferrea*, *Cinnamomum sp.*

The captivating forest extended upto eight Kms. till we reached Darpai, where I had my night halt. It was an exciting experience to be in the midst of nature – ranges of hills going far beyond the horizon, the murmur of water falls, gentle breeze, chirping birds. How long, I wondered, this primordial setting would remain when men with insatiable lust will axe the massive tress down! After a comfortable night halt, I never had such a gruelling march of 20 Kms. to Richik. The narrow path passed through broken hills strewn with boulders and innumerable land slides negotiating walls of a deep gorge. In one place I had to slide down a Kilometer of slush by sheer momentum.

Five Kms. from Darpai I saw a tunnel – *Buru Jiyan*, which is believed to be twelve Kms. long and lead to a place Nyibia. The legend said that once upon a time a tribe called '*mire*' lived here who had constructed the tunnel. The tribe is long since vanished, but their spirits still hover around. Only few daring hunters ventured a few feet of this mysterious tunnel, but retraced their steps due to breathing difficulties.

The staging hut at Richik was on the bank of a river Hema which fell in to Kamla, a few hundred feet away. The river originated from a big lake *Kalo Gangkar* fifty Kms. away to the north, which is fed by the melting snow. A big water fall, Sari Sadang, leaps down 1000 ft. from a hill, called Sariya, near Sulung village of Tayer.

Hema river was not fordable. It carried large volume of water even in the lean period. A cane suspension bridge afforded the crossing to the other bank.

As the night advanced, I was suddenly awakened by the melodies of sweet songs sung by the girl porters. Unlike me, fatigue did not overwhelm them. They burst into cheers and know exactly how to enjoy the life.

I had never heard a Nishi song — set in original tones. The girls were singing in chorus, repeating each line alternately. It was so appealing :

Nyuk Ane Dale Rini No  
 Nyuk Nijir Rile Riku Bo  
 Nyiku Abu Dale Nimi No  
 Nyiku Apa Ela Reku Bo

After some time they burst in to another chorus :

Mukchung Soni Soman Dokuni hoi  
 Bala Tokula Soman Dokuni Hoi  
 Tumbe Tokula Soman Dokuni Hoi.....

How paradoxical it appeared — the girls were betrothed against their will and might have to lead a life without contentment, yet find an outlet to escape from sorrows in joyous moments.

Eight kms. from Richik was Lampong but the path now went along the gentle hillside.

We crossed by cane suspension bridge on the river Pe, which fell into Hema Some distance away.

From Lampong to Parsipolo was a sixteen kms. march, but, mercifully, the path was not bad as it followed the river bed. Four kms. short of Parsipolo I crossed the Kamla by a suspension bridge, strengthened by steel wires. Up the hill is the village Rinchi Poriang, perched on a hill slope, where I went for a short stay. The people from half a dozen villages gathered in a ground. To them the visit of an Administrative Officer was not an ordinary event. It kindled so much of hope that all their problems would be looked into, no matter how difficult these might be. Every one wants development — more roads, school and medical centres.

I listened to them with apparent sympathy, but I had to tell them quite bluntly that unless they abandon isolated settlements and regroup in a large village, there could be no development. They must liberalize the traditional marriage system and avoid blood feuds.

An Administrator must maintain a balanced attitude — a patient hearing although irrelevant. This will go a long way in establishing good rapport with the people.

The small valley of Parsipolo is surrounded on three sides by Kamla river. The span of the river here is considerably reduced – about half the width it is at Tamen. It had so much of fish that people were all the time busy in trapping by conical bamboo contraptions laid on the shallow depth.

Bingiya Ridek – a Nishi from Koloriang, who was a Political Interpreter, came down from the Damin Administrative Centre for my assistance.

He was passed middle age, had a ruddy complexion and a smiling face. For fifteen days he stayed with me and my journey was enlivened by his quick wit and humour.

We had to cover thirty Kms. more in two days to reach Damin. The foot-track gradually climbed to the hill from the river bank. The scenery afforded was marvellous. The hills were now soaring high as snow mountains came nearer. The river Kamla appeared from the top a ribbon flowing through the fold of the steep hills.

A huge landslide almost blocked our passage on approach to Damin. An entire hill had broken down, bringing boulders and rubbles and uprooted trees.

At first look, Damin appeared depressing with a huge gaping land-slide constantly threatening the small town.

The town is divided into two parts – widely separated from each other due to fear of further erosion. All the buildings were of simple construction of bamboo, thatch and jungle wood. A stream was tapped far above from where water was drawn by polythene pipeline. There was no electricity and Kerosine oil also was strictly rationed. All the essential commodities were air dropped by a dakota at Huri – five Kms. farther up across the Kamla river and these were transported by porters in small loads.

There is a small concrete helipad near the river bank for any emergency use.

One hundred and fifty six Kms. from the nearest road head, Damin was the last Administrative centre in upper Kamla river valley. After the village Ruba – twenty Kms. from Damin, there was no human habitations. Terrain became rugged and inhospitable. The region is alpine with extensive coniferous and grass land and remains

snow bound in winter. Chain of mountains all rose to great heights – their pinnacles covered in snow which seldom melts even during the peak summer months.

While Damin was depressing – the Huri, because of its location, was just the opposite. Situated on a saddle at 5,000 ft. height, it offered a magnificent view of the mountains and the valley at far distance. Earlier, the Administrative centre was located here but now the camp had been occupied by an Assam Rifles Wing. The village Huri is three kms. away on south-east.

A narrow path went down three kms. to Kamla river from Damin. The river passed through a gorge, churning the water, which made gurgling sound. Over the river hung a suspension bridge. Near the formidable gorge, a dark forest extended to its far side. Water dripped from over-hanging rocks which made the path extremely slippery. Sometime back, an Assam Rifle man had lost his way and never came back. People believe that the forest is the abode of the dreaded spirit who takes away the way-ward traveller. The mystery of the vanished Rifle man remained a riddle ever since, but probable conclusion was that he might have committed suicide.

Another three kms. of gentle climb brought me to Huri. I was accompanied by Kungliana – the store keeper of Damin who makes routine journey every alternate day to account the stores received from airdropping and to arrange sales. Drone of an incoming dakota alerts him, but the sortie may not be for him but for Assam Rifles.

Kungliana – a Mizo, had been in the Army. Being an exserviceman, he had no difficulties to adjust himself with the Assam Rifles. Sometimes, when his own stock ran short they helped him to over-come the crisis. In remote out-posts the store keepers were the real saviour. It was they who performed the difficult task of feeding the huge number of government officials by organizing an intelligent distribution system.

The Assam Rifles had an enviable role to play which involved patrolling the borders which lie far away from inhabited villages. The terrains, always unfavourable, mountains awesome, howling winds, rain or snow, arouse haunting feelings, yet men must move with precise routine.



Major Batla, the Wing Commander, was very happy with my visit. To him it was pleasant diversion as no officer came this way with whom he could chat for some time. World is too far and he must have to complete the tenure before he could go back to headquarters. I had to sadly admit – the life was tedious for every one – army or the civilians, unless one could find an out-let.

Five stages from Huri – approximately 60 Kms. on the north-east is Taksing, across a high hill – Tello drama which is snow bound for three months in winter.

People of Taksing belong to a small ethnic mongolian group – Naa, who have marriage relations with Nishis.

Naa, known to Tibetan as Khola, are Buddhist, though they follow their traditional faith as well. They are of stout physique with ruddy complexion.

They raise crops in their built-up terraces, keep cattle for milk and butter, but are at same time good trekkers and hunters. The desire to hunt musk-deer in snowy expanse often bring them to the Nishi's land who resent their intrusion. The dispute generates enough of heat and tension leading to blood shed.

In Huri village – three Kms. from the camp area, I met a Naa family who had come from Taksing. They dressed somewhat like Monpas but without foot or head gear, large bead ornaments, and conversed with their hosts in Nishi with apparent ease.

They told me of their land – a beautiful valley rimmed by snow mountains. In fields their main crops were maize, buckwheat and barley. But now with government help, potato cultivation had become popular. A small hydel-power station supply electricity to the administrative centre. But the place is still remote as journey from district headquarters – Daporijo, takes at least a fortnight.

Looking at them intently, I could only find discernible friendliness which was a contradiction to what I had heard of every Naa – a stubborn rustic.

Nishis of upper Kamla valley look much fairer and healthy than their kins elsewhere. This must be due to proximity to mountains where cool fresh air gave a glossy colour to their skin. But

simultaneously, they have a proud bearing and almost a defiant attitude. Long steel swords in scabbard are hung across the shoulder which come out as a flash when some-thing went wrong.

During late fifties, one Picha Kati – the political Interpreter of Tali was brutally killed by one Sathe Talar of Huri. To teach lesson to Huri for their unruly behaviour, the government sent Picha Kati with a section of Assam Rifle men to Huri and some punitive measures were taken.

Later, Sathe Talar, who was the leading man of Huri, laid an ambush and captured Picha Kati, tied his legs and hands and dragged him over the ground for a long distance. There he was killed after receiving extreme tortures.

Strong action by government was initiated at once and Sathe Talar was captured in a surprise raid. He was very much cautious about his movement but on the fateful day he had a slip due to heavy booze. That was his undoing and he was captured.

He was put in a wooden stockade – *lepiya*, encasing the legs in the prison cell. One day, there was dropping sortie, and to collect the stores, all the men including the guards went out to the dropping zone.

Taking advantage of their momentary absence and in the din of noise of the aeroplane, Sathe Talar quickly lit a fire with the burning tobacco which he was allowed to smoke, burnt out the rope of the stockade and got one of his leg released. Another leg still bound though, he lifted the *Lepiya* easily and with the released leg managed to escape to the jungle where he remained a fugitive for long years. His kinsmen paid heavy compensation to the family of the deceased and the government ultimately allowed him return to the village. Even though his case had been officially closed, the relations between the two villages remained estranged and Sathe dared not move out of his area for fear of reprisal.

I met the legendary fugitive, Sathe Talar, in Huri where he was functioning as headman. Though mellowed by age, yet I was struck by his confident attitude even though he was a convicted person.

A cute young girl hardly in her teens quietly followed me from Ziro. I did not know about it till she appeared in Damin. She had

come via Khru valley to meet Bingiya Ridek, to held a *Yalung* – the judicial meeting to settle her divorce case.

Her name was Asu and she belonged to Ruba village about thirty Kms. north of Damin. She was betrothed to a young man of Huri whom she plainly disliked. But bride price having been paid, no matter what her objections were she was forced to go to her husband where she was put in *Lepiya*, then tied to a tree and cold water thrown on her body to break her will. Even the husband's father volunteered to accept her as wife, if she did not like his son!

When all this failed, she was brought to the house, but one day she managed to escape and came to Ziro where somehow she got admission in government weaving institute where she meticulously learnt the trade. Meantime seeing her plight, her brothers took sympathetic attitude but could do nothing in face of stubborn opposition from her inlaws in Huri. The divorce amongst the Nishis is not an easy matter. Once the bride price has been paid, it is obligatory on the part of the parents or brothers to send the girl to her husband. Even in case of defiance, she might be tortured in her father's house.

The *Yalung* was called to hear the case. Almost the entire Huri village emptied at Damin. They came prepared to take the girl away forcibly.

An ominous silence fell in the meeting place which was crowded with onlookers. The Huri men carried in their person long steel swords; their grim appearance was sufficient indication of determination. The girl sat with her people, quietly sobbing. Her beautiful rosy cheek moistened with tears. It was a melancholy sight.

Officials were plainly apprehensive about the out come. They had heard so much of rudeness of Huri people.

I did not know what prompted me. Suddenly with a voice, sufficiently stern, I gave a threat to Huri people to settle the case before the dawn. They cannot keep the girl against her will and compensation whatever decided by the meeting must be accepted. They were also told that I meant business – should they fail to compromise, then I would take all of them to Ziro.

So saying, I made a dramatic exit and went straight to my house.

Bingiya Ridek followed me immediately, deep anxiety writ in his face. He had known Huri people for long years and murder of Picha Kati was still fresh in the mind. We had no police force, nor had any weapons. plainly a great risk had been taken.

Though I dismissed with a show of confidence, yet my mind was disturbed. There was little sleep during the night. What would I do if they refused to take my orders. To arrest any one was out of question without police help.

Just before dawn, Bingiya Ridek knocked at my door. He was excited – the case had been settled with the release of the girl. The bridal price had been returned by her brother.

It was a telling scene at Ziro, when one day she came to my house and presented me a shawl woven by her and said though she had lost her father, but in me again she had found him.

Perceiving the wind of change brought by education, many Nishi girls were not satisfied with marriage arrangement made by their parents and demanded annulment of such relation. But since their parents were unable to pay back the bridal price, the girls worked hard either in road construction or some other odd jobs to raise sufficient money to pay the compensation. Even then, it may not be so simple if their inlaws remained adamant and would not prefer to dissolve the marriage. There are endless discussions in *Yalungs* without arriving at a decision. Some times, girls take shelter in Ziro, being pursued by her inlaws or parents. She might be surprised in an ambush and lifted back to the village. It is only hoped Nishis, like Apatani youth association, force reform in the society to allow the girls' freedom to choose own partners.

## Sulungs — A Lesser Known Tribe

A woman with a distinct tattoo mark on forehead and chin drew my attention. Neither Hill Miri nor Nishis have tattoo marks on their face. She was a Sulung — a little known tribe from the Machang village and had come to Damin to purchase salt.

My programme was to go to Sarli in Upper Khru valley by much frequented route via Saitam village. But to know the Sulungs from a close distance was sufficiently tempting and in a spurt of moment I decided to reach Sarli by covering 37 kms. across a wild mountain through Sulung village of Phoreng. My party included only Bingiya Ridek and three porters.

It proved a life long experience. Never before had I ventured uncharted wild mountainous route on routine tours. The journey was exhausting as we had to follow the hunting track, negotiate precipices, gorges and ravines, innumerable water channels, heavy climb and simultaneous descent.

When we left Damin — a heavy mist still lingered over the Kamla. The hills were partially veiled in clouds. Some showers during the night brought further chill in already dipping temperature.

First five Kms. march upto the regrouped Sulung settlement of Machang was on a gentle slope. Here, an enterprising Nishi, Talam Tasap, had opened a few terraces for paddy cultivation. While his endeavour was praise-worthy, but the Sulung had an uneasy feeling — ultimate aim might be to dislodge them. At that time, I had only vague information of Nishis domineering attitude on Sulungs who

were subservient to them. But Talam Tasap brushed aside such fear. He told me — gone are the days of master Slave relations and it is Sulungs, now emancipated by the government, should develop themselves.

From Machang, the Huri appeared so near only separated by Kamla river flowing through a deep depression.

Soon, we entered the virgin forest extended to the hills. Far away the huge mountains — the entire body now shrouded in white, ran from east to west in an end-less chain.

As we continued our climb — there were distinct changes in vegetation — the sub tropical forest of broad leaves and banana left behind and replaced by temperate type. Here and there appeared straggler pines, oaks, rhododendrons, castanopsis, quercus and magnolia species. So many varieties of orchids dangled on the branches of gnawed trees but, alas ! it was winter and no flower was blooming.

I saw different species of bamboos. No where was the common thick heavy headed bamboo seen, instead, there were slender varieties. One species with sharp claw was poisonous — the wound inflicted by which result in a festering sore that does not get easily healed.

By now it must have been close to 9,000 ft. as we breathed the mountain air-cool and crisp. Streak of light filtered through the foliage and we hurried our steps to reach the top to get a view of far winding Kamla coming down the slope of the mountain.

But it was not before an hour till we reached the crest covered with hoar frost.

Except the small shrubs and grass with finely divided long leaves, the tall tress were conspicuously absent perhaps due to constant howling wind. There before us was a scene of extra ordinary beauty, unfurled in magnificent splendour. In the north was the mountain now in deep snow — its pinnacle dazzling in deflected sun light. The Kamla, seen as a thin ribbon, furrowed its course through rugged valley. Not far from massive mountain range is the Nishi village of Ruba with six long houses, set apart in a small valley. A huge waterfall leaped from a high hill rushing down the slope with thunderous roar.

To the south, the blue silhouette of distant horizon faintly marked the valley of Kamla winding towards Tali.

From the top of the hill, we continued our descent, negotiated a number of rocky cliffs of craggy angles with the help of cane ropes, anchored to a tree. In one place, there was a vertical climb of 100 ft. on bamboo ladders placed one above the other by a good samaritan who might have thought to help the weary travellers.

As we went down, a heavy cloud suddenly spread threatening rain and gust of wind. We hurried across the narrow belt of trees picked our way through broken branches and thick under-growth of ferns and moss, groves of lemons followed the dented bank of a lazy meandering stream and arrived at a ramshackled hunting hut made with jungle leaves. Here, during summer months it is risky to move due to preponderance of Russels viper. In diffused sun light, damp and moist jungle, thick under-growth, strewn with boulders – condition must be ideal for the dreaded snake whose single bite is enough to kill any one within minutes. We were lucky as in winter the snakes went to hibernation.

Our porters were very active. Soon they collected some brush wood and lit a fire to warm me up. A cup of steaming brew rejuvenated my sagging energy.

The place was Pholung from where we again had to climb a hill- Luru for an hour and made a descent for long three hours across a thinly spread jungle. The path mercifully zig-zagged as the Sulung village – Phoreng came nearer. While a climb exhausted the energy, yet coming down also equally strain the nerves as feet move ahead by momentum. During the march, I developed my own technique. While climbing – the pace should be slow, never to look up but look at the feet and avoid drinking water. While descending, the move should be steady in slow run.

From the height, we saw a village with eight houses lying by the side of a small river. Now we passed through the forest of sago palm from where Sulungs gather their food.

It was a refreshing sight after a gruelling march of ten hours that at last I arrived in a village where we could find rest. A thatched house stood above the village which appeared to be a staging hut

where we dumped ourselves. From the hut there was a clear view of the houses affording opportunity to see the Sulungs' daily life.

I saw so many healthy pigs roaming around. These mostly belong to Sulungs' immediate neighbour — the Bangrus who are actually Nishis and find it convenient to lend their pigs for fattening in lieu of small payment. Pig's get nourishing food in *tase* — the wild sago plants, which have much food value and grow numerous around a Sulung settlement.

In fact, Sulungs' existence centres round sago-palm and as soon as the trees become few they shift their settlement to another virgin area. This has given them a nomadic nature and unstable economy.

The tribe was little known to outside world till late forties when Furer Heimendorf traced them out during his visit to Kamla valley.

They trace their descendance from a common ancestor — *Abo Tani* and made their settlements since then where sago palm grew in abundance. Their neighbours-the Bangrus, however, claim them as their own but Sulungs believe that Bangrus some how found an access to their territory and made them totally dependent on them by offer of salt, cloth and other daily necessities. Sulungs had no means to pay back the dues which accumulated over the years substantially and they eventually totally got subservient to Bangrus who dictated them in every matter. It was only after government intervention that Sulungs are emancipated and gradually encouraged to abandon the nomadic life. Yet they remained backward and much scared of their neighbours.

Sulungs are known as *Puroik* — a term more acceptable to them.

Sulungs' houses are small — hardly 15 ft. to 20 ft. long and 12 ft. wide. These are raised on wooden struts, rising 3 ft, over the ground. While walls and platforms are with flattened bamboos, the roofing is done with dried palm leaves. Two platforms are jugged out in front and rear without any walls. In single room house. 2 or 3 families of same kin group stay together.

There is a narrow passage running the whole length of the room. Number of fire places depend on the size of the family. Over each fire place there are suspended trays where grains, dried meat, fish and fire wood, baskets are kept.



Dress of a man is a coarse loin cloth, fastened at the waist with an woven cane belt. The upper garment, which extends up to the knee, is woven out of fibres of nettle plant. The cloth is held in front, just above the knee the upper end passed below the arm pits and received cross wise over the shoulders and tied together in front of the chest with a bamboo pin. Brass bangles are worn in the wrists and a cord of yarn fastened around in the legs just below the knees.

They carry a dao, a knife and sometimes a big sword, all sheathed in bamboo scabbard hung across the shoulders in cane strings.

Men gather their hair and tie in a knot in front of fore-head by rounds of thread. This is pierced horizontally by a brass skewer, six inches long. Cane helmet is decorated with beak and feathers of horn bill.

Women's dress is woven cloth worn around the body and going upto the knee. The upper ends are tied over the right shoulder with a bamboo pin. They also wear bead necklaces.

But most conspicuous is the tattoo marks of women on their face. These are on fore-head, cheek, chin and nose. The design is simple with few perpendicular and horizontal lines.

For tattooing, two ingredients are used – juice of a plant and charcoal. The oozing liquid of the plant and charcoal powder are mixed together and made into fine paste with drops of water. With the help of cane thorn the designs are put by pricking on the face. Blood oozes out and the paste is applied immediately. Tattoo marks in deep blue colour then become permanently fixed.

Fine nettle fibres are woven in a portable loom to make coarse cloth. No particular design is used, nor the dyes. Cotton clothes are obtained from *Bangrus* which they extensively use.

Sulungs' staple food is made from wild sago palm – *tase*. The preparation of pulp for food is a laborious process as this continues for several hours. To maintain the steady supply of pulp, the operation is continued throughout the year.

At first, the tree is cut down, leaves chopped off and bark removed. The inner pith is then cut into pieces and continuously hammered by a flat stave, on a stone slab. During this operation, water

is sprinkled from a bamboo tube to make the pulp soft. The coarse fibres are reduced to fine granules due to continuous hammering and these are then mixed with water and strained in finely woven mat. The residue is kept over the mat to completely drain out all the water. One day of full operation is sufficient for 2 to 3 days' meal.

For preparation of meal, the water in a pot is boiled first. When water is fully boiled, the vessel is removed where sago pulp is put in and stirred with a wooden ladle till it solidifies. The paste is then taken out and made into lump of cake, for a meal. The cake sprinkled with salt and chilli make good taste.

Since the food materials are abundantly available in jungle, the Sulungs seldom go for sustained cultivation. They take flesh of all animals except cat, dog, crow or hawk. In the villages, no vegetable or fruit plants are seen, but there are small clearings where they grow millet, maize, tobacco and chilli.

They use a piece of iron, a piece of hard stone, bark of sago plant as tinder to make fire. The iron is repeatedly struck against the stone where tinder is held. When the spark comes out, these immediately catch the dry tinder and blow into a flame.

Sulungs strictly follow tribe endogamy. Inter tribe marriage is mostly avoided and there are very few instances of such marriage. Being dependent on the Bangrus, they obtain the mithuns from them to pay the bride price but in turn remain perpetually in debt.

I was invited to the house of Sale Lilung who had become spokesman of the tribe by his newly acquired clout as gram-panchayat member in the district council. Despite his position he still remained under the control of the Bangrus without whose tacit approval he dared not do any thing.

His house was simple structure with very few items in possession. In fact, at first glance, it appeared an abject poverty. Yet in Sulungs' standard he was rich having a few pigs of his own and a patch of cultivation where he had raised successful crops. It was interesting that he offered me rice-a delicacy where sago palm bread was a common diet.

But Sale Lilung had perceived the wind of change. He wants a school in the village and posting of an Agricultural field staff to

teach the technique of cultivation. Few times he had been to Ziro and the change had impressed him very much.

But it is sad that Sale Lilung's dream would hardly materialize. His people would like to live in their own surroundings amidst sago palm. It was in their legends – their fore fathers had ordained that they should never forsake the palm which would nourish them forever.

In spite of abject poverty – Sulungs seldom sulk. It is this beauty in their character that they always remain content with the nature. This has found expression in lilting rhapsody sung by the girls in Sale Lilung's house, the meaning of which I was told was the story of sago palm and how it sustained them all the year.

When I parted their hospitable company, it was an emotional scene when the entire village – men, women and children spilled out from their houses to give me a send off. To them, my visit was a tremendous event to be reckoned for a long time.

When we reached some distance, a steady stream of people were seen coming down the gentle slope. They were from the Bangru village of Lee, going to Phoreng where a meeting would be held to settle a dispute of two families. No one had called them but they had only heard about it and so were just going to offer help! I wondered at that time how the poor sulungs who had so little food for themselves would be able to feed so many people.

## The Valley of the Khru

The winding path reached the hilltop when suddenly a wide canvas of extra ordinary beauty lay before me. Silhouetted against a brilliant blue sky was the dazzling mountains glittering in the morning sun. Far below the valley floor was a foamy river, winding its course beyond the horizon. Its roar was heard in distinct thud-beating in continuous rhythm. The valley rolled in waves, down the slope of the green hill. Shadowed in the corners are the gigantic trees, nodding in gentle breeze.

As we took a turn — half a dozen long houses perched on the slope came to our view. This was Lee — the Bangru village same as Nishis — only different in name. The Bangrus are not so poor compared to their kins in Kamla valley. Some of them have built up terrace — where they raise good crops. Judging by the stalk left in the field, it was evident, the paddy must have given a good yield.

Very few people were in the village as most had gone to Phoreng. Near a long house, I saw a raised burial structure. Lying horizontally on two forked parts was a log of 3 ft. length. The log apparently hollowed, was in two parts tied up by cane strings on both the ends. The slit was plastered with mud.

This was the grave of a small child who had died only a few days back.

Not far from Lee was the small town of Sarli—the circle headquarters, neatly laid over a valley. The houses were tin roofed— what a diversion from drab and monotonous structures in Tali and Damin.

Sarli was definitely far better though lying in a corner. Its importance has been mostly felt as it was nearer to border and was a

necessity to bring the entire area under effective administrative control.

In Sarli, the government buildings are semi permanent structures with wood panel and tin sheet roofing. While the timbers were extracted locally the tin sheets were air dropped in bundles-considerable effort no doubt. Whoever planned this deserved appreciation as little improvisation could help the officials in comfortable living.

After 20 days in sweat and smell, I had a real rest in cosy bed after a comfortable bath.

Two stages from Sarli is Mili – the last village in Khru valley. Across the snow mountain is Mighyitun – the trading centre in the past now closed to all traffic. Exasperated by frequent forages of wild Lopas of the frontier, the officials used to pay them yearly tribute in shape of cloth or an animal. Mighyitun's importance was a sacred cave, greatly venerated by the pilgrims.

The vast areas upto the snow barrier are the home of Takin and musk deer and Bangrus, as expert marksman, go there before every winter to hunt the animals. Beside hunting, they collect also aconite tubers which are available in high ranges. Aconite is formed in tubers of particular plants which resemble sesamum and is a deadly poison even to largest animal, the elephants.

Yew Takar – the Circle Officer was a Nishi from Lower Panior valley. Smart and active, he had initiated many developmental programmes in the villages and brought the recalcitrant people to order.

Khru originates from the snow range in the north and carries a large volume of water like Kamla.

I saw two Sulung boys, who were students of a primary school at Poloson – a sulung village across the Khru river. The boys were intelligent and polite in their behaviours. I suggested about their education in an outside school where they would get exposure and could broaden their outlook. It appeared to me that education is the only way for the survival of Sulungs, so insulated in age old belief and traditions.

Following the Khru river, we started for Koloriang – two stages

from Sarli. The valley widened as we moved. Half way to Koloriang was Chote – a small village with three houses. Not far from the river was a staging hut standing amidst green forest. Across the river, a narrow foot path winded its way to 'Jhum' fields. Over the river dangled a cane suspension bridge – its centre perilously sagged and it almost touched the water, yet I saw women with wicker baskets dexteriously crossing the bridge with least fear. What a sad contrast with the women elsewhere in the plains.

With a night halt at Chote, I had time for leisure. Bingiya Ridek was in happy mood – coming so near to his home. I took out my pen and paper as he narrated the stories – the folk tales of the Nishis. One of the story related to cunning trick of *Abo Tani* – the ancestor of Nishis who engulfed the monkeys in a fire.

God created *Abo Tani* and monkey. Once *Abo Tani* played a trick. He just pretended to be dead and lay on the ground. The monkeys found him there and thought him dead and, took him to their house for a grand feast. After reaching the house, they went out to fetch fire wood. Their mother was in the house consoling a child who was crying. To soften him, the mother said: soon meat would be cooked and given to him. Hearing this, *Abo Tani* immediately got up and asked the woman what she was talking about. Greatly frightened, she told him the diabolical plan of her sons. There was a small gourd vessel *kokak* over the hearth which *Abo Tani* wanted to see. The woman, finding no way, said that all the hearts of the monkeys were kept there. At once, *Abo Tani* took the vessel and threw it into the fire, but one heart just slipped away. Except this one, all the other hearts got burnt in the fire. The women and the child also died soon after.

All the monkeys, whose hearts were burnt, died when they returned to the house, except the one whose heart had slipped away. *Abo Tani* then roasted the meat of the monkeys – some he ate and some he carried back to his home.

From the lone surviving monkey, his progeny multiplied in course of time.

*Abo Tani* was once wearing *Jelang* – a red dyed cloth. While coming on the way of the monkeys, he met them. Seeing his beautiful red coloured coat, they asked him where from he had got such a colour, *Abo Tani* told them that his wife had made it for him by putting him in a tree hole-*sengrung* and lighting a fire underneath.

The monkeys then pleaded with him to make similar colour for their coat to which Abo Tani agreed and asked all of them to go inside the hole of a tree. As told, all the monkeys went inside and *Abo Tani* lit a huge fire. With intense heat and smoke all but one were choked to death. The one that escaped thus became the progenitor of monkeys of present days.

We left Chote on the next morning for journey to Koloriang only six kms. now. Foot track passed over the gentle alignment and followed the Khru river upto some distance. The valley widened further as the Khru took a turn to the west.

Koloriang township is much bigger than Sarli being the seat of an Assistant Commissioner. All the buildings were log cabin type with wood panels and tin sheet roofing.

Soon, we heard the drone of a dakota which came streaking through the blue sky. It made perfect rounds and ejected the loads over the dropping zone. After we heard the drone no more, we made our entry to the town. Situated on a spacious valley over 3000 ft. height, the town had been growing with gradual expansion. A hospital with indoor beds, high school, craft centre, public works sub-division had ushered in the progress, but Koloriang is yet to be linked by motorable road. The journey to Ziro is six stages and all essential provisions were air dropped. What was interesting, however was that the Nishis were still strongly attached to age old custom which slowed the process of development despite the governmental efforts. Almost daily long hours were spent in *Yalung* – mostly related to marriage affairs. It was obvious that unless they change their attitude, they would remain backward.

But there were exceptions already seen in few individual efforts. They like to be busy in works and not much interested in *yalungs*. One such person was Pani Kame who had terraced gentle slope and started paddy cultivation. His ambition was praise worthy as he wanted to follow the Apatanis.

It was a sad departure from Bingiya Ridek who gave me such a wonderful company. His ready wits and humour often made me burst into laughter and I forgot the fatigue of strenuous journey. He looked after me so well – guarding my every step. It was difficult to find any such men who would function not only as a guide but also as a friend as well.

I crossed Khru by a suspension bridge — half way to Leel where I stayed for the night. There was no village near Leel, but importance of the place had increased due to road construction which ultimately project to link Koloriang with Ziro.

Nyapin was on a saddle of a hill. From Leel, I made a hurried journey by climbing the hill — paji, for four hours. There was no water on the way and so weary traveller had to cross the hill any how.

Nyapin was also a circle headquarters but looked smaller than Sarli. An incomplete runway of a projected air field stands at a distance. Three stages from Nyapin is Chayangtajo in adjacent Kameng district where a gruesome massacre of twelve policemen had taken place in 1963. The place at the time was under loose administrative control and tribal suspicion was easily roused on government's efforts to emancipate the slaves. After this tragedy, swift move was made for rapid development with opening of road communication.

Situated at the height of over 4500 ft., Chayang Tajo offers a panoramic view of the mountains and officials are no longer scared of its isolation and and horror of the past.

The people of Nyapin, though a shade better but turbulent as murders and elopements still occur. Yet change had kindled hopes and aspiration especially in the girls who no longer like to live in the old world. No one dreamt at the time, but it happened years later that girls from Nyapin began to receive college education and one such was Tame Yam who had competed in Indian Administrative Service examination.

Hardly had I any time to move around, when an urgent wireless message came from Ziro for me to return at once. Next morning saw me hurrying my pace towards Palin-40 kms. from Nyapin. It was close to midnight when I arrived at Palin. Greatly worried with the delay, the Circle Officer Palin, Monoranjan Roy Hajong, sent runners with lights which helped me to find my way.

A vehicle picked me up from Deed — fifty kms. short of Ziro. Rattling over the boulder strewn road for twenty kms. it struck the metalled road near the village Talo and sped fast towards Ziro.

I completed the circuit in 25 days, logging more than 300 kms. on foot march, gathered valuable knowledge of the land and people from close observations.



## MLOKO — The Spring Festival

Ziro in winter is extremely cold. There is occasional heavy frost spreading a white blanket over the valley. The water in the pipe line also gets frozen when temperature dips down further.

Yet in the bitter winter, I was amazed to see never ending works going on in the field. Women were busy even after the harvesting of paddy. They moved with iron hoes to straighten the bunds and levelling the field.

Once, I closely watched them working, and to my surprise, slowly they had increased the land area by few inches. It was on the boundary of my house. A few months earlier they had cleverly scooped up earth from underneath the boundary wall, keeping the upper layer intact. When the heavy rains followed, the upper layer crumbled and fell. Thus a few inches of land was added to the field. One might say, this is a cunning device but I must appreciate the Apatani's ingenuity to utilize every inch of land for the productive purpose.

Adding land inch by inch is seen every where — even on both sides of the road. Slowly but steadily, the width of the road narrowed with the gnawing of earth and therefore government might have to resort to harsh action someday.

It was March — the festival of *Mloko* drew nearer. This time, it was Hija where two other villages — Michi Bamin and Modan Tage also joined. *Mloko* festival is rotated every year amongst three groups of villages. Kalong, Reru, Tajang, Lempiya, commonly called Bula form one group where Hari village also joins. Hong, being the largest, formed the second group, Mudan Tage, Michi Bamin and Hija formed the third group.

*Mloko* undoubtedly is one of the most spectacular festivals of the Apatanis. It is celebrated with great enthusiasm which continues for several days. During the festival no one goes to the field, nor cut down trees. It is believed that any one violating the rule will invite supernatural wrath resulting in death.

For those who do not sacrifice any animal, the festival continues for 15 days, but for others it may last for a month.

Long before the festival, heaps of firewood are brought from the forest to meet the requirement for a month. No one wilfully destroys the stack and if any one does so, great harm will befall on him.

Every clan in the village has *Yagong Ato* — descendant of the ancestors who first observed the *Mloko* festival. There is a separate altar in each clan for *Yagong Ato* where sacrifice of animals is made. The base of the tree where sacrifice is made is called *Yeogiyang Takung*. For the sacrifice, *Yagong Ato* is offered a pig. Those persons descended from the same ancestor are required to give the following for sacrifice.

Alo Ato	One pig
Ponta	One cock
Jibo Ato	One dog
Jego Ato	One cock
Cha Ato	One cock

At the end of October, young and old men of the village go to the jungle to hunt for monkeys. For each clan, one monkey is required. After killing the monkey, the carcass is brought, covered in cane leaves — *Tapar*, in a great out-burst of joy with chorus of shouts HO! HO! HO! HO! HI! HI! HI! HI! . During the hunt, there should not be any sound, otherwise the spirits will be displeased and all attempts to hunt will prove abortive.

On return to their respective clan, a feast is arranged in the house of *Yogong Ato*. In his house, the monkey's fingers in both the hands are chopped off and distributed to the clan members which are subsequently dried and stored.

At the beginning of the festival, the priest comes to the house of *Yagong Ato*, wearing glittering dress and apparels and ornaments. The priest's costumes are sacred — ordinary persons cannot wear these, nor the priest himself can use these on other days except on

ceremonial occasions. He starts chanting the dialogue with the spirit. Those who will sacrifice the pigs, will bring the animal to his house. The priest continues the communication with the spirits which lingers on for a long time. The owners of the pigs also come draped in best of clothes and ornaments and bring rice powder mixed with ginger, salt and chilly, sprinkle these on the body of the small children. After that, they bring back the pigs to their houses. At the time when the priest is chanting the incantation continuously, an oldest member of the clan takes a sharp dao and pierces the pigs liver and pulls this out with the hand.

After the killing of the pig – the relatives and friends visit the houses of each other for a week with beer and meat and enjoy the time in fun and frolick. An interesting debate starts in sing song way selecting any part of the myths. Near the fire place, a long sliced bacon is kept dangling. The person who wins the debate gets the slice as prize.

The debate continues for hours bringing in its trail fascinating tales which are heard in rapt attention by the large gathering.

The spirits – *Neli, Kiri, Piyoti, Yoyoli, Ronto, Rolchong* come to the house of *Yogong Ato*. Those who sacrifice pig contribute an egg each. After 15 days the priest implores the spirits to return to their own abodes saying for fifteen days they have been looked after with due solemnity. During these days no one has visited the cultivation fields or broke the taboos and so they can go back with great joy and happiness. To show them the path, the priest will guide them through the forest.

After the departure of the spirits, there is another propitiation – *Bije Yadu*. This is observed in bamboo grove where a portion of the liver of the sacrificed pig, a portion of skin along with rice, salt and beer are required for the rite.

Two bamboo sticks are stuck to the ground and over these another bamboo is laid horizontally, five pieces of liver and a portion of skin are then hung on it and roasted in the fire which is lit from below. These are then consumed by the people.

The place where this rite is observed in the bamboo grove is called *Alokhu*. This grove is a hereditary possession.

After the rite has been performed, the spirits are asked to go back to their own home. They may kindly see that no snake crawls here nor the branch of a tree falls on the head.

This is followed by trapping of fish in the river. The fish is cooked in blood of the sacrificed pig in an earthen vessel. This is done as the priest promises to the spirits that fish would be cooked as such.

Another rite is also observed in the hereditary bamboo groves— *Agiang Rindu*. Here too, a bone of sacrificed pig, beer, rice powder, salt and chilli are wrapped in a leaf — *Niji Yayoni* and are hung on a bamboo stick, but no fire is lit. Along with it, two eggs and three sacrificed cocks are kept. This ritual can be done also in new field. No one destroys this, and if any one does so will pay heavy fine. If any one purchases this land, he will pay apart from cost of the land an additional cost of a brass metal vessel.

Apatanis first settled in a place — *Epiyo Chopung*. With them at the time were many people and all of them were the descendants of the same ancestor — the Abo Tani. Once it happened that they suffered from blood dysentery. To find out the cause of such affliction, they read the omens that revealed the presence of a spirit *Wiyu Kiri* — who was responsible for the disease.

At that time, their leader was *Shanto Popi*. In *Epiyo Chopung*, a meeting was held where *Shanto Popi* divided the duties amongst all for appropriate propitiation. On his advice, the festival of *Mloko* started in great solemnity to appease the spirits so that they might bestow kindness and benevolence.

Soon after the *Mloko* festival was over, I got a surprise order of posting to Anini — a far off place in Dibang Valley, which was a part of Lohit District.

I had only a vague idea of the place but knew it as remote and approached only by helicopter. On foot march, it takes fourteen days over an extremely difficult terrain, full of land slides and turbulent rivers.

As the government insisted on my posting, I had no choice but to go there. It was sad for me to leave Ziro so soon, hardly after ten months. The Apatanis with their vibrant life offers an

Administrator an exciting experience, though filled with anxious moments.

No where in the wider world a tribe so well knit survived through centuries, developed an echo system, perfected agriculture to the level of sophistication which is the envy of scientists and, above all, are able to make a sustained living.

The people being hard and tenacious, it might not require prodding, but with government help, they may diversify their activities in other trades.

But the people being deeply rooted to their land, much more promise appears at the moment in agriculture and allied fields which will support the agro-industries, thus increasing the employment potentiality for vast number of educated youths coming out from schools now-a-days.

## In the Lap of the Mountain

A chopper was ready to fly to Anini. I was lucky as the weather report confirmed clear approach when I arrived at the air base.

The morning sun lifted the veil of mist when a MI 4 helicopter took off. This was my first experience in a long distance flight in a helicopter and I felt an ominous trepidation with vibration of the panels and shrill sound of the engine. The flight sergeant moved up and down the aisle, kicking the loads from rear to the front, while the young squadron leader shifted his gaze which appeared writ with anxiety.

The hills below also looked ominous as thick clouds rolled in waves shutting off the view altogether.

It was almost an hour when suddenly I saw a valley rimmed by huge mountains covered in deep snow, a misty white river snaking its way in down ward course, isolated houses amidst bamboo forest. Soon after, dozens of tin roofed buildings sprawled in the clear sun over a wide expanse in what appeared to be a plateau rising some hundreds of feet over the river.

We had reached at last our destination, Anini.

As the helicopter circled in wide curve, diminutive figures were found rushing from all directions to the small landing strip. The entire town emptied to see the incoming passengers. There was so much of eager expectation of news from far off world. The return sortie took away some of them, going on duty or leave.

At first sight, Anini was exciting-crisp, clear air, miles and miles of rolling grassy land, slender bamboo forest, tall fir trees, huge mountains deeply enveloped in snow, soaring to great heights, swift

flowing rivers with crystal clear water rushing through the valley floor. Here and there are sudden splash of brown tinge amidst the green vista – the roofs of Idu long houses surrounded by poplar and bamboo forest.

5200 ft. height plateau of Anini gradually descended through tiers of table land to Dri and Mathun rivers, flowing from two directions. Both the rivers, which are snow fed, merge at Matuli – five Kms. south of Anini.

A huge bowl – shaped depression formed an important land mark of the town. Part of this is covered with marsh from where efforts were being made to drain out the water for cultivation. Terraces were built up under special programme in the depression and surrounding areas, but only to be abandoned by disinterested farmers.

The valley has much similarity with Ziro. But no where was there any resemblance to Apatani's endeavour and initiative.

The soil is clayey loam with rich deposit of humus. Rocky profiles are conspicuously absent and so stones were collected from distance to pave the road.

Strong gusty wind discouraged the growth of trees in the plateau land, but in sheltered belts the trees could sustain the growth. A special type of bamboo – *bamboosa pallida hill*, which is tall and slender, grew abundantly though without any care or maintenance. All government buildings were constructed with partially dressed wooden panels, corrugated iron or plain sheets for roofing. There was sparse use of cement in the foundation. The floor is covered with bitumen coated jute felt which were air dropped in rolled bundles. Only the upper portion of the window panes was covered with transparent polythene sheets. Glass is not used due to high cost.

The walls were mud plastered over the split bamboo matting and white washed.

A perennial stream had been tapped in higher alleviation from where unfiltered water was drawn through polythene pipes for distribution. The supply was never regular as flexible pipes often got damaged due to pressure of water.

Two diesel generating sets of 18 Kwts capacity each supplied electricity only for five hours in the evening.

The generation being low, only the near by areas of the power house received the voltage, but the houses situated at a distance never had enough even a hundred watts bulb gave a faint glow.

There is often disruption of supply due to shortage of fuel. It might also happen that only one generator would function as the other developed a snag. At that time, the supply was restricted for two hours in each area.

The town turned into a ghostly appearance when lights were switched off. Very few oil lamps flickered as kerosine was a costly commodity.

A 500 kwts. hydel project had been sanctioned near Alinye 14 Kms. north of Anini, across the Dri river. When this is commissioned, then it might meet the demand of the town and neighbouring villages.

A jeep was air lifted to provide some transport facilities. A 14 Kms. unpaved road went up to the bank of Dri river, near Alinye. In the town area, circular roads connected residential areas and institutions. All the roads become slushy in rain or snow. Often it become so uncomfortable to move with leather boots on. In some portions, oozing water turns the area into deep morass, where jeep wheels once bogged could be lifted only with considerable efforts.

In one end of the town was the market with few shops where tea leaves, soaps, clothes or tobacco were sold at exorbitant price. The transportation charge for bringing the goods from foot-hills market was too heavy thereby increasing the sale rate to allow a reasonable profit margin. Yet it was surprising that there was no real dirth of customers !

Half a dozen primary schools were opened around Anini as education was given a thrust no matter whether teaching staff were adequately equipped. Harsh condition in villages simply frightened many of them who later suffered from depression. How often it is not realised that only the academic qualifications cannot form the basis of selection for service in the frontiers, but his understanding of tribal life as well mental aptitude are equally important.

There were teachers like Monoranjan Bora and Guna Sharma, serving in Etabe and Gipulin Primary Schools who had positive approach to life; developed creative interest and thereby earned good will and affection of the people. Here they had set examples for others



to follow as to how best one can lead a meaningful life, even in adverse condition.

Government recognized the good works done by Monoranjan Bora and awarded him with commendation certificate for meritorious service.

The school at Anini was upto class eight. Within a year, it was upgraded to a high school. Though this had met the aspiration of the people, yet the staff who arrived were plainly disappointing. None of them had seen a hill or lived in tribal areas. The basis of educational programme in the frontiers had been to over-subscribed view on quantity and not on the quality.

Hospital, which had few beds in improvised barracks was shifted to a spacious building, constructed under the special sanction. Though number of beds increased, yet occupancy remained low. There were very less incidence of disease even though people lived in not so congenial condition. The cool crisp air of the mountain had profound and salubrious effect on their health. They get ill only when they go down to the foot hills.

There was a craft centre with trade training facilities in carpentry, blacksmith, weaving and tailoring, yet students were very few inspite of liberal incentives. Sadly many of the programmes were not need based, but staff were appointed any way who, with not much works, sulk in idleness.

A six hectare horticultural farm was developed to experiment in apple and other temperate fruits. At least, in Apple, there appeared some prospect as price was attractive. Many had started small orchards in and around Anini.

Twenty two years before in 1956, Major R.K. Hranga of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service had made an extensive tour in Upper Dibang Valley. He camped at Matuli near the confluence of Dri and Mathun rivers, down the slope of Anini. He was in search of a suitable land to establish an Administrative centre, at first, he thought the long but narrow valley of Matuli, situated on the river banks, might be the ideal place, but when dakota came for dropping, it became obvious that the space was less for maneuverability due to high hills.

Major Hranga in a daring move took only a JCO of an Assam Rifles with him, climbed to the plateau of Anini and saw an immense

open grassy land without any sign of human habitation. He immediately radioed for air drop. When dakota came, the pilot made perfect circuits and ejected the loads with ease.

Within a few days, the Assam Rifles built up their barracks with thatch and bamboo. A few huts also came up to house the Administrative Officer and his staff. The Administrative centre was opened at Anini in 1956 with the posting of Z. Thangsia, the Extra Assistant Commissioner.

How the life was in those early days — JCO Amar Bahadur Rai told me the story.

He was a Rifleman when Major Hranga had first come to Anini. Earlier, he had accompanied B.S. Routledge, the Political Officer, Mishmi hills, in his tour to Mipi in upper Mathun valley.

At that time, Anini was full of tall grass. In the centre of the valley, there was a big marshy land with waist deep water. They pitched their camp on the spur of a small hill. No one came from the village as they believed the place was the home of dreaded spirit.

With only 25 men of Assam Rifles and 20 porters, it was a dauntless job to clear the site for a camp. Working feverishly every day from early morning till late evening, they brought bamboos and wooden posts from far distance and eventually built up barracks and huts to house the platoon.

The winter was bitter cold with frequent rains and snow-fall. Once the snow was a foot deep and covered all the approaches to the barracks. The season was a real curse as due to rain and sleet movement become difficult. There was no escape from it.

Some times, the dakotas dropped supplies. The bags fell among thick grass in widely scattered areas. To trace the bags, the search took the whole day.

Summer though pleasant, yet brought another hazard — the strong wind. Once it blew off the roof of the barrack.

Then there were the snakes which often crawled inside.

He still recalls the fearful experience when a snake quietly climbed over and rested on his sleeping bag!

It was early morning. Suddenly, he woke up feeling some heavy weight just over the belly. On opening the eyes, he found to his horror, a snake had coiled itself and was quietly lying with its hood pointed towards him.

It was a night-mare; he could not jump as the flap of the bag was fastened with the cord. He managed to give a hoarse cry which alerted his colleagues. One of them brought a forked stick and with a sudden jerk threw the snake out to the floor and killed it.

Even after many years, he still feels the chill of the nightmarish experience.

At another time, some-where in the foot-hills, while he was resting in a camp — a small snake had quietly got inside his boot. Luckily, he found it out, otherwise he would have got a sure bite.

It was the contribution of Z. Thangsia, that Anini was slowly built up. He became so enamoured with the place that he seldom moved out unless called by the Political Officer.

In keeping with the Administration's policy of forward thrust to remote areas, a decision was soon taken up in early sixties to move the Additional Political Officer's headquarters from the foot hills to Anini. At that time, except the food stuff all other things moved by land route covering a period of 14 days through a most inhospitable terrain. The weather was always deceptive, torrential rain dislocated the communication link; there was constant danger of isolation by a sudden land slip. Five stages from the foot hills station of Roing was the high hill of Mayu — a place where winds always made howling sound. A climb of 4000 ft. from the river bed brought the lucky traveller to the saddle — any false step would have spinned the body — hundreds and hundreds of feet down to the swirling current of the river.

Yet, inspite of all the privations, the officials stayed at Anini. Even the Additional Political Officer moved only when he had to visit the foot hills. They made extensive tours in far flung areas and decided on the spot many cases, and what was more, established a personal relationship with the people. The longest tour was made by Capt. K. Banerjee, the Additional Political Officer, for six months during which he visited almost all the villages of Dibang Valley.

Even in those early days there were many officials at Anini. They shared their joys or happiness, sorrows or sufferings and very few of them were escapists.

The dibang Valley formed a part of bigger Lohit district which had its head-quarters at Tezu. The Additional Political Officer since designated as Additional Deputy Commissioner, Anini functioned independently with statutory powers with him. Deputy Commissioner, being the collector of the district, controlled treasury function, narcotics, drugs and arm licenses.

Since Anini was far off, Government allowed the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Anini, to visit Roing in the foot hills especially for session courts, as power of session judge was vested with him and trial cases required the presence of prosecution and defence counsel who could not come to Anini.

A communication sortie was sanctioned once a month from Roing to Anini and back for movement of Additional Deputy Commissioner and official files. The sortie was provided on requisition only whenever Additional Deputy Commissioner fixed the time.

But this had an ironic side too. The facilities were fully misused by some of the officers who found a convenient reason to come out from Anini and stay at Roing for any length of time in good cosy Rest house, especially constructed for them and availing all other facilities. My arrival at Anini coincided with such a situation. Except a Circle Officer, none of the important functionaries were present – many had gone on leave or followed the Additional Deputy Commissioner to Roing.

Though pressure of works was not like that of Ziro, yet the routine matters required attention. The important instructions of the Government came by wireless transmission. The daily arrival of bunch of messages took an hour's time only to glance through these!

The additional Deputy Commissioner, an Indian Administrative Service Officer, was not much interested in the inhospitable frontier. But sadly, he was not the sole exception; most of them did not come willingly and felt too happy to go back. Switch over from IFAS to IAS might be debatable – whether the grand purpose of revamping the Administration with young, intelligent officers actually fulfilled the need. At least in earlier times, IFAS officers stayed in their

head-quarters, made extensive tours, left their impressions in bulky tour notes. There would seldom be persons like R.K. Khating, R.K. Hranga K. Banerjee, Rashid Yusuf Ali, R.N. Haldipur or T.S. Murti — who served in the frontiers for several years.

I did not meet the Additional Deputy Commissioner for long seven months since my arrival. Eventually when he came I found him though intelligent, but frittered away his time in 'Rummy' — the game of cards with half a dozen officers. All these days, I had strictly enforced the orders banning gambling — now it got fresh lease of life!

Additional Deputy Commissioner's prolonged absence from Anini created dissatisfaction in the people. Once they had bluntly told the visiting Governor that the officer comes and goes like a tourist. Even then he did not change his escapist mentality.

His successor also an IAS officer who came a year and half after, maintained the same attitude — he to seldom stayed at Anini. In fact, this ruse had been followed by successive officers who made Roing a defacto headquarter which further created bitterness in people.

We had in the office Bram Prakash — the EAC who always followed the ADC wherever he went. C.K. Vyas the Circle Officer who had poor eyesight but continued to stay, SM Das Gupta, the Accounts Officer a jovial person who was later replaced by S.K. Paul, an equally good man, H.N. Biswas, the Sub-Treasury Officer R.K. Saharia, the Assistant Director of Education, L.R. Jyrwa, the district Agriculture Officer. Jyrwa's daughter Eva — a smart young girl was in final year in middle school. She picked up many languages just by conversations and excelled in humour and wits.

Amongst the junior staff were Md Abdulla, the Head Assistant, Hira Das, Manab Chakraborty, S. Sen Mazumdar, John Cherian, Om Bahadur Gurung, Talukdar, S. Adhikary, Duarah, Gogoi, Boruah — all office assistants. Among the Idu staff we had Laitu Miu, Loga Tacho, Khuti Yalla — pcons, Akru Mihu — the Political jemadar, Tapa Mipi, Nulu Tayu and Kako Mihu — the Political Interpreters, Soma Tayu, the chowkider.

In hospital we had Robin Dutta and Dipankar Das, both young doctors who always vibrated with enthusiasm. Robin's only son Tentu a nice little kid kept every one busy with his pranks.

Tade Tacho — a leader of repute was the member of the Legislative Assembly in Union Territory. He was sober in his approach and behaviour which earned him appreciation from the staff. Tade Tacho had been instrumental in obtaining various sanctions from the government for the developmental works.

Buli Tacho was also a leader and was slowly building up his ambitions. Buli's brother Rajesh was a fine boy who had his education in Shillong. He would have definitely made a good career had he continued his studies but domestic compulsions compelled him to come back home.

Chinguchi Tayu — the boy in the high school came from a poor family. Both Rajesh and he were well mannered and earned lot of admiration from us. Jidu, the son of Gane Tacho of Etabe village, Khobor Melo son of Erati Melo of Cheya village were the two other bright school boys who held lot of promise of a good career.

There were few girls in the high school — at least a beginning had been made in their education which might prompt them for better deal in the society.

I have got again my friend from Tuting — Dr. Golok Nath Gogoi, the Sub Divisional Medical Officer. He had not changed much despite the time. A simple and unobtrusive person, at first he gave an indication of total indifference to life. But behind the out ward appearance there was an intelligent self where he stored the mine of knowledge on varying subjects — be of science, history or philosophy.

He passed long hours with me analysing events which he believed would be catastrophic to the world. His theory of two suns in the solar system appeared like a fiction story but, nevertheless, he strongly believed the possibility. Surely a day would come when both the suns would be in same line, then it would be the end of the world! Two suns will be visible from a particular vantage point only for a fraction of a minute.

His bizzare experience was with a ghost in shape of an old woman who visited him in his house which was situated at an isolated place. Near the house was the Medical Store and dispensary. During the night no one stayed there. Behind the house, the land fell sharply to the bank of Dri river.

In front of the house — a marshy land extended upto four hundred feet which later on we reclaimed and converted in to a foot ball field.

It was a cold night at Anini. The electric lights were switched off and so he lighted two candles to read a book.

It was perhaps midnight. He was deeply engrossed in the book when he suddenly heard a soft sound and looked up and saw some one standing on the door of the bed room, looking at him. Soon after, the figure vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared.

Being a doctor, he reasoned himself — how many times he had dissected the human body, passed long hours in mortuary, so, this might be a thought of wandering mind. He drove out the thought and became engrossed in the book.

But soon after, the soft sound was again heard — an upright figure of an old lady was clearly now seen standing on the door ways, intently gazing at him. This time he got up, but to his surprise found no trace of any one, nor the door was ajar.

The incident continued to puzzle him ever-since. Was it a ghost or imagination of a wandering mind?

Sometime later, in an adjacent house which had a new occupant — a radio operator had a grim experience. He too was reading a book, but suddenly found a deep shadow coming towards him. As soon as he got up, the shadow vanished. He too thought of a wandering mind and forgot about it. After some time, the same thing happened — the shadow reached the ceiling and stood upright. With a loud yell, he ran out with his under-wear and came to the house of his friend.

Idus believed, both the houses were haunted.

Since there was acute shortage of accommodation, once we allotted the house to a newly arrived family. No one told them anything and so quietly they moved in. But hardly a night passed without some bizzarre scenes. Later, they too left the house in a huff.

Lonto Roy, the Agriculture Inspector, whom every one affectionately called mama-uncle, belong to Cherrapunji of Meghalaya. He was in Anini for four years. With his pleasant disposition, Lonto Roy easily charmed the gathering with ready wits and humour.

He entered the frontier service before the great earthquake of 1950 and served most of the time in Kameng district. The life was adventurous in those days when road communication did not exist, and one had to live with minimum of facilities.

Chakoo was the oldest serving official at Anini. He had been here since 1963 and by now had passed so many winters. Yet he had no hope of getting a transfer elsewhere as he was holding the solitary post of Sub Treasurer, only created for Anini.

Chakoo was from distant Kerala. Often he became sad and melancholy when he saw, one by one the officials moved out after completion of the tenure of two or three years of service.

Chinmoy Sen, was the Veterinary Doctor — all the time busy with his works. No one saw him wasting his time even in bitter winter.

He built a dairy and Goatery Farm with so much of care that these earned good revenue for the Government. In early morning, Chinmoy ran to the Farm — a Kilometre away from his residence and remained there throughout the day. I seldom saw dedication elsewhere.

Ajit Kumar Das — a Circle Officer now on deputation to Central Service had lilting voice. His songs were enchanting which enthralled the gathering.

We had another interesting person, Karnail Singh — the Supply Inspector. A hefty Sikh-Karnail had a bulging belly which any way helped him to serve as a support in the helped to write the load manifest! We burst in peal of laughter seeing his peculiar pose!

Karnail had wits. Once, in foot hills he brought teh small army unit to attention. He spoke in a gruff voice — Karnail speaking — would like to visit the unit!

Hearing this, understandably there was great flurry of activities to receive the colonel whose sudden arrival naturally created great deal of anxiety.

Later, when the truth came out, Karnail had a hearty laugh making the poor fellows sweating for sometime! It was his name after all which created the confusion!



## The People of the Valley— The Idus

The tribe inhabiting the valley areas are known as Idu. Spread over twenty five villages, the population is only 1500—a figure much low compared to the available land.

Their villages generally lie near a river or on a flat piece of land down a spur. The only consideration is the security it could afford from surprise by an enemy. An Idu never believes in taking chances. He takes every precaution against his rival who may be at any moment on him if he does not remain alert and guard himself from such an eventuality.

A village may consist of one or more houses. A village comprising a dozen houses is considered a big village.

The houses are not clustered together but situated far apart. Thick forest of bamboos, a tall slender species particularly growing in the valley, is seen everywhere through which twisting paths lead to each house.

The windows and pig run of the house always face the river. The other side is closed with a wall and jungle growth is encouraged to deny easy access to an enemy. In some villages the houses remain hidden under such covers.

One of the reasons for having this bamboo growth is to cover an escape in case of danger.

An Idu house is strongly built mostly with bamboos, so that it must not be easily surprised by a sneaking enemy. The length of the

house depends on number of wives a person has, each wife having a separate room and a hearth. The length of the house may vary anything from 40 ft. to 150 ft. but width remains most constant – 20 ft to 25 ft.

The house rests on wooden struts, two or three feet above the ground. The walls are covered horizontally with strong round bamboos. All such inner walls are lined with strong bamboo mats. The round bamboos are placed under the wooden beams supporting the floor. Bamboo mats are then placed over them. The people prefer the use of whole bamboo – no split bamboo is used anywhere. This strengthens the building and ensures the security as well.

The roof is thatched with some grass which is tied to bamboo frames with bamboo strips. The pitch of the roof is made high to allow the rain water to drain out easily. The roof both in front and rear ends in half circle.

Within the houses, fire places are located in rooms. Each fire place is two and a half square feet in area and fitted with wooden boards at the sides, and bottom is secured from below. The space within is filled up with earth.

Over the fire place, the bamboo trays are hung one above the other. There are four trays in the front room, but three trays in all other rooms. The trays are used for keeping firewood, baskets, food materials.

Except the front room which is used by male members of the family, all other rooms are in separate enclosures with doors. A long passage leads from the front door to the rear door of the house. There are narrow passage also in between the rooms where a small square hole is cut on the floor for use as latrine.

The passage leading to front room has no partition. The wall of the passage is lined up with trophies of Mithuns, wild boars, and Takins. Within a partition in front of the room, a square hole is cut on the floor for latrine.

Each room has a separate exit leading to a portico. This portico may further extend a few feet outside the pig enclosure for use of the family especially women and children.

The pig sty is situated below the platform. The pig—run is extended ten to fifteen feet outside which is strongly fenced with round bamboos. For each wife, there is a separate pig sty.

The approach to the house is always from the front by means of notched ladder which is only a few feet from the ground. There is also a notched ladder placed against the rear exit.

The main consideration being the security, the idus are very alert against movement of any stranger. Opening of the front door immediately creates a vibration through the corridor which alerts the inmates. The man takes sufficient precautions to guard himself from the danger and the exit door leading to the pig run serves as an escape route.

In the women's rooms, except the husband and small children, no other male members are allowed to stay. The daughter may stay in her mother's room or have a room for herself.

In the front room, big logs of wood are continuously fed to the hearth. Split fire wood is very rarely used. In other rooms where hearths are small, firewood is used along with bamboos.

In the women's room the second rack over the fire place is special construction. Sides are particularly covered to block the inquisitive look of visitors. Only the back side is kept open. The rack is used for keeping dried fish, rats, birds and brewed beer. From the side of the window, a wall with woven bamboo mat is put. Behind this wall, clothes, boxes etc. are kept. These are not seen by any one while entering the room.

Valuables are not kept in the house—these are put in granary.

Money is, however, carried in a bearskin bag. All new clothes are kept in granary as new clothes are required for burial of the dead.

Male guests sleep in the front room, while women guests stay in the women's room. Important guests are given the coveted place near the window.

Idus construct two types of granaries. One is located in the cultivation field and the other near the house. Each wife will have a store house for herself. The field granary is used for storing the

grains after the harvest as this is situated at a distance from the village.

The granaries are rat-proof. The platform is supported on wooden posts 4 ft. above the ground. The wooden posts are driven to the ground along with bamboo. At the height of 4 ft. all the posts are cut and a platform with round bamboos is laid. The platform juts out 1 to 2 ft. in all sides to prevent rats from crawling in. A one room shed is made with round bamboo walls. The inner walls are covered with woven mats.

The Idus are short statured, with a very pronounced Mongoloid features with flat nose and broad forehead. Their complexion is fair. Women are comparatively fairer than the men and some of them are exceptionally beautiful, with rosy checks and lips and sparkling eyes.

Possessing a strong physique, an Idu is very energetic and capable of enduring extreme hardship.

The dress of women consists of two pieces of skirts which reach upto the ankle. For the upper body, a full sleeve jacket and blouse is worn. These are woven in their small portable loom. The skirts have alternate red, green and black stripes with wide margin. The jacket and blouse are of black or green colour.

Idu women crop up their hair in front but leave it long at the back. The hair is cropped from the side of the ear, with the help of a small knife. The hair is parted in the centre of the head and long hair on the back is made into a bun in which bamboo combs and a piece of flat bone of an animal are thrust. To keep the hair in position, bamboo clips are used.

Women wear ornaments and various types of beads. Some are worn as necklace. A bead *Lekepu*—is very costly. It is of different colours with white markings.

Men's wear consist of a loin cloth to cover the privacy. In the body, a sleeveless woven shirt is worn. The shirt may be of either cotton or of wool with floral designs.

On special occasion, a coat—*Etonde*, is worn. This is sleeveless and stiff shouldered coat and very costly.

Men also wear beads and head gear. The best one is known as 'Apotolo Zuhi' which is made of cane strips and is very strong and durable.

They carry haver-sack made of cane or bamboo. Long strips of fibers in thick layers cover the back side for protection against rain.

Two daos are carried in scabbards and hung across the shoulders which cross each other. Apart for use in chopping fire-wood or meat, these are used for defensive or offensive attack. Sometimes, a spear with sharp pointed blade is also carried.

Like women, men too crop their hair in front from the side of the ear and keep the hair long on the back, twisted in a bun.

All women know weaving which fairly keeps them occupied.

The fibres are extracted from the nettle plants and made into balls and then put in hot water. Wood ash is added and stirred with a ladle. The yarn is separated, taken out, washed, dried and put into the loom.

The dyes of three colours – red, green and black, are prepared from certain plants. Dye is always prepared in jungle, kept secret from other, neither any one allowed to see the preparation.

Designs especially in shirts are quite attractive. These are mostly diamond shaped either plain or decorative. The colour combination in shirts is black, red and green. Black and red are used in diamond shaped designs.

To an Idu, a most precious possession is Mithun (*Bibos Frontalis*) which may bring him name and fame. It is by Mithun, he can get a wife, observe the 'Rhe' Festival and entertain people. Surprisingly, he is not interested to multiply the stock, instead purchase the animal from far away place.

An Idu toils very hard to get the *coptis tita* – the medicinal plant, from the high hills. He goes to the foot hills for sale and with the money, set out again to purchase the Mithun. Expenses never bother him so long the precious animal is secured, Pack wolves and tigers are a menace to Mithuns. There is always loss of one or two Mithuns. That is why people are reluctant to keep a large herd.

Killing a Mithun seldom requires an occasion. The animal might be slaughtered at the spur of the moment, only to entertain others. Here the Idus display a magnanimous character quite bewildering to an observer.

The killing is done by bringing the animal to the place and head is kept under crossed stumps which are firmly driven to the ground. The rope is fastened around the neck and pulled by two or three men from the front. The tail is likewise held by one or two persons to keep the animal steady.

A single stroke of the sword may not cut the wind pipe and so repeated blow are made till the head is severed. The blood is kept in a receptacle and after warming it over fire, taken with chilli and salt. The meat is immediately chopped and distributed. Often, people taste the meat even half roasted or boiled.

If many Mithuns are to be killed – the animals are brought one after the other and slaughtered in separate enclosures. Two Mithuns are not slaughtered in the same place as the smell of blood might turn the second one violent.

The other domestic animal is the pig which is also killed in a cruel way. Its feet are tied and it is made to lie on the ground with the belly upside. The slaughterer then pierces the heart with a sharpened bamboo. It might happen, in one attempt the exact position might not be located, and so another position is found and pierced. The animal in great pain makes a heart rending squeal.

The pigs are reared in large number in individual houses. These are not let out but kept confined within the strongly fenced barricade.

Dogs are not numerous. One or two dogs in each family is enough. Hunting dog is considered a special favourite. The death of a hunting dog is mourned and given a special burial.

Though not of any specific breed, the dogs in Mathun and Dri Valley are very healthy and bigger in size than the average dogs seen elsewhere.

Cows are not numerous but goats are being reared from recent time due to demand for meat in the township.

To an Idu, sustained cultivation does not have much appeal and although every family do raise crops in their individual holdings, the return is not substantial to meet the annual requirement.

The reason being the abundant availability of food in the forest – leafy vegetables, roots, fruits and mushroom – an Idu does not like to take the trouble for full time engagement in his cultivation which would have kept him away from other pursuits.

They follow the usual slash and burn method of cultivation known as *jhum*. The fields are small and lie scattered not far from the village. Comparatively easy areas are selected where there is prolific growth of bamboo – the tall and slender variety peculiar to the valley. The bamboos could be cut easily and put on fire which spread quickly. But the fire in the bamboo trash raise immense heat and there is constant danger of its spreading to adjacent areas.

Paddy and maize are the common crops. In the field, along with these two crops leafy vegetables, brinjal, pumpkin, yam, soyabean are grown. In some areas buckwheat is also grown.

Ginger though popular amongst the women, does not grow in the area. They have to import this from other areas.

Before the preparation of the field, a strong fencing with round bamboos is erected. Fencing is so strong that it is impossible for Mithuns to break through it. Field boundaries are demarcated, sometimes by bamboo arch – bent and driven to the earth at each end.

People have devised an ingenious system to scare away the birds from the field. No one is required to operate the mechanism which is driven by water.

The water from a channel is drawn in to a bamboo tube or some other container. The base of the container is tied with two heavy bamboo poles which touches the bamboo strings radiating to different parts of the field where split bamboos are hung. The container is kept in a slanting position. When water pours into the container upto a certain level, the balance is lost and water pours out. The container then falls back to its original position and strikes the strings with a force which under stress pulls the split bamboos to make simultaneous clattering sound. The process is repeated every minute or so and found very effective to scare away the birds.

The fish is popular with women as they are debarred from eating flesh of four footed animal.

Fish is mostly caught by traps. Sometimes poison is also used. The leaves of particular plant—*Rukto*, is crusted and placed in the water upstream. The poison slowly paralyzes the fish which are then easily collected.

Sometimes when plenty of fish are to be caught for a festival, a shed is constructed near the river where fishermen stay as long trapping continues.

As fish is an important item of food for women, the demand for its supply is usually placed with a person who owns a fishing area. The supply is always made strictly on payment—mostly in kinds.

The millet beer is the most favourite with the Idus. For its preparation, the Millet is first fried till it takes a reddish glow. It is then taken out and put on a mat and pressed to peel of the outer coating. Water is boiled in a vessel where fried millet is put. After boiling, it is again taken out and spread over a mat when still warm—yeast is added. It takes almost two days for full fermentation.

The entire content is put inside a woven bamboo container. The walls and mouth of the container are firmly covered with leaves of a plant—*Angna*.

For use as a drink, hot water is poured after removing the leaves and water oozes out and is collected in a container.

The brew called 'U' has three different types—prepared from millet and maize. The brew 'U' *Iyamusha*, is strong enough and intoxicating.

A family consists of man, his wife or wives, children.

Man remains busy all the time with hunting, fishing, trade or disputes affecting him or the people. His most important pre-occupation is to get as many mithuns as possible to procure a wife and as well to observe the '*Rhe*' festival.

A man seldom under takes a journey without a purpose. wherever he goes out, an aim must be there—no one travels simply for fun.



Marriage system of the Idus is in three ways—selection by parents, choice by parties themselves or by elopement. In each case, the decision must be referred to the elders who would judge whether the relation would be outside the prohibitory zone. The cross cousin marriage is strictly taboo and restriction extends upto fifteen generation. This discipline has been enforced to maintain the purity of the race. Any one would run a risk of severe punishment for violation and Idus are very conservative in this respect, and seldom allow cross cousin marriage without a very heavy fine. Dispute aroused so much bitterness that murder and reprisals were common till recent times.

After the settlement of marriage, the bride price which is in shape of number of Mithuns, is paid corresponding to the status of the girl's parents. In case of breach of agreement—when the bride might refuse to go to the bridegroom, heavy fine might be demanded which may be double or treble of the bride price initially paid by him.

There is no age restriction for marriage, nor a fixed time which a girl has to go to her husband's house, even after all negotiations are finalized. If the girl is of minor age, she naturally prefers to stay for further period at her parent's house. But her husband might visit her occasionally. When he comes to his in-laws house, he might bring dried fish, rats etc. He may even render help in cultivation. The time between betrothal and going to husband's house may vary from a few months to few years.

There are always considerable expenses involved in arranging a marriage. The income of an average person is not very high. In many cases, he borrows from others but the burden of payment remains even after the marriage. He is constantly haunted with the thought of indebtedness which naturally depressed his mind.

If a man is unable to pay or dies under debts, the responsibilities to pay remains. It is absolutely incumbent upon a man's heirs or his brothers or the clansman to pay off the debt. For this reason there are numerous feuds in Idu Society and relations are embittered.

Inability to arrange bride price is another factor responsible for the large number of youngman who remain unmarried.

If the husband dies before the girl could go to him, even then there is no freedom of choice for her. She will have to go either to the husband's brother or to his clan relation. If she refuses to go or parents refuse to send her, double the amount of bride price must be returned. On the other hand if she dies without bearing a child, her parents must return the mithuns, but if she dies after bearing the child, then nothing is demanded.

In case of a girl, whether before betrothed or not, if she conceives in illegitimate love, then she is tortured to give the name of the person responsible for her pregnancy. The man responsible is searched after the girl gives out the name and he would be required to pay heavy fine.

If the girl does not confess, the child might be banished without the knowledge of any one. But if she confesses, then the child is kept with the parents. In that case the child assumes the title of the mother's clan. If she re-marries, then the child also goes along with her.

Adultery is a heinous crime in the Idu Society and the girl has to under go extreme humiliation. Premarital relation is total taboo though girls are allowed free movement and never put under restriction. But when a girl remains unmarried, she might run a risk of capture and betrothal. This may happen when she is on a visit to a far away village where an interested party may intercept her and closely question to ascertain whether she is already married or any settlement made as well also about her clans. If the answers are favourable to the party, then she may be forcibly dragged inspite of her vehement protest. That is why, an Idu girl seldom ventures alone to far away places without a dependable escort.

Immediately after the abduction, intermediaries will be sent for negotiation with her parents. Even though parents might be reluctant, but persuasion will continue by a bigger assembly of elders till they agree to the marriage but settle at a higher amount of bride price.

Now-a-days, however, many girls have become assertive and influencing their parents on marriage negotiations. No amount of cajoling by the go between succeeds if the parents are influenced by emotion and sentiments of their daughter.

The position of women in Idu society is rather ambiguous, though she apparently has full control on domestic affairs. She can have separate cultivation, separate livestock, clothes and money derived from the trade. But the responsibility towards her husband cannot be shelved. She will have to feed him, prepare the brew, entertain guests, make cloth for him, look after her children, sometimes from her own income. Husband seldom troubles himself with household responsibilities except when he wishes to help. All heavy works, however, are done by him—construction of house, felling of trees, clearing debris for preparation of Jhum.

Women have to toil very hard. She has no respite. From early morning till late evening, she remains fully busy with varieties of works—from collection of food items to preparation of food and weaving of cloth. To an Idu, a wife is an asset as most domestic works and agricultural operations depend on her. Another reason also is the necessity of off-springs, especially son, for the continuity of the family and the clan. The number of wives enhances the status of man. If he can afford, soon another wife is brought and the number may even go up to three or four. All the wives are however treated by him equally and they are provided with separate rooms with separate granary and cultivation. Distribution of works is perfect and there is less chance of friction, though at times, temper may build up resulting in quarrel between the women. In some cases the poor husband becomes the target and is badly mauled by an irate wife who might have been offended by remark of her performance, or, it may so happen that domestic peace is seriously disturbed when the husband, in frayed temper, beats her up.

But such cases are considered normal and no one likes to interfere in spite of terrific howling. But if she is badly injured or dies, then compensation may be demanded by the parents if the guilt lies with the husband.

It is the duty of the husband to attend to her illness with elaborate arrangements for propitiation to spirits. In this, the husband cannot shelve his responsibilities.

An unmarried daughter stays with her parent and has a right to shelter. If she likes, she may have her separate cultivation, but cannot sell the land.

She can sell pigs or fowls reared by her and may even carry on trade in coptis tita and earn money for herself.

Her parents and brothers always show affection to her as girls are valuable assets in the family, who render much help in domestic works.

While visiting a house, if any one happens to know that a woman in the house is in her period, then he will go around the fire place by the right side in the front room before entering the next room.

Son inherit the father's property, however, if the man dies leaving behind no son, then his brother if any will inherit, or else, any clans man who has rendered much help during the burial. Daughters donot have any claim on the property of their father.

An Idu is constantly haunted by the spirits— '*Khinu*' who live in the forest, hills, shadowy recesses, rivers, gorges as well in house and the village. They are much feared as no one knows when one may fall into their trap. The spirits are the real masters of their fate. Any calamity befalling them is attributed to the spirits. The wrath of spirits can be removed only by the *Igu* — the priest, who knows exactly how to deal with them. Several restrictions must be followed — sometimes elaborate rituals must be observed.

Most spirits are malevolent. To an Idu, every cause is attributed to spirits — thunder, lighting, violent death, drowning, stumbling over the rock or slipping from the path, illness or damage to crops or earth tremors. It is the spirits, if pleased, guide the hunter to the den of the animals, keep him to get musk from the high mountains and allow him to return safely to his house.

But for the spirits — an Idu would have been happy and fearless. His life would be full of gaiety and pleasure. But the spirits never give him a moment's respite. They are constantly after him.

An Idu seldom ventures outdoor in the evenings as spirits' wandering starts exactly at the time when darkness falls.

Shaman or the *Igu* is an important person who occupies an exalted position in the society. He is not only a priest but also a Medicineman and tries to save the people from the clutches of wandering spirits.

Not every one can be an *Igu*, even if he tries to be one. He must show some indication of being possessed by the spirits and definite sign of communication and understanding with supernatural elements which dominate the world of the Idus. He should also be well conversant with legends and history of the tribe from the beginning of creation and should have a detail knowledge of various ceremonial rites, otherwise, his standing as an *Igu* will be held in ridicule.

The life of an *Igu* is not easy. He has little rest as his help is sought by the needy every now and then. It is his duty to attend every call except in very exceptional circumstances when he cannot go.

The *Igus* have the ceremonial attires which are worn and give him an awe-inspiring appearance, to make him competent to confront the spirit.

An *Igu* carries a small drum. A big drum and trumpet are carried by his two companions who do not wear special gears.

The priest and his companions stand in line with the priest in the centre. One of the companions beat the drum which hangs down from the neck. The bamboo stick for beating the drum is attached to the drum with a string. The trumpet is played by the other companion. The priest continues his ritual prayer song while simultaneously instruments are played. The knees are flexed up and down with the rhythmic movement and heels are raised and stamped on the ground. The companions repeat the line sung by the priest. The movement of the party with flexed knees is made up and down the floor accompanied by beating of drums and singing of song. The position may be changed and movement may be either backward or forward.

Though a person of flesh and blood, an *Igu* is always feared. When his house is visited, the people make no noise as it is commonly believed that the *Igu* might be having a dialogue with spirits who would be greatly disturbed. For similar reasons, early morning visits are also avoided as far as possible.

The Idus, like other tribes, have also belief in magic. The *Igus* are known to have power to cast spells on others and demonstrate

such feats as lifting off from the ground like a bird, flying across the rivers or the hills and safely return back to his house!

An Idu takes oath in the name of *Ini*—the sun, so that sun's rays may fall on the body and truth prevail. But if sworn falsely, the sun's rays will pierce the heart and break it into two.

Also at the time of oath—the earth is touched and words *Hikhi Echaahuku* is uttered—that is mother earth should uphold the truth. If sworn falsely, the mother earth will be annoyed and kill the person.

Idus bury their dead. It is obligatory for all the relations to come for the last glimpse before the body is laid to rest.

The place of burial is selected in consultation with the elders. The grave is approximately 5 ft deep and large enough to accommodate the body. The sides are covered with round bamboos and woven bamboo mat is placed in all sides.

The body wrapped in new clothes is laid on a cot—and furnished with all the necessities which he had in previous life. Even cooked and uncooked food also are provided. A live dog and a fowl in two cages are lowered into the grave to give company to the dead.

The head points towards the downward course of the river.

People give at least one piece of new article which has been kept earlier as an offering to the dead. Even currency notes are thrown so that the dead should have material possession in the Nether world.

Idus by nature are individualistic. Each man likes to act in his own way. It is the emotion which shapes their daily life. On a sudden spurt of desire, he may kill his Mithun to entertain others or go for hunting carrying his gun on his shoulder. His mood may at once change to seek for a revenge on an apparent insult. It is precisely for this reason, an Idu will always try to avoid arguments—neither will he involve himself in a dispute. He remains indifferent even though something serious might have happened. Constant fear of the would be assassin haunts him though there may not be any apparent cause of apprehension. According to their own law of vendetta killing is justified as an act of revenge. Now-a-days murders have become rare due to strict vigilance by the Government, but in place of murder the animals are killed.

The Idus have almost proverbial memory. Any incident that happened in the distant past is clearly remembered. So also expeditious relay of news from one village to the other. Whenever any visitor comes to the village anxious queries will be made about happenings in the area from where he has come. The same news is then relayed to other villages by travellers. As inter village traffic aways continues, the news too travels very fast.

The council of elder – '*Abala*', sometimes, helps in settlement of a dispute. It is the intermediaries, who are the close relatives of the parties who arrange the compromise with the help of *Abala*. There are customary Laws for various offences and *Abala* assembles to hear all such complaints. After lengthy discussions, the guilty is persuaded to pay the fine or compensation which vary according to the nature of the crime.

The most important ceremony in the community is '*Rhe*'. This ceremony, however, is not a regular one and is performed by an individual at any time during his life for the welfare and prosperity of his clan.

The time for the ceremony varies according to the individual capacity to make elaborate arrangements. Generally, this is held when people are free from other works.

The festival lasts for four days. The person who performs the *Rhe* festival must inform all his clansmen and other relations and offer them meat, drink, food as well as money. Sacrifice of Mithuns again depend on individual capacity, but greater the number of Mithuns slaughtered, the greater will be his fame. Thus it becomes a desire with an individual to earn name by sacrificing more Mithuns. For a rich man this may not be oppressive but for a person who has little resource, the burden is very heavy. He borrows from others just to satisfy his ego and runs into heavy debt which of course must be repaid whenever wanted by the person from whom he has borrowed. It is the lender who demands his dues when he himself observes the festival. However, no interest is charged.

Sacrifice of Mithun during the festivals may reach staggering figures. It may even go upto 150 in number!

After the sacrifice of Mithuns, the meat is distributed to all those who attend the festival.

Besides the Mithuns, number of pigs are also slaughtered. Food and beer, of course, are offered to each person. Women are given fish, dried rats, squirrels and birds.

There is always a great rush of people during the festival. It is obligatory for the clans men and relatives to attend. They may render help if so desired. Everyone must be paid according to his status, and his relation with the performer. It is to be ensured that no one is dissatisfied. Each payment is duly recorded by means of knots in a rope prominently displayed, and a person is especially detailed to make payment and maintain the account. So that in later days, if any dispute arises on payment, this can be verified.

On the first day, the *Igu* invokes the god to bless the performer. On the second day, the Mithuns are sacrificed and blood is offered to ancestors. The *Igu* propitiates the spirits for wealth and prosperity of the family. Ritual dance starts in the evening.

On the third day after he has propitiated the spirit, the *Igu* continues his dance and narrates in vivid detail the myth of creation which is listened to by all in rapt attention.

On the fourth day of the ceremony, a cock which has been reared for the purpose, is sacrificed by the performer—the blood is sprinkled on a bamboo Pole out side the house. The head of the cock is stuck on the pole facing the rising sun. A cup full of a special brew 'U' angi is kept on the Pole. The *Igu* then prays to the benevolent God to bestow his kindness on the performer and his family by giving more wealth, and power to beget more children to enrich the clan.

There is much fun and joy during the festival. On the concluding day, boys dress up as girls and demonstrate the love act in presence of all, while *Igu* remains busy with his priestly duties.

The festival of *Rhe* binds all Idus with strong sense of brotherhood. It is the only occasion when clansmen gather and renew their brotherly ties. In spite of gay abandon, the participants never quarrel and seldom lose temper which would have been unusual for an Idu in other occasions.



## The Challenging Tasks

After the initial euphoria ended, I gradually came to realize the reality of the situation which appeared far more depressing.

With not much of works and nowhere to go what else could offer diversion except in booze and gambling?

There were secret dens where junior level officials gathered in the evenings to booze themselves with millet beer and derive pleasure in gambling.

It was a mid night—I was somewhat kept awake. Suddenly, I heard two persons passing by the road having interesting dialogue. One said, “What a worry; mind so depressed, no letter from home.”

The other fellow replied—“Dash it bloody fool; What the letter could bring news of home except demand for money or sickness. So be happy with booze and gambling.”

Next day, I summoned the O.C. Police. At that time, the policing duty was done by a Central Reserve Force under an obliging Sikh Officer, Prahlad Singh.

Prahlad Singh was interesting. He rose from the rank and felt proud of his achievement. He would not budge an inch when an order was issued.

Not much conversant in English, once he amazed everyone while offering the condolence to the bereaved staff with congratulation!

Prahlad Singh immediately got into the job. In single night operation he rounded up 18 persons and dutifully produced them in my court on the next day.

At that time, we were searching for a suitable land for a football ground of our own.

There was no play ground nor any recreation facilities. Some years back the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mon Bahadur Rai, did try to construct a football field on a small table land away from the township. His efforts did not succeed as huge cuttings involved for levelling the ground.

Assam Rifles unit had a small parade ground which they converted into a mini football field for them, staff and school students. All other functions were held in helipad.

Football was a game which aroused considerable excitement. We had to remain alert whenever a match was between Assam Rifles and others. Once it developed into a fist fight. The ground was too small – just double the size of a volley ball court, where players had no room to maneuver. There were so much jostling, kicking, pushing that tempers naturally ran very high.

Fortunately, the O.C. of the unit was a reasonable person who co-operated with me and managed to separate the warring groups. Later, I had to issue an executive order to stop participation of students and staff in Assam Rifles field.

Once, during my racee with Jumke Bagra—the Circle Officer, I saw a bowl shaped land just near my house, covered with thick growth of ferns and reeds. No one ventured inside the thickets in the deep depression, but it struck to me a possible area where we might be able to construct a big field.

The gamblers provided me with a God-sent opportunity. They were dead scared of imminent punishment and landing in Jail and pleaded for mercy. I had the humour to tell them – since I am no fool to send them to jail which would bring me no benefit, I have better way to utilize their services!

All of them were marched off to the area where we had projected a football field. For some days, they worked and cut the trace lines to enable us to have a detail survey. It appeared that, with some efforts, we might be able to fill up the depression to retrieve sufficient areas for a field.

Soon, the decision was taken. It was a total mobilization of all available man power—police, Assam Rifles, students, staff; none were left behind.

No one knew exactly how much works would involve as the terrain was so deceptive. At some places, the depression was upto 10 ft. But mercifully, the earth was soft with very little rocks.

There was no dozer, nor even a wheel burrow. Every thing had to be done manually with whatever tools available.

To dump the cut earth – improvised stretchers were made with gunny bags. Even logs, sharpened at the end were used as crowbar.

Enthusiasm was spontaneous as we raced against time – it must be completed by 15th August – the Independence Day.

There was no fund from the Government, nor did we ask for it. We divided amongst ourselves to provide snacks to the workers. The snack consisted of soaked gram – the only delicacy available at Anini.

It was a massive task as we inched forward to fill up the depression as wide as 30 ft with 5 ft of average depth. Beyond this, the land rose gradually to a height of 5 ft which also required cut and levelling.

Initially, not all was silver lining. There were sceptics who thought the work as sheer waste. One of such was my friend, G.N. Gogoi, the Sub Divisional Medical Officer who asked me to divert my attention to other fruitful works!

It was a scene soon after. He turned into most enthusiastic worker. Getting up much early before the day-break, he used to come running to my house, knocking at the door frantically and would drag me to work. Often we both laboured alone for sometime to pile the earth and to make it easy for others to cart away.

In exactly three months, we completed the magnificent task – a beautiful football ground of 10,000 sq. ft area retrieved from a huge depression stood up in the centre of the town. Its rim was circled by a road and slopes planted with avenue trees. Except one end, the other three sides were raised ground which provided a natural gallery.

In all, the cost estimated at that time was Rs. 40,000/- but all achieved by our own labour.

It was a proud occasion for all of us, when on Independence Day, the flag was unfurled in the ground. Expectedly, there was a huge gathering as people from distant villages came to see the unique achievement.

After we made this spectacular success, our efforts now directed to organise a recreation club.

Fortunately for us, a dilapidated building was available which was though survey reported, but not yet dismantled. With some improvisation, it provided accommodation for Indoor games.

Our carpentry staff neatly made a table tennis board. Soon, we organized a running trophy donated by Dr. Gogoi and Lonto Roy.

I had always taken a fascination for the trees. In the town area there were very few trees. Recurring fire destroyed any attempt to the growth. Only a few stragglers managed to survive.

Over the football field there was a small table land commanding as nice view of Dri river. Below the land was an abrupt drop to several hundred ft down to the river.

The land was covered by shrubberies, the plants rising to the height of 4 to 5 ft. Its flowers were yellow, and during season looked quite beautiful.

Since the area was covered by thick grass, no one took notice of it.

Once, during an idle moment, I was just looking beyond when suddenly I perceived a beauty not found before. It was hardly a few hundred paces from my house to the elevated ground from where I could see a valley shaded with poplar, fir and slender bamboos—the river Dri flowing with sparkling water, Idu long houses half hidden in the green foliage, milky white water falls, cascading down the sheer cliff of the mountain walls.

It gave me the instant idea. I rounded up another group of wayward revellers and cut trace lines for a survey.

Roy — The Forest Beat officer, soon got into the job. With proper lay out, we constructed a winding path, laid few benches and an open house as a viewpoint.

As exotic plants were not available, the poplars, which grow rapidly, were planted along with thin stemmed bamboos.

We christened it as 'Dri view park' —It attracted so much of attention that it became a routine for an evening walk.

## The Festering Problem

Anini being a district headquarters, the officials were too many. Added to this were dependents. There were Assam Rifles with families, a company of Central Police Force, Public Works Department labourers. Besides, there were local people who appeared always in distress. In absence of road communication, the entire supply requirements including the developmental stores were brought by the air transport. The cost was staggering. A kilogram of Rice which was Rs. 2/- in outside market became Rs. 14/- the huge gap was reduced by heavy subsidy by the Government and consumers paid the same price of Rs. 2/-.

The essential items like rice, wheat, lentil, oil, vegetable fat, sugar, tea, salt, were strictly rationed and issued to the staff from Central Purchase Organization store. The other items of daily necessities were kept in the co-operative store and sold in concessional rates.

All the supplies were ferried from the Air Transport base at Mohonbari in Upper Assam by dakota sorties or helicopters. Often, the sorties flew three or four times in succession and dropped the items. The solid stores were free dropped while the fragile stores were parachuted. The impact of the free drops were often so severe that craters were formed in dropping zone. Sometimes, the erratic dropping took the load far away or a para got struck on tree top. There were quite a few instances when para did not open at all, and stores were reduced to mash.

The dropping zone was situated near the helipad in sloping land. The drone of the aircraft was heard before approach to Anini. It is the store keeper who must be alert. As soon as the dropping

was over, ran to dz to locate the load manifest struck in one of the load and got the stores verified by a board of officials.

But his most difficult task was the transportation to the godown lying half a km away. If the sorties came in the afternoon, the ordeal was doubly compounded. No matter how long it took, the stores must be retrieved and safely stacked.

The Agency labour corpse were the backbone of the transport service in the frontier. Most of the men were hardy people from Nepal. With a minimum amount of subsistence, the men carried their task diligently, yet there was no service security as available in regular government job. Only concession given were the periodical hike of few rupees, hardly commensurate with the hard labour performed. Saga of their sacrifice has never been told but Administration would have faced the immense problem of logistics but for their sincere service.

Akru Mihi, our Political Jamadar, had a Mare. A pair was brought by fleeing Tibetans in late fifties. While one died, the other survived some how and now was rendering the invaluable service in transporting the stores from DZ. Though getting old, but her owner least bothered about its feed and care. So the day would soon come when it would collapse and store keeper felt genuinely worried.

The demand for ALCs in other services was a headach for the Circle Officer, who looked after the transport. There were end less bickerings, anger, jealousy and frustration on his alleged indifferent attitude, but with a limited strength of 30 odd personnel it was impossible to satisfy everyone. His most urgent job was to provide men to retrieve the stores which could not be left aside.

Helicopter sorties, unlike the dakotas, bring the stores almost to the door-step. But unloading and loading must be quick as pilots become impatient. Added to this confusion was the clamour of the outgoing passengers whose names were to be manifested, loads verified and dispatched. It might depend on the mood of the pilot who may straightway reject any extra load or passenger. Officers and staff were, therefore, at their wits end to befriend the pilots.

In absence of any other means of service, the demand on air travel was understandable. It was 14 days foot march to reach the

nearest road head and the journey had never been easy. No one, therefore, took the trouble to go by land route.

Every Government official including his family members were allowed free air transport once in a year; on duty there was no limit. Baggage allowance was restricted to 20 kg for each person. While the outgoing staff could afford to stay back, the ordeals of the incoming persons could be easily imagined as helicopter sorties were not regular, nor there were enough space. They undergo the extreme agony in heat and dust in air base. More often than not weather pack up and a sortie is abruptly called off or it may return abortive from the half way.

There were thorough security check-up – any contraband item or excess baggage straightway rejected. Wily staff sometimes smuggle the liquor bottles hidon inside the bedroll. If luck did not favour, the Security Officer – a flight Sergeant, spots it out. It happened once that an official – a confirmed addict – gulped the entire bottle rather than to part with it!

Inspite of check, the staff managed to bring some extra baggage cleverly, marking as government store! This was no doubt objectionable, but what else could they do in scarcity ridden Anini?

Sometime later, the air base was shifted to Chabua – some 25 Kms away from Mohonbari. There was no catering service, nor a waiting shed. Since the flight might take any time, the Depot Officer quietly packed all the passengers at the streak of dawn and then agonizing wait started for hours. If any one was lucky, a sortie might immediately take off or else wait on scanning the blue sky and without a drop of water. At the end the rickety truck of the depot would return back with thoroughly frustrated passengers.

The longer the wait in the base, the more was the mounting expenditure. One might sell the valuables when purse go empty. With limited seats with the queue of waiting passengers, the depot officer had to fix the priority. The more delay there was in sortie despatch, the more was the extended line. To clear the backlog alone might take several days.

The situation at Anini was also, nonetheless, happy. We had to fix the priority – divided in different categories. Temper rise

high—some one loses the composure, blames the officers for the total mess. The officer understandably gets irritated and takes a vengeful attitude till some one tactfully mediates to cool the feeling.

The exercise in load manifest is also tedious. To satisfy every one was just not possible. Ironically, sometime it happened that several sortie flew in a week—all the back log cleared and there were neither the load nor the passengers waiting.

The approach to Anini only widens from a distance of 25 kms. There are high hills which are hazardous for the pilots. Thick clouds hover around which reduces the visibility.

Our barometer was the hill over Matuli—hardly 10 Kms from Anini. Someone named it a “Gate way of India”! The cloud formation there definitely indicated a bad weather, hence one can presume no sortie.

14 Kms away on North East of Anini, in the Valley of Dri, was a 1600 ft long landing strip at Alinye. A fair weather jeep road ran from the town to the bank of the river from where across a suspension bridge, a two kms long foot track winded up the small hill to reach the air field. Perforated steel plates were laid end to end to cushion the impact of the air craft.

The air strip was constructed by Army Engineers during 1963. Major Fernandez, who was with me at Yingkiong in East siang district, completed the task in record time. He was all in a hurry to go home for Christmas, but fate ordained him otherwise. The helicopter had a crash in snow bound Hunli ridge mid—way to Anini, which claimed his life. A cement plaque at the entrance of the air strip, bears the memory of the major and his companions:

Dedicated to the officers and JCos of 380 FD Coy—who were killed as a result of the helicopter crash on 4 Nov. 1963 during the construction of this air field.

IC 5888 — Maj ED Fernandez

IC 12841 — LT S.B. Jirge

JC 14722 — Jem. R. Garg

I remembered major Fernandez — a Jolly good man while he was at Yingkiong. Soon after the war of 1962, he came with his



Engineering company and completed the task of strengthening the long air field in record time. His friendly manners struck a distinct cordial relationship with us and we provided him full support by mobilizing the people.

Major was a devoted christain. He often quoted from the Bible, 'From dust one comes, to the dust one returns!'

Seeing this memorial plaque, I had to sadly agree how true was the prophecy.

When Anini was just established—there was a search for a landing strip. Capt. K Banerjee, the Additional Political Officer thought of an air field near the present township which would have provided at least 3,000 ft long runway. But the idea was dropped due to enormous cost involved in the project with only one way approach. Subsequently, a further survey found a suitable area with open approach in either side just across the Dri river though quite far from the town. As the land was almost flat, the cost of construction was estimated as minimum.

Soon the decision was taken; the helicopters ferried the Engineering task force with their equipments.

The fair weather jeep road, linking the town with the landing ground at Alinye was constructed in early seventies. It came upto the river bank only. The span of the river was 300 ft and required strong foundation for an iron bridge. There were several inspection and surveys, but every time the decision was delayed which caused us lot of irritation.

Near the air strip was a four room Inspection bungalow, nicely laid in an idyllic surroundings. the building — a semi-permanent structure with iron sheet roofing was a delightful week-end retreat.

The air strip was frequently used by carabou air-craft till mid seventies. The propellor-driven Plane had bigger capacity and could land in a short strip of less then 400 ft. But safety margin invariably required longer space. There was clear approach to the field from both ends and air craft could maneuver on either way.

Unlike the dakota, the carabou door is opened at the rear and all the loads supported on rail are ejected speedily. With smooth

take off and landing, the journey was comfortable with less vibration and sound. The flight time took only 45 minutes from the air base.

Since it has more carrying capacity, each sortie brought substantial stores and Anini had that time a golden era! The Extra Assistant Commissioner, a south Indian fellow earned a good name as people thought it was he who did the miracle!

To add to his luck, at that time, a huge labour force was also available on road construction works and lifting the stores to Anini posed no problems.

The situation suddenly became worse soon after his departure as carabou had a crash and the entire operation was called off. There was so much of scarcity which never did minimize since then.

The dakota required a longer runway. It could not land at short air strip in Alinye. For every 1000 ft elevation, an additional runway of 75 ft was required and as Alinye was at 4500 ft and so total length of 3500 ft was required for safe landing.

The versatile dakota – a product of second world war, rendered immense service in difficult terrain. After the war, the role was transformed as transport aircraft in which it functioned most efficiently. But because of ageing the air craft being gradually phased out, a day would soon come and it might go away for ever. But to us dakota will remain in cherished memory.

To cope up with ever increasing supply problem – an otter squadron started operation from the air base. There were quite a few short landing strips in the frontier where otter or carabou could land.

The otter is a single engine propellor driven plane with 1000 kgs carrying capacity.

The plane, a second world war product, had slow speed and manouvre.

It was an experience to fly by otter, tedious slow journey. Some one mentioned that if its engine stops, it could glide down safely!

The truth I did not find out, but once it so happened that we had a real emergency when the engine gave trouble in the mid air.

But the pilot, a squadron leader, had the fortitude—brought the plane down at Pasighat. Later, we were flown out by another relief air craft.

An otter carries eight passengers, but in one occasion thirteen of us were flown out though it might have been a risk. There were anxious moments when the air craft simply could not develop enough thrust and the pilot looked back to see if there was over weight. But luckily, in full throttle, the plane raced forward and soon was air-borne.

On persistent demand from people, government sanctioned a few otter sorties which brought goods or building materials. The cost for a sortie was though quite high, yet many willingly paid.

In the air landing station, no one really worried of risk in travel. Every one was crazy enough some how to find a seat and scribble hurriedly his signature on the indemnity bond which free the government or the air force officers from any liability in the event of injury or death!

The lifting of loads from far away landing ground to Anini strained our nerves.

In each sortie 1000 kgs of stores were brought and a porter could hardly carry—18 Kgs. The situation become desperate when dropping sorties to Anini became irregular. While there were surplus of stores, only 14 Kms away—the sheer transport problem created a near starvation condition. Those who could afford went to Alinye to bring some precious commodities. It took five hours in both ways journey.

A Sub Post Office at Anini fuctioned though, but mails were always irregular. There would be shortage of postage stamps or the receipt books. More often than not, a breakdown occurs in wireless set and telegram travels in mail bag!

Some times, an entire sortie comes, with mail bags. A few shop keepers devised the ingenious way to bring the commodities in parcel packets. Interestingly, this was cheaper compared to the expenditure incurred in bringing a load from foot hill station, covering 14 days of strenuous march.

As all the mail bags were identical, no one knew exactly in which bag the precious letters had come. So we had to lift the huge pile of mail bags to Anini only to discover actually few letters. Then our suspicion developed though could not be proved of connivance between the postal staff and shop-keepers to despatch the parcel bags in every sortie.

To send letter, there were less of problems. These were handed over to the pilot or to an out going passenger who posted these in the air base.

Except in cloudy weather, when approach was thoroughly blocked, the otter sortie flew in once or twice in a day. The operation was only in the forenoon as turbulent air might be dangerous to the light air craft.

Schedule of flight was hardly known but expectation used to run high when there was clear weather. Staff anxious to go, would not take a chance, run madly over 14 Kms to the air field. But on arrival his expectation might be belied—no sortie had come. Then the weather ominously start packing—frustrating all hope of a flight. The Inspection Bungalow filled up with more officials—some were with families making an agonizing wait.

When the hope of a sortie was gone, all might relax, unfolding the bedroll; but suddenly a feeble sound is heard—a low flying otter quietly landed in the air field. The scramble now becomes desperate, they run a marathon race to reach the aircraft any how.

There was a comic situation when losing all hope of a sortie, official had gone half the way, when he saw to his dismay an otter quietly flew in!

Sometimes, there were simultaneous operations of MI4 helicopter and otter. It was easy to avail the flight at Anini but schedules were hardly known. While one waited with expectation at Anini an otter would come instead at Alinye. Hoping for another sortie, they would run to the air field only to find helicopter had landed at Anini!

We had a few unlucky staff who never could get a sortie in time. It happened always and so when we saw their move was sure enough, sortie would never come.

Visitors to Anini were few but when they did come were in all hurry to go back as sorties were uncertain. Most of them were a peculiar lot—never knew an adventurous life, though Anini offered all that it could.

A tele-communication officer had to come for a short visit to Anini to inspect his department. He came in an otter sortie with expectation to go back after a night's halt.

But luck did not favour him. He almost went mad—yelling for his dear wife left at home!

His condition was desperate. When he moved to Anini from the landing ground, an otter landed. But as soon as he went back, then a helicopter came to Anini! After five days, we managed some how to pack him off in a helicopter sortie.

The MI4 helicopters operated for some time. It had less carrying capacity and could accommodate only four passengers. The air craft was surely ageing and being phased out. But till then it rendered valuable service in VIP duties, evacuation of patients or transporting ration stores.

There were peculiar sensations in MI4 helicopter flight perhaps due to air drag.

Once on a flight, I was going with my wife and daughter when we had an ominous trepidation as suddenly it began to lose height. The wing commander later told that it was in air pocket so common in the frontier, but helicopter had advantage—it could manoeuvre easily in difficult weather condition.

After a year, the MI4 squadron finally went out leaving only one or two for communication sortie. In its place came the MI8 — the helicopter with bigger ceiling capacity. Being a heavier air craft, it required more stable ground but at Anini we had no problem as helipad was strengthened by perforated steel plates.

MI8 squadron came only for time bound operations and left for its base soon after the completion of the assigned task. Huge stores — both ration and constructional materials were airlifted within a few days. Sometimes there were whole day operation — starting from early morning till late afternoon. The gnawing sound of the air craft was heard from distance, but before we got time it had already landed in the helipad.

A MI8 helicopter could easily lift 17 passengers or 3000 Kgs of stores. Even a jeep was air lifted without difficulty.

When MI8 had started operation, we were in a happy mood. But soon followed the gloom as commitment came to an end. After several days or months the squadron might come back.

Most of the Air Force Officers were young and energetic. But being human they too had whims. Continuous strain in flying over the rough terrain and weather had telling effect on the nerves. We did realise their mood and tried our best to keep them happy.

Several times they helped us. With some persuasion one or two extra passengers or loads were accommodated.

When pilots were in happy mood, we were flown out in an early morning sortie and returned back by the last sortie in the afternoon.

Once I went out in a morning sortie to Dibrugarh to witness a grand movie – War and Peace. After the show was over, had lunch and returned by the last sortie in late afternoon – without untying the lace of the shoes or change of cloth! By land route it would have taken 28 days foot march up and down the hills. It was really a fun.

At another time, I had to go to Delhi. In a morning sortie I went out, caught a boeing flight to Calcutta and the same evening reached Delhi by another connecting flight. I was lucky in my return journey too. The boeing landed when the last sortie was ready for Anini.

MI8 helicopter could fly in all weather though risk might be there. In spattering rain or dark threatening clouds, the sudden gnawing sound of the air craft was heard – the visibility was so less, yet the pilot maneuvered the air craft for a perfect landing.

The small helicopter – the French manufactured Alloehoute is only pressed for emergency duty. With seating accommodation of two passengers, the craft moved very fast and could land in a small field. Once it hardly took 30 minutes for me to reach the airbase at Mohanbari from Anini. The journey in an 'Alloehoute' was very exciting as its transparent window offered beautiful panoramic view of the landscape below.

Sometime later, government decided to extend the air – field at Alinye by another 1000 ft to accommodate bigger air craft.

The huge labour force were brought from far away Orissa and Bihar who travelled all the way from the foot hills.

Their condition was pathetic. In tattered clothes, worn out look, herded by unscrupulous contractors, they came all the way, lured by a higher wage which they would have never got in their home. Coupled with Ignorance, illiteracy, superstitions, the country side of those states suffer from abject poverty – what a tragedy – inspite of successive plans – the condition remained as it was. If this was not slavery, then what it could be!

Contractors promised them a kilogram of rice, a few grams of lintel, soaked gram and potato.

Special sortie dropped the ration at Alinye air field. The landing operations were called off for ground works.

Inspite of poor physique, the men were expert earth diggers and did the job with speed. Within six months, they completed more than six hundred feet of extension, filling up the depressions as deep as 15 to 20 ft. Since the area is vast – a long air field upto 6000 ft might be eventually possible but then bigger air craft would not land as soil is too soft. When the 200 Km road from foot hills to Anini once completed, then the air field would remain for emergency use only.

Apart from crowding the area, the labourers brought enough headache for us. They came from the most backward region of the country where knowledge of health and sanitation just did not exist. They made every place an open toilet, defecating at will, viciating otherwise clean air with foul smell.

Some consider people here are backward, but they should hang their head in shame when their own people, projected as civilized, exhibit most obnoxious manner and custom. It is no wonder that writer like Ronald Shegal had to portray a vivid picture in his book; "The area of Darkness".

There were instant resentment in people. We immediately took punitive measures around the labour camps. Orders were issued to contractors for compulsory use of pit latrines. Fines were imposed and to enforce the orders strictly, we had even mounted guards.

Every day, a few labourers fell sick – they actually suffered from acute malnutrition. There were few deaths too. One tragic incident was reported only after the body was found near the river bed; the fellow died apparently in great agony. Mutilated the grass

as he struggled in the bush. The dead body after post Mortem was buried with our own labour corps.

Being dependent on only air supply, there was always a scarcity condition. Some of the officials were energetic – managed to smuggle in few things in incoming air craft. These were quietly carted away for distribution amongst their colleagues only during night – lest other should know and fell like vultures!

We, being in the privileged group of officers, never did actually suffer as our friends in the air base rendered help.

It was also interesting that no one really bothered about the cost. Every commodity evaporated like soap bubbles in no time!

Jokes were heard that even stone chips duly coloured and sent as food stuff would not go waste!

During few months in summer, however, any one with some initiative could grow vegetables. The climate being favourable with a fertile soil, there was prolific growth of crops. Tomato, beans, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce carrot, squash, raddish grew abundantly.

I too took initiative, reclaimed a land in backyard, built some terraces. Every morning both my wife and I spared some time to work in the garden. We brought some seeds from Shillong which germinated well. Soon, our garden had enough of vegetables – beans, lettuce, potato and cole crops, squash and it was easy for us to distribute to others.

We had so much of squash that an idea struck to preserve this for winter.

A 2 ft deep trench was dug where dry saw dust mixed with sand spread up to 3 inch thickness. Layer of saw dust put in all the four walls and covered with round bamboos. A platform with round bamboos was laid on the bottom of the pit keeping an inch distance for moisture absorption. A layer of gunny bags was then spread in all sides.

The squash was stacked one above the other and saw dust was sprinkled. The pit was covered with bamboo sticks and gunny bag packing.

For three months in winter we could preserve the squash but after that deterioration started with heavy snow fall.



There are plenty of edible mushroom – pale white and dark grey in colour found on decayed wood in the forest. Idus have names for all varieties of mushroom – *Akupi*, *Akolo*, *Akueshambro*, *Akumeho*, *Akupu*, *Akrolor*, *Akuem Braha*, Among these *Akupi* and *Akolo* – Pale grey colour almost resemble cultivated variety – *Dyster Mushroom* are much sought after.

There is a poisonous variety – *Akuthi* which one must avoid.

While death from mushroom poisoning was never heard amongst the Idus, but it happened in Anini in a Nepali labour family. They were accustomed to mushroom food but on the fateful day, Perhaps due to carelessness, a poisoned variety got into the diet. The entire family of four just collapsed within 24 hours before our eyes, inspite of frantic efforts of the doctors to save them.

In summer, the road side jungles were full with wild red and black berries. Every time I used to gather a bagful – so sweet and tasty. Soon I raised a plot of berries in our garden and next season there were so much of fruits that my wife had good time preparing Jam and Jelly.

It is interesting that every conceivable place in Anini is dotted with Medicinal Plants. Many are known to the people as they use these for specific ailments. Though I collected the local names and use, it was only much later, when, I could identify the botanical names with the help of Forest Officers. *Coptis tita*, *Podo Phyllum hexandrum* *Acenitum*, *Gaul theria*, *Berluris*, *Theum*, *Piper*, *Acorus*, *Swertia*, *Paederia*, *Hypericum*, *Zanthoxylum tec*. *Valerrane*, *Solanum Khasianum*.

It would not be surprising if many more still remained unidentified in high altitudes.

While Mutton was definitely scarce and chicken too costly, we had pork and mithun's meat. My wife, engaged in social works, had good relations with village women who obliged her every time when they visited our house. She picked up some words of Idu Dialect that brought her closer to them.

But, once on our visit to a village, she saw in horror, a still born calf came out from the womb of a slaughtered mithun and that was enough for the nerves, and since then she never touched Mithun's meat so long we were at Anini!

The climate of Anini was salubrious. We never did suffer an illness inspite of unfiltered water. The air was cool and fresh with breeze blowing all the time.

While summer was pleasant with more sunny days, the winter was severe with rain, fog and sleet. There were hardly any paved roads as stones were few and road became slushy with oozing water. – It was impossible to move, with leather boots.

There were occasional heavy snow fall – once it recorded the highest figure – 18 cms.

It was, however, a treat to see the snow flakes like white petals noiselessly falling from the sky in continuous stream – then covering the ground with a white sheet. All on a sudden one would hear the thud as huge chunk of snow slid down the roof.

When there was heavy snow, all ran out in excitement to witness the beautiful scenario. My little daughter – Rosana, had so much of fun making figures with the lump of snow. Funny idea came, how nice it would be to send these to our home!

During the snowfall, the works in the office came to a halt. The mood was lost in shivering cold. Only the officers who had cosy charcoal fire would stay back, idling the hours in gossip.

The cold penetrates to marrow inspite of heavy woollens. The ordeal was severe for those who could hardly afford a charecoal fire. In the office, we had provision hence there was not so much of a problem. After the office hours staff lift the charcoal canisters to their homes just to get some warmth. Most of the officials have come from hot, humid place and were not accustomed to cold climate. Some even never left a charcoal canister even while in toilet!

I had somewhat tolerance. Born in the hills, my early days were full of memories of severe winters.

I never took warm bath except in fatigue. The cold bath which had been practiced over several years, gave me enough of resistance. Even during snow fall, I seldom gave up my bath. Many heard in disbelief and actually came to the house to verify!

The scarcity accentuated in every passing day. In the kitchen garden, all crops withered with the heavy frost, only green available

was edible fern growing in shadowy recesses near the river bank. Never before I had known such a scramble for this fern. Elsewhere, no one ever bothers to look at it, but in Anini this was a precious commodity.

Once it happened that a snake quietly coiled in the bush. The man who went for collection got a shock of his life. He narrowly escaped a bite.

There were wild banana flowers in moist jungle far from the valley. Road labourers found a source of earning some money.

But most sought after was the tender bamboo shoots which sprout just before the retreating winter. Bamboo forest being extensive — it just required a little labour for a bagful of collection. But when the extension works in the air field started, the hordes of labourers, finding no other vegetables, devoured all the bamboo shoots in no time.

Tender bamboo shoots make a fine pickle and is a delicacy in most homes.

While in North East, bamboo shoots as food is most common, but in other parts of the country people seldom knew it.

There was a comic incident. Somewhere a commandant's wife belonging to the region wanted bamboo shoots, the man brought bundle of bamboos and dumped at her residence!

The only commodity that never went dry was the rice beer — 'U'. Being a favourite drink of the Idus, it had caught up with the officials too who soon found an escape in it from the monotoneous life.

Somehow, they knew a den where a bottle could be obtained with a rupee or two — no matter what was the stuff, so long it gave a 'kick'!

Very few actually escaped from the spell of 'U'. Some became terribly addict. We exchanged jokes — open a bar on the hill top, there would be never ending queue of customers!

When the winter retreated far behind then came another hazard — the grass fire, leaves dried up in severe frost offered instant tinder and a careless spark raised an inferno, reducing the valley land to ashes in no time.

The fire leaps several feet enacting a devil dance. When it caught the bamboo — the spontaneous crackles were heard like automatic gun fire.

With grass all around, we were in constant fear. A beautiful forest plantation raised with so much of care just could not escape the fire as it leaped forward inspite of protected barrier.

Propelled by the wind, the speed was fantastic.

Soon a red ball was seen far below, immediate alarm alerted every one to run with soaked gunny bags, water buckets and staves. Even then, with precise drill, we could not save the Assam Rifles family line.

Later, an executive order was issued to make compulsory fire lines with sufficient barrier. But then grass grows so prolific and never really dies even though scorched by the fire.

Along with grass, the valley had bushy ferns which was not even touched by browsing animals. The leaves dried in winter burns rapidly added more fuel to the fire.

Though at present these fern serve no purpose, but some day research might reveal the potentiality of this useless plant.

While — mischief was definitely behind a grass fire, a theory however mooted was that probably friction in bamboos releases a spark. Whatever may be, the Idus derive benefit, in trapping the rats which come out from holes due to intense heat.

It is also interesting how in the valley so close to the mountains harbours so many snakes — small and big which appear soon after the rain. Snakes sneak in the house in search of rats. But snake bite cases were rare. Idus had strong superstition — would not tell any one except the *Igu* — the priest. If the information leaked out then victim's house will not be visited by any one for five days. Inter village traffic is also restricted. But if this is not known, then victim and the *Igu* observed the taboo for five days. A snake bite victim seldom informs others inspite of terrible pain or swelling. The person would have a cover story such as a fall from the rock or tree.

Once I saw a branded krait near Alinye. It quietly went to the bamboo bush.

## Along The Dri

10 Kms. from Anini on the upstream of Dri is Mihindu – a village we selected as a model for developmental works. The jeep road to Alinye just touches its fringe before going down to the river bank.

Soon after a turn at one Km. Post from Anini – a magnificent beauty unfurled before the traveller. The rolling grassy land, meadows, tall fir trees, banks lined with poplar, awe some mountains, Idu long houses partly hidden behind the bamboo groves, far below the river Dri with its silvery water flowing between the folds of the hills.

Just across, as if at a stone's throw, lies the Alinye landing strip. A few tin roofed buildings so clearly seen. In lucky moment one could see, an otter flew like a bird and lowered the height for a smooth landing.

Yet Alinye still remains far – a two hours hurried march by a short cut. A foot tract just descended from four Kms. post of the jeep road where a tall fir tree stood all alone down the years.

Half way to Mihindu, the road passed upto some distance through a mixed forest of birch, oak, spruce, Fir, poplars and rhodoendrons. Mercifully, it had escaped the wood cutters, but how long one just could not say.

The houses in Mihindu village stood in line with wooden panels replacing the bamboo. Government helped each house owner with sown timbers and iron nails. The roof was however thatched.

A cement concrete reservoir stored the water from a perennial stream from where distribution lines were drawn for supply to the village. Near by was a irrigation channel leading to the terraced fields.

Two lady visitors in Project implementation centre, a teacher in the Primary School, an Agricultural field staff, a Mason formed the component of Government staff.

Because of paralleled line of houses flanking the street the village presented an orderly look.

Idus keep their pigs confined in a strong enclosure under the platform of the house and compound. This had at least saved the village from a dirty look.

Though Mihindu now a model village, but in a typical Idu village thick under growth always remain to afford an escape. An Idu never believed in chances – he took every precaution from the danger which might come to him at any time.

Till recent times, a high bamboo palisade stood around the house. Spiked bamboos sharpened like spear heads were put on either side. A door that could be lifted only permitted entrance. Over head hung bamboo tubes which made clattering sound when the door was opened to warn the inmates of the house of arrival of a visitor.

Though this type of elaborate defence arrangement is rarely seen now-a-days, but I had the opportunity to see one in the house of Liba Mihi in Gipulin village of Upper Dri Valley. Though an old man now, yet he had plenty of enemy, so he believed who might surprise him any time!

Mihindu belonged to Malage Mihi – a member of regional council, Rano Mihi, the grand old priest and his enterprising son Achona, daughter Ephindi, Nanji Mihi the village head man and his daughter Shanti who was a teacher.

Malage was a charming fellow. I never saw him depressed except once when his daughter who was a student in middle school at Anini committed suicide probably for failure in love affair. She was a cute young girl charming like her father and always impressed me whenever I visited the village. No one had an inkling of her melancholy mood but she took the determined step to end her life by hanging. It was a great loss indeed, as she was a brilliant student and her teachers pinned great hope on her.

Suicides are rare in other tribes but so common amongst the Idus. Though mostly related to unsuccessful love affairs, but a few

cases were due to acute depression either for prolong illness or loneliness. To an Idu – ending a life is as if no problem. No indication is ever given nor a suicide note left. Even minor boys and girls were not immune. They are so emotional and sentimental that strong rebuke from the parents might drive them to madness.

It was pathetic indeed – when a beautiful girl just jumped from the bridge to Dri river not far from Anini. Her body was found twenty five Kms. down stream after a frantic search.

In another instance, two young girls simultaneously hanged themselves from the branches of the tree as if this was just casual affair.

It happened in Amuli village near Anini, where an old couple lived. One day the woman died due to prolong illness. Unable to bear the pang of separation, the old man quietly took a sharp knife, slit open his stomach, spilled out the intestines, lay on the floor in pool of blood. When the news reached, our Medical staff rushed to the spot but then it was too late.

From Anini – a foot track went down to the Dri river. Over the river hung a suspension bridge from where one could find an easy way to commit suicide. The awe-some land slide which ripped open the slope was supposed to be the abode of a dreaded spirit who lured the victims to sure death. Interestingly, the victim predicted the doom. On one such case where I was a witness – a labourer went to the village for vegetables and said it would be his last journey as the spirit already summoned him. So saying he quietly came up and sure enough he slipped down the steep incline to meet with instant death.

For several days the gory stories circulated. Some one happened to see a figure coming up asking for raw tobacco, or, his family woke up hearing the rattling sound and a feeble voice.

When there were few cases of death then our chowkidar in the office, Somu Tayu – a priest of some repute took a drastic step. He made an elaborate ritual and drove away the spirit from his abode.

A few cases of attempted suicides, however, were stopped by timely action of alert family members or by immediate medical help. A girl put a knot and hung from the ceiling but the body touched the floor, so was not quite dead. Immediately, knot was loosened

and she was rushed to the hospital where doctors managed to save her life. She was so much in agony, yet never cried.

In some cases poison – mostly agricultural pesticide proved easy, but might not be fatal when very prompt action was taken by doctors. We thus managed to save a few cases.

Why the propensity for suicide? It has never actually been found. The Idu society is most individualistic, each one prefers to chart his or her own course and remain highly emotional to the issues of life – be in love, marriage, illness or desire.

I felt a personal loss when a promising boy of Anini – Sakole Mihi who was in his final year in the college suddenly committed suicide. His room mate in the college hostel, an Adi boy never had an idea of his depressed mind – rather he was so cheerful on the fateful day and sent him away to have a nice time. Then he tied his neck with a cloth to the ceiling fan and put on the switch. He died moments later.

Malage though gentle and affable nevertheless had enemies. Once he narrowly escaped death when assassin stalked him stealthily from behind but moment he leaped – Malage's sister suddenly saw and raised an alarm which enabled him to run for life. The reason for retaliation was due to certain remark passed by Malage in a gathering which the man thought as an insult, although it was some time back. But the person suddenly remembered it probably after a booze and decided to avenge it !

It is indeed very risky for an Idu to offend any one. Seldom an insult is forgotten and must be redeemed by adequate compensation or else retaliation might follow.

One day our office peon, Khuti Yalla took his gun and killed a pig of one uti miu as a revenge for passing offensive remarks on his mother. Khuti reported to me and said, whatever the punishment as decided by the court he would accept it, since he had succeeded in redeming his honour by killing the pig!

It happened in case of Erati Melo of cheya village – not far from Anini – Once he was offended by behaviour of the store keeper and burnt down the entire government stores. For long ten years he remained as fugitive in the jungle and surrendered to the Government when he could no longer tolerate the terrible hardship.



A person from Etabe village across Dri river, holding a position in district council offended his own brother-in-law in Mathun Valley.

In a meeting he just did not record his request for a health unit in his area and instead passed some derogatory remarks. In a huff, he left the meeting and went to his village from where he sent the ominous word – the river is white but some time it may turn into pink as well.

Immediately, there were alarms. Secret move of intermediaries finalized a deal. The poor fellow from Etabe had to pay an enormous compensation.

Normally, sober Malage once sprang a surprise. We had been camping in his village for a developmental programme. In a get-together I just joked, what a man he is, could not feed us properly in his own village!

Malage was laughing but soon after he left the place quietly. Minutes later we heard a distinct sound of gunfire. A hefty Mithun was just shot. Soon after, he brought the huge chunks of meat and dumped in our place! Interestingly he did not keep any thing for him a trait with all Idus which defies logic.

Though individualistic, yet Idus are most hospitable. A guest in the house is a highly honoured person. The owner would forego all his comfort to make him happy – offering the best part of the meat, beer and provide food as well for the journey back to his village. Any one making an insulting remarks on the guest might face revenge. Many a time I stayed in an Idu house and had a personal experience of their lavish hospitality.

Being an important member of regional council, once Malage chaired a meeting at Anini. When his turn came to say something, he sprang a surprise by demanding a bus service to his village ! When it was told – how a bus could run without a road, Malage made an innocuous face which brought us all in laughter!

Nanji's daughter, Shanti, though could not complete her high school education, but got an appointment as teacher to support herself and her young son. Her husband was from the foothills who had already two wives. Humiliated and tortured, Shanti came back to her father and vowed never to go back again. The torture left her limping, yet she maintained her composure and determined to give her son proper education. Many a time, she narrated the sad stories

of her life while on visit to our house. Somehow, she found comfort in us which she could not get in her society.

I had a feeling that there was a discernible change in Idu girls when they saw us — happy family going around without inhibitions. I hoped some day they too would lead a happy life when their marriage system becomes liberal.

Shanti's father, Nanji — a grand old man yet maintained a strong will. Several times I saw his frail figure trotting along the path to the cultivation field. As is the custom of the Idus, everyone looks after himself — being old no matter. So Nanji accepted the fact of life and so would go to the cultivation despite his old age.

He had voice which was listened with respect I saw how his talk was heard in rapt attention, something unusual in gathering.

He was appointed as headman by B.S. Routeledge, the last British Political Officer and he still kept the red coat given by him.

Rano's son, Achona, actually belonged to Ahui valley — six stages from Anini, and settled in Mihindu to help his foster father. Achona was smart and was slowly developing his quality as a leader. One day he might take over from Malage and go to district council.

Rano Mihu's daughter, Ephindi, who had some education, entered the Government service as lower division clerk. She was smart and had a graceful movement.

She fell in love with Jumke Bagra — our Circle Officer who was from Along, in Siang District. Jumke was a smart young fellow with pleasant disposition.

The affairs with Ephindi created flutter as Idus donot look to this kindly. However, it was due to stubborn attitude of Ephindi which ultimately mellowed Rano. There was a grand marriage ceremony and both of them led a very happy life since then. Jumke switched over to the police service and rose to high position.

Rano was an Igu — the Priest of great reputation. In fact no one was equal to him in Dibang Valley. He could attend to very serious illness.

Years back, he cured Somu Tayu of Anini, who suffered from a severe attack of blood dysentery. Blood dysentery and Choleric

diarrhoea are dreaded diseases as much as epilepsy. Death from such diseases are feared so much that house is deserted and left standing as it is.

In many Idu villages such deserted houses are still seen.

It happened in Yuron village 25 Kms. south of Anini that a family died but none attended burial of the dead till Government arranged disposal of the bodies.

Somu Tayu's illness was severe. Rano erected bamboo fence all around and thoroughly swept the area. The obdurate spirit at first was reluctant till Rano in a trance fought relentlessly and drove him out. Soon, Somu Tayu was fully cured.

Rano travelled back to his village Mihindu — a distance of ten Kms. in one month! Every where he had created special obstacles of bamboo — '*Laro*' to stop spirit following him to the village.

Persons who are drowned in river are believed to have been claimed by a water snake. Though dead cannot come back to life, yet the *Igu* of Rano's standing could drag the snake out of the water with tremendous pull. Many told the story how Rano once pulled out a thin black thread which represented the snake from the Dri river near Ahunli village when a man accidentally slipped there and died.

Inspite of his busy time Rano took interest in developmental works. He had wet paddy field, fishery ponds which he looked after. Some times he went to the river to lay the traps.

There was a small island on the Dri near Alinye where Rano went by a twin bridge.

Twin bridge is made with strings of cane which are secured to a tree or stone on either side. A large cane ring is then made around the cable which is again attached to a cane rope stretched overhead.

While crossing, the body is tied firmly to the ring and head thrown backward. The crossing is done by hand and feet propulsion and holding on the cane rope. For newly initiated, it is definitely nervewrecking but by repeated practice one could overcome the fear.

Five Kms. from Mihindu across the Dri river is Etabe village. The village presented an idyllic view with snow mountains providing a back drop.

The village belongs to Gane Tacho – the grand old man around seventy, but like others he too could not tell his age. He reckoned the years from various activities like jhum cultivation, house construction, war, death or natural calamities. During the great earthquake he was still a young man who could dash to the mountains several times in a year.

Gane Tacho's earlier years were full of struggle when his parents died. Only his maternal uncle helped him sometimes.

It was great moment when birds from the mountain migrated to the valley. Boys of his age went mad with bows and arrows. In dark shadows, they moved silently and killed the birds which fell to their hands so easily. He still remembered how he felt excited when he first handled a gun. With the gun he could roam in the forest at will and was often lucky enough to kill an animal.

Big game hunting was always a thrill. Sometimes, he went alone and once even tried to kill a tiger, but narrowly escaped death when it jumped over his head, missing him by inches. Tiger and panthers being dangerous, had to be trailed cautiously.

Bears were frequent visitors to the valley where crops in the field lured them. Bears are a nuisance and if once they come upon a field they would always visit the place again and again by following the same path. A bear's movement follows a fixed pattern. From the hill it would slide down straight to the field and come up again by following the same way. The bears track in the field are visible from long distance.

Some times, bear lived in tree holes. It became easy to frighten it by lighting a fire in the grass. Blinded by smoke and heat the animal dashed around and fall into the traps of hunter.

Though he himself escaped from the embrace of the bear but Andru Mihi of Gipulin village was not so lucky. Once Andre Mihi went for collection of honey from the colony of rock bees – when he faced the bear. With a slap, the bear tore away one of his eyes. Andre Mihi survived due to timely attendance of *Igu* who collected the medicine from the spirit which then healed his wounds.

Gane Tacho's mountain trail was full of thrill and adventure. Each journey took twenty days but he never came empty handed.

Every year it had been a practice to visit the mountain as if on a pilgrimage. Hunting Takin and Musk deer was favourite with people, and he was no exception.

His comprehension of the mountain was that of a mysterious, awe inspiring region where no man can live as spirit '*Gono*' is the master there. But *Gono* allows brief visits only after elaborate propitiation and should any one earn his displeasure he would never come back alive. Many people lost their lives in the barren and desolate region, perhaps because of hunger or a fall from a precipice, but every one believed it was *Gono* the lord of the mountain who claimed the victim for breaking one of the numerous taboos he imposed.

Gane Tacho so far bagged thirteen takins, eight Musk deer, seventeen boars, six mountain goats, twelve berking deers-an impressive record for a hunter.

The Takin is a hefty animal which lives near snow line. It prefers to move in a herd from pasture to pasture and come down hill only during heavy snowfalls. When a herd moves — scouts consisting pairs of young ones go ahead to show the path. The leader which is a bull moves in the centre. In the rear another bull follows. When the scouts find a pasture which borders a marshy place with salt lick, the animals halt there as long as two to three months till another pasture is found. Often in the pasture, a tiger appears but luck may not favour him. The bull is alerted and it lowers its head with semicircular horns sharpened at both ends, dash forward in a terrific speed. The hooves pound the earth — shake the ground to raise a dust storm. In one quick move the bull picks up the tiger by his horns, throws it in the air only to be caught by the horns of another Takin. The play continues till the entire body is shredded to pieces. But even then revenge is not complete. The dead tiger is thrashed against a boulder until reduced to a mere pulp.

In spite of bulky body Takin is not slow in movement. Bull Takins are most dangerous, when an enemy is seen, they immediately encircle him and charge.

To cross a barrier is no problem. They even walk over the fallen trees with ease and speed.

Old Takin lives lonely life, almost discarded by the herd. But even in old age, its main enemy – the tiger dare not attack, as it still maintains some vigour and can charge with speed and determination.

During a hunt of Takins, the hunter first observes the pug mark and determines the size of the animal and time of move. If the mark is fresh, then trail is followed. For a successful hunt, the animal should be on the slope and hunter on the ridge. This advantage is necessary to keep them at a distance so that if they change also cannot move fast over the slope and give enough time to the hunter to stay safe.

After spotting the animal, a careful aim is taken at the shoulder and bullet hits the animal piercing its heart. The animals surprised by the sudden sound of fire first mistake it as thunder clap, but when they see one of their companions rolling on the slope, none stay a moment – bolt away quickly.

After bagging the animal, its right ear is cut and kept in the pouch. This is not spoiled. Then a dry piece of wood is dragged from head to foot of the slain animal and slowly laid on the ground. This is to tell the spirit to take away all that is bad with the animal.

The meat is divided amongst all who accompany the hunter and he gets the shoulders and horns.

Gane Tacho's other passion was collection of *coptis tita* – the medicinal plants of the high range. Every year before the winter set in, collection of roots started involving several days' stay in the mountain. The roots were then taken to foot hills where these were sold in exchange for salt. Often the journey was risky as no one knew where the lurking enemy might wait. Those days were full of uncertainty as people fought each other and murder was as common as slaughter of animals. He and his companions often followed a difficult mountain track to come to a neutral or friendly village for barter of valuable *coptis tita*, musk pods and animal skins.

He had many interesting experiences. Once he, with a friend, went to the hills and suddenly heard clap of thunder though the sky was clear with dazzling sun. They desperately dug themselves into the thick foliage but still the sound of thunder began to approach them with menacing speed. They froze with fear and dared not moved from the forest cover. The sound ultimately became faint and vanished.

This was the first time they heard the drone of an aeroplane. Subsequently, many were seen in the sky but no one knew what these were – every one took these as another manifestation of *Gono!* In the village, desperate fear gripped the people and they shot arrows at the flying birds passing over their heads!

Once they heard such a flying object fall to the ground which shook the earth in sissar valley near the foot hills. No one went there for fear of the spirit !

Those were the days of the Second World War, but Gane Tacho and his people did not know anything of the grim tragedies enacted just across the borders.

Some years later suddenly a band of people, whom they had never seen before, appeared in their land. That was the time when all of them buried their differences and prepared for a fight with poisoned arrows, spears and match locks.

It was dusk and surprise attack would have surely led to a victory.

The plan was made with so much care, but before they could move, these mysterious people threw something in to the air which burst in green and red colours with dazzling illumination which momentarily blinded them. Surely, they thought these were not man made but the play of the spirits brought along by the aliens, and if they trouble them further, then all might get killed. So they quietly retreated and allowed them to come to the valley. That was the incident in 1945 when B.S. Routeledge, Political Officer, Mishmi hills, made a tour of Mathun valley.

Once he stayed in Talon valley. One night he suddenly heard a rumbling sound as if hundreds of mithuns broke through the forest in galloping speed. The stones began to roll and houses swayed violently. A big boulder passed over his head narrowly missing him by inches. Never before he had seen such catastrophe – how many people died no one knew, how many villages perished? It was learnt only much later. The great earthquake of 1950 created a havoc unparalleled in their history.

Those days were full of bitterness and rivalry. No one trusted any one and no one was even safe in any village. Each house was fortress. Enmity developed all on a sudden and bitter feuds often

resulted in murder. Gane Tacho could not recollect how many people were murdered in mathun, Dri, Talon, Ahui, Emra Valleys.

There was another comic incident when two rivals were approaching from opposite direction unknown to each other. Both of them had loaded guns carried on their shoulders. Suddenly, at the bend of the road, they came face to face and simultaneously fired at each other. The bullet from one hit the cane helmet which flew away and bullet from the other cut away the sling of the scabbord of the sword and the sword fell to the ground! Both of them did not take a second look and disappeared at once. Gane Tacho burst in laughter while narrating this episode!

Though now Anini is a sprawling town with hundreds of people yet in those days it was a dreaded place because of an unknown disease from which recovery was impossible. No one dared pass through the place which was full of sun grass and violent winds that always made howling sound. From the distance, it looked like the permanent home of spirits and who would dare risk his life? To go to mathun valley, they preferred climbing the hill over Mihindu village but never ever for curiosity would they visit Anini. Though now the situation changed with the arrival of Government, but people believe that spirits reluctantly abdicated the place.

Time had moulded Gane Tacho and his generation. He now felt for a change where his village would no longer remain isolated; people would bury the past and pulsate with new life for better future.

His eyes sparkles with the vision of coming days ahead when the valley would be full of apple orchards, cultivated fields, net work of roads, and no one would go to the mountain for hunting takins or uproot *coptis tita*.

In community meetings, Gane Tacho gave fiery talks exhorting the people to rise up and march along with the time.

His two sons – Jidu and Khumbra Tacho were in the high school, who would not follow the tradition of their father in hunting and fishing but read in school to gain knowledge and become leaders of the society.

Gane Tacho, despite his age, shuttles between his village and town for fulfilment of his dream.

Upper Dri valley beyond the air strip is more beautiful. The valley opened up far distance in broad expanse. There are meadows,



springs, forest of fir, massive mountains that captivate the mind of the traveller going by the path following the Dir river.

Across the river was Agrim Boling, the largest village in upper Dri. It belongs to Disene Mo – a man about forty. Soft spoken but active, Disene Mo is now an affluent man from his paddy cultivation. With land so fertile with plenty of water, he did not have to work hard.

Disene Mo had problem with Buli Tacho – the wealthy man of Anini.

His sister was taken by Buli as his wife. Both are cross cousin relation though now separated by few generations. Yet Disene was furious – this amounts to incest and must be annulled at any cost.

Buli was equally adamant – there could not be blood relation after lapse of several generations.

In a fury Disene killed a hefty Mithun of Koka Mihu who was not a party to the dispute. Koka in retaliation killed a Mithun of some one else. Now, the entire blame fell on Buli who violated the custom. To the Idus, the deliberate dragging of third party to the dispute is justified to compel the guilty man to see the enormity of the crime and pay the heavy compensation.

Buli ultimately had to pay an enormous sum although he got the girl.

A few years back in Agrim Boling there was an interesting case, when a wealthy man disillusioned with life desired a live burial. He made a tunnel where he built a spacious room lined with stone walls. The room was furnished with all the necessities of life. After an elaborate ritual, one day he entered the grave cheerfully, bidding farewell to everyone!

## The Man Who Fell in to A Trauma

Eighteen Kms. South of Anini is Yuron, surrounded by lofty hills — the place is in a pocket. A small river fell on the Dri which flows by the side. Sun is seen only for few hours during noon.

On a small table land was the village with three houses.

In a staging hut, by the side of the river, the officials on long distance journey stay for a night. Not far from it was the primary school where Buragohain, the teacher, stays all alone.

Only a few students who come to the school go back soon after the classes are over.

Murmur of the flowing water obstructed by the hills produced a booming sound. Mingled with this is the noise of the water falls falling from a height of 1000 ft.

On all sides, there were forest, dark and foreboding.

During cloudy or rainy days, which were not infrequent, the world retreat far behind.

Except few stray villagers, no one visits the school as it lies away from the foot track. Any one making a night halt in the staging hut is also in a great hurry to leave the place.

The school was opened as people wanted it. There was no alternative site as the terrain was too rough.

It fell on the fate of Buragohain to organise the school and impart education.

Initially, the enrollment was high but slowly petered away leaving only a few students who too were irregular.

It was natural, in such a situation, Buragohain suffered from a trauma. He developed abnormality.

Some where in a rest house, he made entry in the register — poet, philosopher, thinker, traveller, writer, dramatist, explorer and at last a teacher!

He had a bitch whom he called Lucie. No one gave him company except Lucie. One day, suddenly the bitch was found missing and Buragohain became depressed. He shot out a lengthy letter to our office giving a very detailed description of her and how in her absence his life had become miserable. Now Government must do something, even call the Assam Rifles to trace his dear Lucie!

He went on in his lengthy letter — my dear Lucie, darling of darlings, so enchanting her manners, blue eyes always sparkling like emeralds. She is cute, very well mannered, highly obedient disciplined and above all had very deep affection and love for me. She never did any harm to any one, never been angry, never left me for a moment. Oh! Lucie, my darling — my heart bleeds for you — where you are now. I am sure there is no food for you — why you left me, what did I do for you. Oh! Lucie, come back to me again — without you I cannot live any more.

He concluded his letter by announcing a hand-some reward to any one giving an information of his darling Lucie!

Inspite of our efforts, Lucie could not be traced. For sometime, Buragohain even did not eat his meal.

Once we were in a tour with ADC and had a halt at Yuron. An information was sent to him to meet ADC but the messenger was turned back — telling what an audacity! Did not the ADC know that he is a scion of the Ahom Royal family? He should come instead to see him!

He was, however, persuaded to come. He carried a dao in scabbard slung across his shoulder. Some one asked him, was he ever posted in Tezu proper?

Buragohain immediately flared up. He said what is proper? I am proper, you are proper every body is proper – I should be addressed properly!

ADC who did not know him was visibly annoyed, but before the climax reached, we managed to send him off by appreciating his genius which only behoves for the person of royal heritage!

What was tragic was that there was no rational thinking about the welfare of staff. His department remained unresponsive and found it a good riddance to dump him in remote place – after all no one volunteers to go there.

It was long after, due to our initiative, that he was ultimately transferred to a better place in foothills, but by then damage had already been done. He might not be normal again.

## The Turbulent Hills

40 Kms South west of Anini is Etalin – the circle headquarters, situated on a narrow ridge of a high hill. The hill rose at steep angle from Talon river which fell on the Dri, some distance away. From the river bank to the Etalin camp was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours of sheer exasperating climb. A few houses – all bamboo and thatch buildings lie on table land. Nearby was a gaping landslide which brought down a chunk of the hill with rubbles and up rooted trees. A little below the ridge was the dropping zone at  $45^\circ$  incline of the slope where stores were dropped from high flying dakotas. No matter how precisely the pilot tried to locate the exact point but the ejected loads drift away by the wind to far distance. Sometime parachute hung on the tall trees, and to retrieve the stores, the whole tree had to be cut down.

Situated over 6000 ft. Etalin experiences severe winter. There are more rains in summer months. Except for somewhat strategic importance, being on the approach route to the border post of Malini, it did not serve any purpose. Its height might had been the only advantage which prompted Major R.K. Hranga to establish the administrative centre here to contain the turbulent Idus.

Three stages from Etalin across a rugged terrain is Malini – a valley of unsurpassing beauty. Travellers arriving there would forget their fatigue seeing the nature in its most beautiful manifestation. Stately pine and fir trees cover the vast expanse of undulating land rising gradually to the mountain heights. Streams with sparkling water lazily meandered along the contours but in a sudden thrust surged forward down the slope to meet the Talon river flowing far below.

A few Idu long houses lie hidden amidst tall slender bamboos and poplars. In summer months, the valley bursts in riot of colours

when hundreds of rhododendrons bloom, flowers spread a carpet, spongy moss cover the shallow banks.

Malini had an Assam Rifles post to guard the borders not very far. Government opened a Primary school, Co-operative stores and posted staff for other developmental activities. It was interesting that none wanted to come out from Malini once they have reached there.

While coming back from Malini I had a providential escape. A sheer cliff over the swirling water of Talon rose to several hundred feet through which a narrow foot track cut across solid rock. A cane rope dangled from above – holding it tightly, measuring every inch of move, the journey has to be made with extreme caution. Any wrong step would surely throw the body off balance with a headlong plunge into the swift current of the water.

Sometime back, a porter lost his life in this very place. His grip on the rope could not hold. Sometime he swung like a bat, but load on his back dragged him forward and he slipped into the river.

I was plainly nervous, seeing the surge of foamy water below. The rope was slippery with dripping water. Some how through providential grace I could cross over, although sweated profusely. How perilous is a journey in the mountain – those who did not experience could never imagine.

A smart young man – Yomut Perme was the Circle Officer at Etalin. He stayed with his wife Opi and small son Kaling despite immense problem in the inhospitable place, where one could only see the rolling clouds passing on the valley and the hills. In winter, severe frost wiped out the last vestige of green. Only diversion was the high flying aircraft going to Anini. Sometimes, a dakota comes streaking over the dz to eject the precious cargoes but loads might be thrown far distance due to drifting wind.

Yomut was cheerful always which was an asset to him and contributed no less building up confidence amongst his staff. To overcome monotony and boredom, he organised sports, games as well social works. In the evening, officials would gather in his small little house – passed time in gossip and humour or at game of cards. Not many however imbibed such qualities – many remain morose, dull, depressed and curse all the time being thrown in to the out post.

Yomut had been known to me since his student days. He was from Ayeng village in the foot hills across the Siang river. A sportsman of reputation, Yomut participated in many tournaments, but here in Etalin, he had hardly any scope.

At his request, once my wife and daughter went to Etalin and stayed for few happy days with his family. It was an exciting moments for my daughter Rosana, hardly seven years old at the time to trot in her little feet over the difficult hilly tract. Except the suspension bridge which scared her she made the journey without any help. Long years since then, she has never forgotten the excitement of the journey and vividly narrate with gusto the romance of her experience to her friends!

Three stages from Etalin was Ambolin, in Emra valley – a most formidable terrain. It leads to a pass in the frontier, hence its importance.

After crossing the suspension bridges over Talon and Dri river, the foot track negotiates a huge gaping land slide – which constantly haunts the traveller like a night-mare. After the earthquake of 1950, the hills had bared the skeletons, and torrential rains during summer months made the journey as difficult and risky yet small post at Ambolin must be fed with ration supplied from Etalin. The rivers in Dibang Valley are not fordable – Emra also is no exception. In what appeared at first sight, the Idus daring as they are defied all natural barriers to eke out a living in whatever small arable land available in the valley.

Ambolin was the only place having some elbow room. A Central Reserve Police unit man the checkpoint. A primary school had been opened by the Government but no one volunteered to go there till we found a dashing youngman from plains of Assam – Bordoloi, who subsequently stayed long three years. His success story was the good rapport with the people, learnt their language to communicate and built up a garden from where he sustained his living. Not many are like him and his predecessor never stayed even for six months. One of them actually drafted a will as to what should be done after his death!

After the earthquake of 1950, all the hills of middle Dibang Valley became unstable. Every year, there were casualties – either

a slip down a precipice or struck by rolling stones from the huge land-slides. Except in Dri and Mathun Valleys — no where was extensive table land seen. All the rivers pass through deep gorges of steep hills.

Near Etalin down the Granli village where Dri river turns in a loop through a narrow gorge of hardly 30 ft. span is never visited by any person. Neither one goes to the hillock near by — Limbiando which is encircled by the river on three sides inspite of abundant games. People believe that these areas are special retreat of the dreaded spirit and whoever dared to go would never return. Years back so the story goes, two Assam Rifles men went there for hunt but never returned.

The river Dri runs into rapids near the Limbiando hill. The foamy water rushes through a narrow steep gorge giving an awesome view. So strong is the current and fall that fishes from down stream cannot come up the rapid.

Twenty kms. south of Etalin is Angolin. Near the village is hill feature Nani Anchi Alomi which bear a legend still believed by the people as true.

There were a man and a woman who had a daughter. After her birth, for five days, the parents could not decide her name till a bird's voice spelled *Anchi* — *Anchi*. Parents liked the name and called their daughter *Anchi*.

When *Anchi* grew up she was betrothed to a youngman of Angolin village. On her way to husband's place the spirit caught her. A tug of war ensued between the spirit and her companions — both sides pulling the poor girl to opposite directions. *Anchi* was in much pains and requested her companions to leave. Immediately, a thundereous voice was heard and *Anchi* was lifted off to the hills.

Fear gripped the men who hurried back to the village and informed the Iqus. The Iqus immediately found out the reason as *Anchi* was the name suggested by the spirit and she, therefore, belonged to him. According to the custom, the bridal price was returned to the bridegroom in Angolin village.

After long time, suddenly the daughter returned one day to her parents accompanied by a tiger. Her body was full of hair though



earlier she had no such growth. People got apprehensive but she consoled them that this was natural as she was staying with her husband – a spirit. Her husband had sent her for payment of bride price and so she had come with a Mithun. But no one could find a Mithun, instead they saw a tiger. She then took a mortar and struck at the beast and killed it. Its body was then chopped into pieces and the meat was distributed to every one.

The parents then requested her to help in the cultivation. A large number of people collected but no one could see them, and the jungle was cleared within no time by a violent sweep of the wind. Food which was offered also was eaten up by the unseen workers.

*Anchi* then took a red garment and a cock and told her parents that so long as she would be alive, the cock would crow and the red garment would be hung in the sun and that would be an indication of her presence.

For four years, people used to see a red garment spread out during the sunny days on the spur of a distant hill and heard the sound of cock crow. But a time came when nothing was heard or seen. All were convinced then that *Anchi* was no more.

Though apparently peaceful, all on a sudden, the tranquility might get disturbed by peculiar outburst of *Idus*.

One *Ichu Mihu* of *Edilin* village was singing a song – which was an episode of a story. Some parts of the song offended *Yoge Mihu* of the same village who shot an arrow which struck at *Pido Mihu*, Nephew of *Ichu Mihu*.

*Pido* managed to remove the arrow, snatched a gun and shot at *Ratane Mihu* who was the elder brother of *Yoge Mihu* and escaped to the forest. Some time later, when he was fishing in the river, *Yoge Mihu* stalked from behind and struck him at the thigh with a spear. Though badly injured *Pido* managed to escape

Stern action was taken by the Government soon after. The culprits remained elusive for some time but being exasperated in jungle life, later surrendered.

The fugitive who remained at large till the end was one *Sadhu Mimi* – which sounds like a fiction story.

In september 1964, Sadhu Mimi of Kano village of Ithun Valley was engaged by the Government as a leader of ten porters for carrying stores from foot hills station of Roing to Anini. After he reached Anini, he wanted his payment which, however, could not be paid as helicopter bringing the cash did not come. The Circle officer promised him payment but meantime he could make a trip to Etalin and come back. But on return from Etalin the money was not paid as still the helicopter did not come.

Sadhu got upset and demanded the money. The clerk also got annoyed with his impatience and snatched away the portorage vouchers from his hand.

The clerk's behaviour irritated Sadhu who said, just wait! Today you have snatched the government credit slips from me, I too would show my power tonight itself.

As told exactly Sadhu Mimi slipped into the clerk's house with two of his men and lifted the cash box containing the sale proceeds of store and fled to his village.

From there he sent the words to the political officer to despatch an official to take back the balance cash which he would return after deducting his dues.

A Political Interpreter – an old Idu man came and received the balance cash. Though the important papers which were in the box were retrieved, but the Political Officer wanted Sadhu Mimi's arrest. An Assam Rifles Patrol was sent to Kronli – the circle headquarters.

Bhawani Shankar Ghose – the Circle Officer was an interesting person. He was passed middle age with a stooping figure, big eyes as if protruding from the sockets with excessive booze. He had been with the Idus for number of years and got well with them. Later, he married an Idu girl from the Ithun valley.

No one knew of his parentage as he never told, but in the service record was mentioned the name of an aunt. But he often joked: born in Burma, brought up in England and fed up in India !

Though ordered by the Political Officer, Ghose delayed his move to arrest Sadhu. Later, when pressure was built up, he went

with some porters and a small armed escort. But the escorts were left behind at Ithun river and he alone went up to Kano village with only one Idu guide who carried a gun.

Sadhu, in a cunning move arranged a grand reception for him with ceremonial gates, rice beer, sumptuous meal which pleased Ghose who paid some cash to him as a token of appreciation. He asked Sadhu to come to the meeting which would be held in the head man's house.

As told, Sadhu came and sat near the fire place. Ghose then asked him to surrender to Government and he would see no harm would be done to him. But Sadhu replied: since he had not committed any crime but had simply taken the legitimate dues, now why the Government wanted to arrest him? He had enough of experience in the Jail where mosquitoes buzz day and night and, so what fun again to go there?

So saying, he quietly came near the guide who was holding the gun – snatched it in a flash, stood up and pointed to the gathering and told them to bolt away as fast or get killed. Sadhu wanted to fire at Ghose, but luckily the safety pin was locked.

At once, Ghose and the guide fled to the jungle narrowly escaping sure death.

Assam Rifles Patrol which was sent after him, ran short of ration. So post commander sent four men with 18 porters to circle headquarters at Kronli. Half the way at Anaya village, Sadhu, who all the time kept a watch, cleverly engaged some girls to keep the A.R. men busy in the village with rice beer. Happily, they stayed back while porters, who were all Idus, went alone to Kronli and came up with the ration loads.

Sadhu was in his hide out with the Government gun. He immediately appeared on the road and asked the porters to leave the ration loads and told them to get away fast or get killed.

Scared by the threat, all of them threw away the loads and ran, Sadhu quietly lifted the entire loads to his hide out situated in cave behind a high cliff.

Alarm was raised soon after. One NCO with four men rushed at once. They traced the desperado by fallen wheat powder. But

Sadhu had a signal system with empty tins strung on a rope. Any one coming up would strike the string hidden in the bush and make clattering sound in his hide out – warning him of the danger.

As expected, the Assam Rifle men came and dislodged the string which alerted him. He went behind a rock and waited.

The A.R. men in a single file were coming up the cliff. He allowed three of them to come up to a distance and then fired at the last man killing him at once. There was a futile chase, but Sadhu escaped.

The situation became serious and Government decided to drag the net.

All the posts were alerted. A helicopter landed at Hunli with Political Officer, V.P. Singhal and Assistant Political Officer, Monbahadur Rai. An A.R. Party under an officer and Arben Swer Agriculture Inspector as guide, left for Kano village – two days from Hunli. They carried out extensive combing operations, located a number of hideouts of Sadhu, but he remained elusive as ever.

He had in the mean time slipped to Achombra village up the Ithun river where from he brought three men and made a bamboo raft to cross the river.

Arben with five A.R. men was on the look out from a vantage position when suddenly he spotted Sadhu crossing with the raft. He cautioned the A.R. men to lie low to allow all three of them to cross over. But one of the foolish-fellow raised his head and at once Sadhu saw him and jumped into the river. The shot fired at him missed but struck on the rock and ricocheted inflicting some injuries to his limbs, but he escaped.

His two companions went to the village, got clothes and dressed the wound. They also brought some food. Sadhu cleverly sent the same fellows back to the village informing the news of his death in the river!

The headman, who swallowed the story, sent information to the post at Hunli that Sadhu Mimi had been drowned in the river!

But later, the news leaked out that Sadhu was very much alive. A hunt was started at once with an A.R. squad as information was

received that Sadhu had come to take his wife who was earlier arrested but released on bail. Some-how, he managed to get her and escaped to the jungle. They stole some maize from the field and went to Ithun river to cross by a twin bridge to go to his wife's relatives. His wife went ahead and reached the house where she did not reveal anything of her husband's whereabouts.

Meanwhile during the night, he crossed the river by twin bridge and took a quiet rest, lighting a fire to roast the maize. Seeing this from far distance, some youngman who too were on the look out for him, being promised handsome reward by the Government, thought of ghost and fired in the air. This alerted Sadhu who fled away at once.

At midnight, Sadhu managed to reach the village – located the house where his wife was staying, entered through the latrine hole, quietly woke her up, took her along and fled. Reaching the outskirts of the village, he shouted – you idiots! Lured by a reward wanted to catch Sadhu Mimi but now no one can escape my vengeance.

His deception fooled every one. While he was actually moving in right bank of the river, he left behind the visible trail on the other bank which exasperated the search parties with futile chase.

Then an order was issued that no man should be allowed to cross the bridge without proper verification. Guards were also posted there. The exception was only the women as no one suspected their involvement with Sadhu.

Taking this advantage, Sadhu dressed himself as an old woman and taking his wife approached the guards – Imitated the voice of a woman, introduced himself as the mother and the wife as daughter! He even sold some mustard leaves to the guards who were meantime duped by him by clever tricks!

After reaching the hill top at a distance, he took out the woman's garb and waived and shouted – You all bloody fool! I am Sadhu Mimi, not your girl friend's mother!

He bypassed Hunli and arrived at Roing in the foot hills where he bluffed his way by telling the guard that he was the nephew of Ita Pulu – the influential man of Roing and to his house he would be going. Would the guard be kind enough to point out the way?

Since he behaved so innocently no one had suspicion and readily showed him the direction to Ita Pulu's house!

Arriving at some distance, Sadhu said, you fools! only know how to shout halt! halt! and to chase a shadow, but here I am Sadhu Mimi, walked away right before your nose!

He then went to sadiya, purchased some gun powder from a clandestine dealer, arrived at Tezu from where he took the jungle track to the hills. At Donli village in Ithun valley, he got a muzzle Loader and came to Kronli. He felt hungry, quietly came to a police post and begged for some bread. No one suspected, as many like him also visit the camp. He was given some bread and when he was about to eat, a man became apprehensive which alerted Sadhu and at once he left.

Arriving at a safe distance, he thanked the men in the post of providing him food!

From there he came to his village, fooling the sentries by telling all the stories of the notorious outlaw — Sadhu Mimi — the scoundrel who brought much miseries and deserved to be hanged!

Sadhu remained fugitive till last. Ultimately, Government decided to withdraw the case against him and allowed him to lead a quiet life in his native village Kano. He too reconciled and never posed any problem.

It happened so, during my second tenure in Dibang Valley as Deputy Commissioner in 1985, that I went to Kano village where I saw the legendary man Sadhu Mimi, but found him still elusive. He did not come to the meeting place and kept a safe distance.

## Escapades of Officials

The first General Election to the territory's Assembly was held in March 1977. Prior to that, members were nominated. With the change came real representative Government, elected by the people on adult franchise.

Gegong Apang of Yingkiong, now became a Minister. Gegong, a sober and affable boy, was much close to us during early sixties when I was posted as Base Superintendent at Yingkiong. It was later I lost contact with him when on deputation outside the frontier. Yet even after long years, he did not forget — kept a close tag of my whereabouts.

It was in the Air base some time in 1977, when Gegong suddenly came to my room. Now a Minister, no longer a young boy, yet I found he had the same respectful regards which he had for me.

After the second general election in 1980, Gegong became the Chief Minister, a high climb up the ladder and continued to function effectively in his post ever since.

Though he did not come to Anini during my tenure but his predecessor, Prem Khandu Thungon, visited the place. Thungon also a nice man, took time to move around. An interesting incident happened when helicopter pilot got impatient and scribbled a note, Mr. Chief Minister — in two Minutes' time, we are taking off.

So saying, the pilot revved the engine and actually meant what he had written. It was a scene. In a marathon race, we managed to bring the Hon'ble Chief Minister, just in time!

In the Circle headquarters we had Bhawani Shankar Ghose at Desali and Jagjit Roy Suneja, at Anelih.

Both were interesting characters. While Ghose had an Idu wife, Suneja had married an Adi girl.

Neither of them were serious in job. Air dropping loss went to staggering level – most of the time they mentioned that droppings were erratic. It was apparent, they never supervised the accounting of the stores but depended on their junior staff.

Worst still was the money matter. Cash sent was invariably found short and we had to pass our time in anxieties. While we had reports on Ghose's business deals where he utilised Government cash though later on returned, Suneja would send the message, recollecting from memory the mistake happened due to hurried time!

Both the officers had already outlived the utility of their service and became a liability to the Government. Fortunately, they were withdrawn and more energetic officers were posted.

Being in the out posts for long time might be the reason as to why they developed negative attitude, unless a creative interest is developed, any one would succumb to temptation of life and render themselves useless.

Government later decided on rotational postings between hard and soft stations, fixing the tenure of service in each place. This had some sobering effect on the staff serving in difficult areas.



## The Majestic Goat

He was a goat. A hefty creature of more than the average size of any of his clan member. He had two sharp curved horns, a beard, two ferocious red eyes and trotted majestically leading his harem. Wherever he went, at least half a dozen she goats followed him. No wonder, he had a nice time. His appearance was enough to scare away any other romeos who dared not approach him.

Only a year before, he was dropped by parachute for the slaughter house of Assam Rifles. But seeing his stubborn bearing, they did not despatch him to the kitchen, instead took a fancy on him. They fed him well, provided a special enclosure where he gained more weight and developed aggressive posture. He had only regard for any one in olive green uniform – the dress of Assam Rifles, but to others coming on his way was sure to earn terrible reprimand. So aptly he was given the rank of ‘Major General’! Major General moved with elegant trot. His beat included the A.R. camp and office areas but not the village or market place – that he scrupulously avoided – being not worthy of a visit!

Everyday, he climbed up on a small hillock and looked around majestically to spot the members of his harem. When he come down or waited somewhere, no one ventured near and hastily made way.

One day, suddenly we heard his rank had been temporarily stripped off for the offence he had committed by making an unprovoked charge on an Assam Rifle gardener who was not in uniform.

For a few days, we did not see him. After some time he again appeared but his sullen mood this time changed to aggressiveness.

His beat now shifted to the road leading to school. Soon, the school children became his target and a panicky situation developed.

Complaints began to pour in the office. At first, we tried to scare him but he would not leave the place. Finding no other alternative, I pronounced the death sentence which was duly carried out.

There was instant gloom in Assam Rifles camp. They did not like my action. Perhaps, he could have been let off with any other punishment.

The meat was chopped off immediately but very few could actually relish as they found it was too much tough unlike common goat's meat.

## In the Naturalist's Paradise

Thirty Kms. from Anini on the upstream of Dri is the last Idu village – Acheson. A kilometre further up is the check post of Dambuen where there is a staging hut for the touring officials.

Beyond Dambuen the valley is the scene of extra ordinary beauty with lush primeval forest spilling over far distance towards the mountain walls.

Zigantic fir trees with long drooping branches, flower filled meadows, belts of poplar, carpet of colourful moss, bushes of *primulas*, *berberies wallichina*, *rhodoendrons* and miles and miles of wavy land gradually elevated to merge in to the mountain.

Here the Dri turns in to a loop, meandering lazily with clear sparkling water.

Some one compared this landscape with vale of Kashmir and Switzerland.

Everywhere there are bushes of *cemellia sp* – the wild tea. Once during the month of April, I collected a bagfull of first flush of buds and tender leaves and processed this for a home made brew. The leaves were first kept in a shade for 24 hrs. and then chopped in to small sizes. After drying in the sun for a full day the colour took a brownish tinge. It was then sieved to remove the large particles.

The liquor was some what strong but any way served our purpose.

I had a plan to visit the mountain. The destination was Bruini situated at 10,000 ft. height and 30 Kms. away by the mountain trail.

My party consisted Choma Mihu of Gipulin, Kino Melo of Alinye village, Tahong Tatak, the Agriculture Field staff who was my favourite guide and two porters.

Sometime before, Kino Melo told me mysterious mountain chain – Akhandi and Noro Ekhopra studded in big lakes with floating Lump of snow in crystal clear water, frozen falls, snow eagles, galloping musk deers, grazing takins, beautiful imperial pheasant clustered on tree branches.

It was late October – the snow yet to fall on the lower valley. The check post officer however warned us of unpredictable weather and should not go too far.

At streak of dawn we moved out. The winding narrow path passed through the belt of conifers, debris of broken branches, thick undergrowth and scattered rocks till we gradually began to scale the mountain wall.

We followed the Dri – rushing down in a torrent through the hard crystalline rocks – granite gneiss and mica schist. Some where an waterfall spilling over the edge of a rocky escarpment, the jet of glistening white water knives down wards, plummets in a single unbroken cascade and dissolved in a frenzy of spray.

Snow capped peaks glistened majestically against the cloudless sky. Jagged crests of lower mountain ridge rise toward the heaven like a solid wall. There in the distance we saw the steep slopes gushed by deep gorges and covered with glittering fields of snow.

We passed through dented ravines strained with loose boulders scoured by snow and torrential rains and entered a richly varied forest of *Tsuga dumosa*, *Abies spectabilis*, *Texas baccata*, *Picca spinulosa*.

The Montane wet temperate forest had *quercus lamellosa*, *Michelia*, *Castanopsis*, *Populus ciliata*, *magnolia campbellii*, *viburnum*, *Rhododendron-spp*, *Rubus*, *Rosa* and *Photini*.

A small diameter bamboo peculiar at this height – *Arun Dinaria* found in abundance in Semi dark corridors and Shadowy recesses.

The sharp ridge ended in narrow vale where we saw a beautiful pool of emerald blue water fed by a stream. On the banks are *junipers*,

*primula* and *poplars* where for the first time, I saw the birds — brilliantly feathered parrots and macaws flit through the foliage. Mountain here are the home of *Trogopan blithe*, *scalaters mental*, *eared pheasant* and in still higher region are *Tibetan Partridge*, *great Himalayan barbet*, *striped throated Minla*, *tit babblers*, *Ibis bill* and *snow eagles*.

In a small table land we pitched our camp by the side of a brook. The night was clear with thousands of star brilliantly sparkling in the sky.

Choma and Kino who went ahead in search of *coptis tita* returned late with a bagful of roots.

Morning came to the mountain only too early. The sun already appeared, its rays filtered through the foliage as we packed our kit and marched off for our destination Bruini yet far distance.

It was perhaps 25 Kms. since we started the journey from Dambuen — the Change of vegetation showed that we might have climbed over 11000 ft. Stately *Tsuga* reduced to half the size and *Rhododendrons* turned into mere bush. A thin layer of snow covered the ground already and we must make the return journey early.

From a vantage point I looked below — the extensive Dri valley far beyond the Dambuen at once appeared before our eyes. So beautiful it looked from this height.

It was just before midday that we arrived at Bruini — situated on gentle slope and guarded by a massive mountain wall.

A waft of snow blown in — the intense cold immediately touched the marrow and I quickly moved to a stone shelter.

Suddenly Tahong beckoned me. I hurried with my binocular and focused at the distant mountain. There appeared before my eyes a fantastic scenario — a white sheet hundreds of feet long hung down the mountain slope — an waterfalls completely frozen in snow. So sad I felt, we did not carry a camera.

During the night in cosy comfort around a fire, Kino narrated the story of the Tibetans who in search of a promised land followed this path in early present century.

Tibetans were the pobas whose homes were destroyed in a great flood in Yigrong valley in eastern Tibet. The famine that followed drove them to the land across the mountain to the Dri and Mathun Valleys. At first they had friendly terms with the Idus but when immigrants began to swell the numbers by fresh arrival from Kham, Derge and Pome then tension developed. Idus began to harass the Tibetans by hit and run tactics and forced them to withdraw. On the way bad weather caught quite a few of them and some even died.

The remains of the skeletons still seen on the path of their retreat.

During the night the sky became overcast – an ominous indication of snowfall. We did not wait further. Just at the streak of dawn hurriedly moved down the slope till we reached the foot of the mountain.

It was Kino who took the blame. He ventured too far in search of *coptis tita* and displeased the spirit.

## Along the Mathun

While Dri valley provided an enchanting view Mathun Valley was awe-some. The river itself dark and deep flows through steep hills. There is less open space and the journey was definitely tedious.

Farthest village in Mathun valley is Brango-30 Kms. from Anini. Beyond the village three Kms. away is Mipi, where Assam Rifles had a post. Brango lies on the right bank of Mathun river – the village of Abachi Mipi, a pleasant young man who became my guide.

Mathun was crossed by a cane suspension bridge. It was hanging loose held on two wire ropes. All nerves were strained while crossing, and I too inspite of long years of experience, felt no less shaky. Some times later – the headman of the village slipped from the bridge, his body was found six kms. down stream.

The river here passed through a gorge – churning the water in mighty whirlpools. Every year, Mathun claimed a victim and so it was named as killer river. The very look was fearsome and unlike Dri the water was dark though the river came from the snow range.

I was on my way to Elembro as guest in the house of Neta Emiri, who was the member of Anchal Samity – the regional council.

Apparently of pleasant disposition, Neta, however, had dubious distinction of unpredictability. His emotion might suddenly overtake the rational judgement where he would not think of consequence of killing a man who might have crossed his way.

Some time later after my departure, Neta actually wanted to kill some-one who had provoked him, but the fellow made a providential escape as he was standing with two legs apart and bullet from Neta's Gun passed between the legs!

I was cautioned by well wishers to avoid Neta but some-how I found in him a friend who would do no harm to me.

I was accompanied by Tupidhar Gogoi – the village level worker. Tupidhar an Assamese had married an Idu girl, hence he had some influence in the area.

He knew, I have written books on other tribes, and so he wanted I must write on Idu – the much maligned people for whom there was less of understanding and sympathy.

To write a book is not an easy matter. It strains the patience severely when informations are to be collected by regular field visits.

But Tupidhar would not listen – he continued to pester – which ultimately forced me to write on the Idu.

I began to visit the villages as often I could – stayed in Idu houses, observed their custom, marriage, death or festivals. Being an officer of the civil service, I had the advantage to move at will either on administrative job or supervision of developmental programme.

I knew Neta had knowledge about Idu's origin and migration which he would not normally tell any one, unless he had enough of confidence on him.

I was going as an honoured guest to his house – an event that caused much excitement. Seldom, any staff visited his village – not to speak of an officer.

The village was in an obscure corner, some ten kilometres from Brango. The track was tortuous going through a rugged terrain involving some climbs.

Neta was all the more happy – being able to bring an officer to his village, now it would enhance his position as a public leader.

The village was hidden behind a hill, three kilometres from Mathun river. Thick forest of fir covered the hill slopes which gently came down to the river bank.

Neta's house was a two storied building built with timber and tin sheet roof. It must have cost him an enormous sum to bring the materials – tin and nails from Alinye, a distance of 50 Kms. He



engaged sawyers for extracting timbers which was, however, easily available.

Only eight houses were in the village, and Neta's was the one which showed some affluence. Though plenty of land was available, yet much remained fallow—a trait with Idu who never bothered for tomorrow.

Some five kilometres from Elembro up the hill was a vast undulating land covered with dense forest. Here the blue pines, fir, oaks and some straggler *Tsuga*, rhododendrons — the species of trees of temperate and alpine region were abundantly found. No village was near by, but Idu had cut a foot track though faintly visible, which go down to Emra valley in two days of strenuous march.

In Mathun valley, the bear was a serious pest, a menace to the crops. So traps were laid in all vulnerable areas. These traps are dangerous when tensioned strings were loosened to release the sharp spike. To trek in a forest unaided was a potential danger.

Near the village, I saw bamboo spikes struck on a tree. This was the peculiar emotional outburst of an Idu who had released his pent up anger being unable to make retaliation. No one would ever remove these spikes which remain dangling on the tree.

For three days we stayed with Neta, enjoying his hospitality. He did everything to make us comfortable. Idu hospitality is proverbial — a guest is much honoured, the host goes out of his way to make him happy.

Neta was also an Igu. He had his special ceremonial gears which he always kept near the side of the wall facing the river.

Casually, he told Tupidhar to spread his bed near the fire place. He perhaps did not hear it or took the words seriously.

During the night he jumped off the bed — profusely sweating, having seen an ominous dream — some one had tried to throttle him!

Poor fellow suffered a bout of fever, and I had to leave him behind.

Later, I was told that gears were favourite to a spirit who was displeased for some one occupying his place and so curse fell on poor Tupidhar. Neta ofcourse cured him by appeasing the spirit.

I had utilised my time with Neta who narrated the origin and myths of the tribe. In his happy mood he paused every now and then to enable me to record the correct words. Later, when I read out the text to him, his face beamed with smile, only then I knew it was authentic.

One of the legends which I recored was interesting.

Ini Donduli – the mother of all beings including the Idus ancestor Todu, gave birth also to Iniyeye Joye – the bear, Ini Ashoye – the monkey and Amra – the tiger.

Todu could not stay with bear and monkey because of their intemperate mood. He then went to stay with Amra. One day, both of them went out for hunting and Todu bagged a game. Todu asked the tiger to fetch fire wood and water, so that meat could be boild. But tiger did not go, instead he said raw meat felt more tasty. Todu got very annoyed at the insolent behaviour and went out himself to bring wood and water. As soon as he left, the tiger took the entire meat leaving nothing for Todu.

On his return from the jungle, Todu saw what had happened and rebuked the tiger for his bad manners. But the tiger was far from repentant and instead said he would take whatever he liked even would not mind to eat the flesh of his mother.

In utter disgust, Todu went back to the house and told Ini Donduli what had happened and of the omimous threat from tiger. Ini Donduli pondered and decided to frustrate the evil intention of the tiger so that Todu could survive. She hatched a plan by which Todu would out manouvre the tiger.

She asked both of them to appear in a test, the winner of the test would dominate the other. In the test, both of them were to cross a river and reach the opposite bank. Todu by means of a swinging rope and tiger by swimming – whoever would touch the other bank first would be the winner.

So agreed, both of them started crossing but Ini Donduli in a clever trick threw some lice on the body of the tiger without his notice. As soon the tiger prepared for swimming, terrible itching started due to bite of lice and he began to lick these off from the body. The delay enabled Todu to reach the other bank much earlier.

He held a bow and arrow and as soon as the tiger came near, pierced his heart with shot and tiger succumbed to the wound.

The remains of the body in shape of bone then was carried down the river to another big span of water – Silileya. A big bird – Prabo, sitting near the bank saw a shining object floating under the placid water. It became inquisitive at the sight of this peculiar object and brought this near the bank and sat over it for ten years.

After ten years, a number of cubs came out in different shapes and size. The first to come out was the big tiger which went off to the mountains. Next were the leopard and panthers who went to live in lower hills. The last one was the small jungle cat which went to live in moist forest.

In their own places – they began to multiply and that is why they are still seen.

But enmity between Todu's descendants and the tiger continue till this day. They avoid each other. But, if by chance they confront and the man kills a tiger, he has to follow rigorous taboo and a special ritual must be observed, because man and tiger were the offsprings of the same mother Ini Doduli.

After killing a tiger the man on returning to the house takes a spinning wheel – *Nambo* and goes near the mortar – '*Elabe*' and laments profusely on the death of the tiger whom he had to kill although he was his elder brother. He begs for mercy and promises never to repeat the same in future.

This ritual is observed in presence of an *Igu* who recites the prayer.

The man is required to maintain strict taboo for ten days during which he is debarred from eating chilli, flesh of any jungle animal, visit any one's house or go to the cultivation or fetch fire wood. It is believed, if the taboo is not observed, he will grunt like a tiger and die out of agony only to reappear as a tiger to take revenge on man. The tiger has not forgotten the past and seizes mithun – the valuable possession of man at any opportunity.

Neta and his brother Rano escorted me to the foot track to Anini. Over Mathun river, a long suspension bridge over 400 ft. hung

precariously. Balancing on a single rope and holding on another some how, I managed to cross it. Even Neta, much accustomed in such journeys, felt apprehensive. It did not take much time when one day the entire bridge collapsed.

4 Kms. away on the down stream, the river forked in two branches till it joined again at hundred ft. away. An island is formed with a thick jungle growth. How nice it looked, yet Idus fear it being the abode of dreaded water spirit who drags the victim to the whirlpool. Across the river is a virgin forest, extending to ten Kms. upto Matuli where Dri meets Mathun. Solid rock rose to hundreds of feet and in the crags one could see colonies of rock bees. No one go there because of sheer steep face of the rock – a single misstep would plunge the body headlong into the Swirling river.

A fear gripped Anini when rumours spread that there would be catastrophe when eight planetary conjunctions take place at the time of solar eclips. The end of the world was imminent! The news came from outside and spread panic. There were prediction of earthquake – which might come anytime. Though this later event was a possibility and Government initiated some measures by first aid drill and circulating instructions on do's and donot's but more ominous threat was the planetary conjunctions! Some people even killed their pigs and consumed the meat lest these should go waste!

During the solar eclipse – no one should look towards the sky which might spoil the eyes. So much scare was created that all windows were covered with clothes and very few people went out of the houses!

Our office peon, Loga Tacho, hurriedly shifted' his residence away from the slope – telling that if earthquake really come at least he would be safe!

With enough of materials gathered from field visits, I began to work on the draft for the book on the Idus. Most evenings, I utilised my time in writing in quiet room of my house. Though the task was labourious, but some-how I managed to complete and got these neatly typed. Ladies coming on visit to our home inquired from my wife – how strange that your husband always remains so busy with official works even in the evenings!

The 160 page book – the Idus of Mathun and Dri valley came out in mid 1983. It was natural for me to be excited when I found it was well received.

Soon after I completed my book, I thought it was time for me to move out of Anini into a new place for a change. So when the Chief Secretary came on a visit, I made a polite request. I was asked the choice of the place – the name Longding in Tirap district just came in mind. The Chief Secretary kept his words and issued the posting order in march 1980

But soon after, another message followed that I should stay on for sometimes as Ugen Pulger, the EAC at Longding, could not be released.

It was disappointment when I was ready to go and my reliever had already arrived.

As MI8 squadron would move out soon, I took few days leave and boarded an incoming helicopter with all my beggages and left Anini. It was only after I arrived at the air base that a message was relayed to me cancelling my transfer! But I ignored it and instead proceeded to my home from where I asked for a month leave. Later, with some efforts a posting place was arranged in Nafra Buragaon, in West Kameng District.

## In the Valley of Bichom

I had no idea of the place — but the name Nafra struck familiar. Some one mentioned, it was hardly 50 Kms. from Bomdila — the district headquarters and connected with an all weather motorable road.

It was not Nafra but Thrizino where I had to go — the seat of the Extra Assistant Commissioner, Nafra Buragaon Sub Division.

On arrival at Tezpur, I got the depressing news of the place — no road or electricity nor any other basic facilities. It was 17 Kms. foot march from the road head across a river. The total distance from Bomdila was 150 Kms.

Yet I had no other alternative but to go. Only regret was that family would stay back at home during the entire tenure. My daughter, who had been in a convent, lost much of her precious years in Anini where teaching was poor. So she had to begin afresh before getting admission in the convent again.

It was June 1980 when I left for Bomdila. After crossing the check post at Bhalukpung, 50 Kms. from Tezpur, the metalled road climbed to the deeply forested hills following the Kameng river which was swollen by heavy rain.

Here at Bhalukpung a tragedy had occurred a few years back when a bus-load of passengers were drowned in the river as the water spilled over the road.

The dense forest is the den of elephants and many gory incidents had occurred in the past. Even now, during early morning or at night, one must be cautious of solitary rogue which might come on the way.

The road being the life line for several Army units — the task force remains busy in clearing the land slides. The steep gradient in rocky hills gives a chilling feeling as the vertical incline surely proves fatal for a skidding vehicle.

Suddenly, without a warning there was a continuous rattling sound of rolling stones falling down from a broken hill. Narrowly we escaped as the jeep just passed through a few seconds earlier. Behind us, a long line of convoy got stranded for how many hours I did not know.

After covering another 50 Kms, a thick fog blurred the vision. A warning sign board hung on the road cautioning the driver to be careful on their move. In winter the fog is more dense.

Ahead of Army divisional Hqrs at Tenga, the road zigzagged into a steady climb to reach Bomdila.

Spread over narrow shoulders of the hill range, the town is situated at the height of 9500 ft. The tiers of buildings rise one above the other in the steep slopes. The first impression gives an ominous feeling of total catastrophe in the event of a massive land slide.

The forest around Bomdila had already thinned by continuous encroachment. As the winter is severe with heavy frost and snow fall — the demand for fuel wood has left with no other alternative. Two hydel power stations supply electricity, but generation has never been steady.

Being a district headquarters, there is rapid growth of the town. Trade and commerce simultaneously expanded to meet the growing need of various establishment. The people who are Monpas and Sherdukpens have strong business acumen which resulted in their affluence. Apple or potato which were never known before has now become important crops and brings enough of cash to the people.

I had to take some briefing before leaving for Thrizino.

The officiating Deputy Commissioner was T. Lhendup who had served long years in the frontier. Originally from Sikkim, he had now settled in Bomdila after his marriage with a Monpa woman.

Backed by experience, Lhendup was efficient in his works and had a pragmatic approach to many problems. He never acted in

haste or arbitrary manner. Only distraction was his deep involvement in religion. Being a Buddhist, he meticulously followed the rituals taking off time from official functions.

Lhendup gave me enough of information about Thrizino – a place nevertheless had earned the dubious distinction as exile. Depressing though, there was little choice for me. I cursed the government for being so unsympathetic.

With hardly anything to do at Bomdila, I left for Thrizino with two guides – both belonging to Aka tribe. They spoke fluent Assamese and immediately struck a rapport with me.

Bubbling with enthusiasm to escort the Extra Assistant Commissioner who was coming to their place, they fed me with exaggerated stories about their land being so hospitable as no one would like to go back once one happened to be there!

We moved out of Bomdila in a jeep along the same metalled road going towards Tezpur. At 60 Kms. – the place called Nichiphu where it bifurcated, a gravel road took off following an easy gradient through a dense forest. The road went to Seppa – the headquarters of East Kameng district – 100 Kms. farther to north east.

Several pot holes bared on the way with accumulated water. It was obvious, the road not being a defence priority received the least attention of Border road task force. The jeep rattled on the loose boulders and slush, slowing down the speed.

We were following the Tenga river – a tributary of Bichom which falls into river Kameng. Across the river, perched on the gentle slopes of the blue hills, were the villages – the names later became so familiar – Jamiri, Husigaon, Buragaon, Karanganiya, Palatari. A few buildings appeared in between – the school and other Government establishment.

Suddenly, through the screen of forest appeared Thrizino – a nice little place with a dozen tin roofed buildings laid on the saddle of a hill. I felt an immediate excitement – visualizing wonderful time.

Covering a distance of 50 Kms. in three hours at last we came to the road head at Palazi, a small dinghy place with few shops and



a primary school. So far only one village seen — Ramdagania — with hardly a dozen houses. In between the long stretch of the road were the camps of task force and forest department where few officials with labour gangs stayed.

Leaving the road at Palazi we now took the foot track which went down 4 Kms. to the Bichom river. Over the river hung a 300 ft. long suspension bridge with wooden foot board to enable the ponies to cross over.

The bridle path made a gradual climb to Thrizino yet 13 Kms. away.

My youthful escorts Madhu and Phuntso saw my move in hurried pace and decided to take a short cut by a steep climb to reduce the distance. The narrow contorted track passed through the forest of wild oaks and climbed to the hill where the Serpentine bridle path appeared again. The road now passed through the gentle slope to cover the last lap of the journey of 4 Kms to Thrizino.

A motley crowd gathered soon led by the diminutive figure of the circle officer — A.K. Bora. There I met all the officials of Thrizino — not even two dozens.

Slowly we marched forward through the forested path and arrived at the saddle of the hill where the small township was laid on the undulating land with dozen of tin roofed buildings raised on wooden platform.

Situated at a height of 4500 ft., the view was magnificent extending far to the horizon. In clear sunny days, the eyes catch the glimpse of distant blue hills of lower subansiri.

At first, it appeared the place was for a serene contemplation. There was no jostling crowd, nor the hustle and bustle of community life nor hooting of the motor cars. All around were the green forest spilling over to far distance.

The legend says the place belonged to a tribe Thrizi long since lost due to a divine curse. Here and there a few moulds only reminded of the hoary past.

With no electricity or piped water, and only with a tenuous supply and communication link, the few officials cursed their luck, being thrown into exile.

The Administrative centre was the headquarters of the Extra Assistant Commissioner, Nafra Buragon Sub Division. The post was upgraded as importance was felt to extend the control on the outlying areas too far from Bomdila. Being in a corner, the place was linked with foot tracks. The mail was carried by the runners relayed from place to place, and more often than not, the link get lost if movement did not coincide.

All the urgent communication passed by wireless transmission but this too snaps if the sets go off-air due to mechanical snag. Communication is again restored only when replacement arrives, which might take long time.

More difficult was the supply. The stores were dumped at Palizi — 17 Kms. away, brought by the truck from Bomdila. These are then splitted into small loads for lifting by porters and ponies, hardly few quintals at a time. All the ponies look so rickety as their owners never cared for their feed, their bones almost bursting through the seam and they move up hill with great difficulty.

To feed the officials and their dependents had never been easy. All the blames fell on the poor manager of the co-operative store, if the supply ran short. The transport depended on the rickety ponies on which the manager had no control.

A small concrete helipad constructed sometime back did not serve any purpose except movement of VIP who might come. During my stay, only once did a helicopter came with the Chief Minister.

Two water holes available in a depression provided the drinking water. A survey revealed a perennial source seven kms. away, but no matter whatever the cost might be a pipe line had to be laid. A year later, the Government sanctioned the scheme but it was an uphill task to lift the 2 inch pipes from 17 Kms. away road head. Mobilizing whatever man power was available, eventually we managed to bring these upto Thrizino, but only long after my departure, the pipes were laid and the town had then enough of water never dreamt of before.

A health unit functioned under a doctor who had half a dozen para Medical staff. Dr. Nath — the Medical Officer, was posted for sometime but later was relieved by Dr. Norbu Thungon, a sherdukpen from Rupa; he was the first medical graduate from the district.

The doctor, however, seldom stayed there as duties were varied and temptation to go down on some or the other pretext often became irresistible. The dispensary then remained under the charge of a pharmacist who, any way, functioned quite efficiently.

The primary school was for some time with two teachers – Ojha and Choudhury, both from the plains of Assam. Agile and active, they enlivened the social life at Thrizino. The school was later upgraded to a middle school with the posting of a senior teacher, Hazarika, who brought much improvement.

There were Junior Engineers of Public Works and Rural Works Departments. Their presence was hardly felt as their beat included Palizi – the road-head where they stayed too often ostensibly for work supervision.

The other departments were agriculture and veterinary, manned by an Agriculture Inspector and Veterinary Assistant Surgeon. Later, the VAS was withdrawn leaving the charge to a field Assistant.

In the office after the departure of the Circle Officer, we had an Upper Division Clerk – J.N. Boruah, accountant – Phukan and Sharma, Lower Division Clerks Ajit Dasgupta, Bishnu Bhattacharjee, Peons – Renu Aka, Phuntso, Kanailal, Mail runners – Kharu Aka, Kul Bahadur, Tafam Bangni, Political Interpreter Norbu Jebiso. A 20 members Agency labour corpse provided man power for odd jobs including carrying loads.

Only consolation was the living quarters with wooden platform, panels and tin roof and improvised toilet facilities. But all the staff did not have the comfort as buildings were few. Except for families, others stayed together cramping in whatever little space they could get.

After the night fall it was almost ghostly silence but for the clinking sound of the bells of the ponies which graze outside. Few lamps flickered as Kerosene was scarce. Occasionally, head lights of passing vehicle were seen in the far distance, that reminded with pang of sorrow how isolated we were.

During the day, the time passed with some works in the office, but again dull moments followed without any activities. Except a brisk walk on road to palizi, nothing else was there as other diversion.

Within a few days, I was in a breaking point as to what to do with my time. Then suddenly a flicker of hope came – we must organise ourselves in community works.

It was soon an experiment, no one had thought of it before. Every hour was utilised in so much of works that the feeling of isolation never occurred there after.

We decided to make a ring road around the town, keeping in view the future expansion. The 8 ft. wide road nearly two kms. long was cut through forest and steep slopes. The works were divided amongst officials and villagers who enthusiastically responded to the grand programme. It took three months to complete the road and how nice it looked when it became a place for evening walks. The town boundary was demarcated by bringing more land and maps prepared with the help of our survey staff which was later approved by the Government.

We constructed a community hall with accommodation for 200 people. A platform was made with sawn timbers donated by the people. So strong was the foundation that it could easily last for few years. The opening ceremony was marked with tremendous enthusiasm as people from distant villages came to see it. The community hall then became the hub of our activities. We had the amplifier, musical instruments – all purchased from our own resources.

Near the community hall – land was levelled for a Mini foot ball field. Here too, much labour was spent to dig the earth, remove the boulders.

To meet our requirements of vegetables we cleared a half hectare of land, fenced it with bamboo, divided into plots and planted seeds of seasonal crops. Within a few months there were so much of vegetables that we sold these and got substantial amount for our consolidated fund.

Simultaneously, we took up programmes of tree plantation. I spotted some plants in the jungle which I thought to be shade plants and might give a beautiful look.

Every village had a share of 20 or 40 plants. Even from a distance we brought pine seedlings. These were carefully planted

and fenced, but most of them did not survive as ponies and pigs became a nuisance. Subsequently, I brought eucalyptus seedlings which thrived very well. Perhaps, after many years when we would be no more, this might remind the visitors the good works done by early pioneers.

We also brought some efficiency in the office. A new building which was earlier sanctioned by the Government was speedily completed which relieved the congestion. A big sign board was painted by our energetic staff – Ajit Das Gupta, who had talents now found expressions in so many ways. Das Gupta called Benu was a nice boy hardly in his teens and was an asset.

We improved our mail communication by drawing a schedule. The relay runners could not be avoided though, but efficiency was brought by following the strict schedule and posting of runners at short distances. We also introduced direct runners whenever necessity arose. The extra departmental post office started functioning more efficiently.

The only problem we could not solve was the supply. With few porters and two rickety ponies it was impossible to lift the stores any way.

Later, we tried with the transport contractors of Bomdila even offering liberal incentives, but they hardly stayed as the maintenance cost was too high.

To make our small place somewhat beautiful, we removed the shanty sheds that had mushroomed in the camp area.

The people of nearby villages found it convenient just to build up a shed in the vacant land where they ostensibly opened a shop. Someone even removed his entire house from the village and constructed one just in front of our office !

With some administrative measures, we managed to remove all those ugly structures and allotted them alternate sites where plots were given to individuals who had trading license.

My house was on a gentle slope – a small cosy bungalow constructed with wooden posts and panels with iron sheet roofing. It had a raised platform, 3 ft. above the ground.

In the front, a narrow uncovered portico just allowed some space for the visitors.

I chalked out programme to beautify the house – an arched gate, paved path, fence-soon gave a better look. A kitchen garden, poultry run also came up. Inside the house, the drawing room had the maroon coloured window curtains and decorative pieces made with drift woods.

It was apparent to me that to live in a place like Thrizino so isolated and remote, I must develop active habit. My kitchen garden provided an outlet where I worked for some time every morning. How nice it turned when I could get all the vegetables for my kitchen.

It was an exhilarating experience, when in early morning, I had a 2 Kms. walk on the road to Palizi. The Chirping birds, gentle breeze, mysterious forest all revealed the nature's beauty and brought instant peace and tranquility in the mind. I wonder how often many succumb to delusion that life is not worth living.

To provide reading materials, we opened a library. Periodically, a trunk load of books were brought from the District Library, Bomdila. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to read so many books of my choice, mostly on travelogue and history.

We also brought news papers though late issues, but any way that kept us informed of the events of the world outside.

I did not do much of writing while at Thrizino except jotting down stray thoughts in the diary. There was enough time for serene contemplation, but some how I had no inclination to write – it just could not be explained. After so many years, it still appears a paradox.

## The Tribe That Call Hrusso

People of Thrizino area are known as Aka – a term given by the outsiders for the prominent tattoo marks in their face. But they call themselves as *Hrusso*. Some how, there was no resentment of being called Aka, rather it was accepted and now widely used.

Spread over two dozen villages on the slope of the hill or on flat land at average height of 3,000 ft., the population was hardly 2000, a figure much low compared to the available land.

Bichom, an important tributary of Kameng, is the main river. It is snow fed and carries large volume of water. It has three perennial tributaries – Dirang, Tenga and Kheyang or Kaya.

The villages are small – hardiy with 40 to 60 people except the big settlement of Dijangania which has more than 400 people.

Their neighbours are Bangnis and Mijis. While there is no marriage relation with Bangnis who are akin to Nishi, but with Mijis there is close relationship with marriage and social ties. Except the dialect variation, there is little to distinguish between these two tribes.

The other sub tribe Khrome lives in Pichang village who had only dialect variation, but in all respect they are indistinguishable from the Akas.

Most of the village could be covered in a day of foot march from Thrizino. The nearest villages are Sakrin, Gijiri, Palatari, Dijangania, Tulu, Kararamo, Karangania, Mophromo.

The Akas had a turbulent history. Earlier records mentioned two clans amongst them – Hazarikhowa or Kutsun – eater of thousand hearth, Kapaschor or Kovatsun – the lurking thieves. Each

of the clans was under a chief. The Kapaschor or Kavatsun had a right to Posa — a tribute paid to hill tribe of the frontier for maintaining peace. The Posa still continues and is paid in shape of cloth and yarn.

The Kavatsun, under the leadership of their legendary chief Tagi Raja, had indulged in loot and plunder in British administered villages. In 1829, he was captured and sent to jail. Later, he was released but he took revenge on the people who had betrayed him. In 1835, he wiped out British out post at Balipara by massacring the men, women and remained fugitive for seven years. At last, exasperated with the hardship he surrendered. Later, he was pardoned after he took a solemn oath.

For 40 years since then, peace reigned in the land. But in 1883 the lull was broken by sudden raid on a forest outpost at Balipara.

It was in connection with an exhibition in Calcutta where apparels, ornaments, weapons of the tribe were wanted for display in the exhibition. One Lakhindhar — the Mauzadar of Balipara was sent by the Government to obtain these and if possible one Aka man and woman also to be brought.

Akas, however, suspected the motive, seized the Mauzadar and his servant and put them in stockade. The chief at that time was one Medhi — his brother, Chandi, raided the forest out-post at Balipara and carried off the Ranger and his cook. Meantime, Lakhindhar — the Mauzadar died in captivity.

Soon after, the punitive action followed. The troops marched to the hill but advance guards were attacked. There were two deaths and some injuries. When the troops arrived, the Akas retreated but their villages were burnt. Blockade of routes was announced which continued till 1888 after Medhi and Chandi surrendered to the Government. Since then Akas did not disturb the peace any more.

An Aka village is a cluster of houses either on a slope or on a flat land. The house is rectangular structure of average length of 30 ft. and width of 20 ft. Raised on crossed wooden struts — 4 to 6 ft. above the ground, the platform is made of split bamboos. The wall may be either of split bamboos or wooden planks. The roof is thatched with sun grass or fronds of cane leaves.



The house has two compartments divided by an ordinary partition wall. Below the platform is the open space for pigs.

A notched ladder is put in the front for entrance to the house.

Behind the front door, there is small compartment which is meant for the guests – *Thumona*, who are honoured visitors in every Aka house. This compartment is left unoccupied even if there is no guest.

The main hall is big compartment where all the members of the family stay together. In the entrance there is a hearth where an Iron tripod is used as oven. In two small enclosures on either side, house-hold articles and firewood are kept.

There is no smoke outlet in the house and the inside remains dark.

The granaries are usually situated near the house. It is also on a raised platform supported on crossed wooden pillars. The roof is thatched with grass or fronds of cane leaves.

Strict restriction is followed during the first menstrual period of a girl. She has to live in a separate apartment which is away from the main hall. During the period, she is not allowed to enter the main hall and shun male members. Food and water are served to her separately and her utensils are not to be used by others. She cannot even touch the hearth. if required, a fire place may be made to keep herself warm. No one should come to her except the children of the family.

In subsequent menstrual periods, this type of rigid restrictions are not followed, but she should live in an isolated corner and she should not engage in domestic chores. Routine works are resumed only after the period is over and she cleans herself.

The women wear a number of silver ornaments which are obtained from the outside markets. In addition to these, they wear also coloured beads.

The silver ornaments are *Melu* – a flat ornament worn over the chest, *Rambin* – the big earring, *Gichi* – also an earring, *Gejuri* – the wristlet. Well to do women wear a silver chain – *Lenchii*.

*Aescheri* – the sacred ornament which is an ancestral property, is worn by both men and women. In addition, an Aka woman is fond of a decorated silver fillet with a flat piece in the front put around the forehead.

All girls have tattoo marks which are borne before they attain the puberty. A scratch is made from the forehead upto the tip of the nose and then in the chin it bifurcates in number of lines. Pine wood resin is then smeared over the wound. When this dries up, it leaves behind a permanent blue mark on the face.

Men's wear consists of a long coarse cotton, wrapped around and held by pins over the shoulders. Lower part of the garment reaches below the knee. The cloth is held by a sash in the waist. A jacket is worn over it which reaches little above the knee. The long hair is gathered in a knot on the centre of the head.

Men do not use head gear except a ring cap made of bamboo. In front of this hat, feather of bird or bamboo leaves are fixed as decorations. The ear lobes are pierced and, sometimes, small bamboo tubes are inserted. Coloured bead necklaces are also worn.

They carry a dao stuck to the sash in the waist.

Women's dress consists of dark red or white garment in the body hanging down from shoulders upto the ankle. Like man, this is also held in the waist by a sash. They wear a jacket which is little longer and reaches upto the knee. The long hair is tied in a bun at the back.

Both men and women wear a piece of cloth in legs, stitched into cylindrical shape, leaving the feet only uncovered. This protects them from the bite of dimdam — *simulium indicum* which is half the size of a small house fly, whose bite produces an irritating blister which might turn into festering wound.

The art of weaving is not common among the Aka woman. Some use small portable loom where they weave bags which have some floral designs.

The girls are fond of decorating their face with resin of pine — *Lengchung*. During marriage ceremonies, both the bride and the groom's party take great delight by smearing each other's face with *lengchung* oil.

The only craft in which men have proficiency is basketry. They weave baskets of different shape and size from bamboo and canes.

They follow jhum cultivation — the slash and burn method. Maize is the main crop and forms their principal diet. Along with

maize they grow some millets and as well pumpkin, colocasia and yams, but rice is cultivated only occasionally. In spite of sufficient available land, agriculture as an occupation did not appeal to the Akas. With the limited return from the field, many depend on '*Rambang*' – the tree fern and wild sago plants – at the time of scarcity. The preparation of cakes from the pith is although labourious, yet no one actually bothers.

The field huts called '*pam*' become temporary shelters for the family during cultivation time. They may remain there for long period tending the crops. When several families have their huts in adjacent areas, these may ultimately turn into a village where eventually they would shift abandoning the parent village.

Meat forms the essential diet in which pork and beef are common. There is no taboo to take flesh of any animals or birds except dog, snake, crow or hawk.

Fermented drink – *Mingri*, is prepared from corn or the millet. The preparation is simple – at first maize or millet is boiled and is allowed to cool. A yeast – *fa* is added to it. This is then packed in leaves and kept for two days for fermentation. After that it is put in a funnel shaped bamboo receptacle where hot water is poured. The liquid oozes out which is collected in a container. The people are fond of drink – in festive occasions they exceed their limit.

The tribe is sub divided into number of clans and follow the rule of clan exogamy. They strictly adhere to tribe endogamy, except the Mijis with whom they have much similarity.

The slavery system was common among the Akas. The slaves are known as *Khulo* who remain outside the Aka society and live in same village. The person, once a slave, remains a slave forever and can marry only among the slaves.

Though the slavery had been abolished and slaves were official emancipated, but the slaves after many years of total subjugation have no where to go and have to depend on support of their one time master. They till the soil, fetch fire wood, look after the cultivation and any other odd jobs in return for shelter and food.

In some of the Aka villages, there were dark complexioned men and women, descendants of one time captives brought from the

plains. They were now indistinguishable from the local people except for the complexion.

The Akas deal with their past slaves some what harshly. It happened at Thrizino, when a boy came to my house with severe bruises in his body, complaining of beating by his one time master with whom he would no more like to stay.

I rescued the boy from the clutches of his tormentor and gave him job. But peculiar subjugated mentality persisted and some time later, he voluntarily went back to him inspite of beating!

In Jamiri village – an influential man had twenty slaves. They toil so hard, yet never mind the suffering, would not desert their one time master!

Marriage system of the Akas is by negotiation. At first, a go between – *Mukhou*, enters into the deal after which suitability is ascertained by divination. It is the *Mukhou*, a relative of the bridegroom, who plays an important part.

The bride price consists of mithuns, Iron tripods, silk cloth, pigs, a piece of cloth to the each member of the village and one pair of cloth each to bride's brothers.

The amount varies according to the status of the bride's parents. If he comes from a well to do family, the number of mithuns may easily go up to ten or more along with increased number of other articles.

Bride's parents also give some gifts to their daughter at the time of her marriage. These are usually ornaments and utensils. The ancestral ornament '*aescheri*', is also given to the daughter. A dao in a silver scabbard, iron tripods also provided. These become her personal possession in her husband's house.

Another system of marriage which is not so uncommon is by elopement or marriage by capture. It does not require an elaborate negotiation, nor does it involve the complex rituals. The only exception is that direct pallel cousin marriage with one's father's brother's son or daughter are strictly prohibited.

There were instances the man so poor can not afford to pay the price, and so he may be allowed to stay in his in-laws house for

3 to 4 years and render services in house and field and thus raise some amount to pay the price of the girl. However, he can have marital relations and have children. This system is accepted as an economic necessity.

The Aka marriage ceremony is accompanied by much fun and gaiety.

The date of marriage having been fixed, the party comprising the groom, parents and relatives and as well some people from the village move in a procession to the bride's village. On their way, the party makes a lot of fun, reaching every hill top give loud shout – Ho! On arriving near the village again give a loud shout, signalling the arrival of the party. At that time, people from bride's house accompanied by villagers come to receive them.

Here the guests are given a small feast. After the feast, the party then proceeds to the bride's place accompanied by their hosts. Near the house they again give a loud shout, and the hosts then pull out their swords as a sign of resistance. Both the parties then pretend a mock fight – brandishing the swords in air. This mock fight continues for sometime and ultimately the bride's party admits defeat and allows the groom's party entrance to the house. The host then arranges a big feast amidst songs and dance by girls which continue till late night.

The old women dress themselves as men, drag the groom's party and indulge in jokes and gossips, This creates a lot of fun amongst all who enjoy the merry making scene.

On the third day, the girls of the bride's village indulge in more fun. They prepare black paint from resin oil, smear the face of the boys of the groom's village. The boys also return the compliment with equal fun and gusto which continues for a whole day.

Divorce is permissible in exceptional circumstances like barrenness or infidelity. But in certain cases, when a woman runs away with her lover, the person has to pay heavy compensation to her former husband before he is allowed to keep her. In case of his inability to pay, the woman will be forced to stay with the husband.

If a married woman runs away from her husband to other village attempts are made to bring her back. Lot of bitterness ensues with

the run away married woman either with her lover or simply deserting the husband. In former days, even blood feuds were common.

Adultery is a heinous crime and involves heavy punishment. Even the aggrieved husband may not leave the matter at this, the adulterer may be done to death.

The Akas have a system of friendship – *Thumona*, which develops a strong feeling of attachment and strengthens the tribes solidarity. A person invites any member of the community of the other village to accept the *thumona* – the offer of friendship. On arrival to his house, the guest is given a warm reception and a special accommodation in the house where he is lavishly entertained with presentation of gifts. The guest too returns the compliment by inviting the host to visit him which is duly accepted.

The Akas have various types of dances – ritual or for entertainment. The ritual dances are performed for victory or revenge.

Victory dance is performed when a rival is slain or predator like tiger is killed. The dance is performed by covering the body of the slain animal with leaves and branches and then going round the village in rhythmic motion with occasional gruntings and shouts. They carry the weapons of chase along with them. The priest – *Mugou*, has an important role as he propitiates the spirits.

The ritual dance is performed as a symbol of revenge for sudden death of a person. The belief is that the death is due to displeasure of spirits who have their abodes on certain trees. The trees are felled, and leaves along with crooked branches supposed to be special favourite place of the spirits are collected, and dance is performed around the village and then to grave yard where these are left.

The mask dance is performed to drive out the spirits responsible for an epidemic.

Two or three persons are only associated with this dance along with the priest – *Mugou*.

The dancers cover the whole body with leaves and wear mask of animals. They go round the village followed by the priest without uttering any words. Only the people who accompany shout Ho Ho. – The women do not participate in this dance.

The festive dance is performed in marriage ceremony, entertainment of guest, harvest of crops or during house inauguration function.

There are different stages of performance. In the first stage, the dance is accompanied by a drum and cymbal. Here every one gets a chance to show his or her ability of rhythmic performance for a few minutes. The dancer may put a rhythm in the song, but this is not compulsory. The audience shout three times Hoi – during the dance. In the second stage, the dancer is at first a boy who dances a few steps accompanied by drum beating. The girl joins and sequence changes step by step of movement. This results in competition between both of them amidst continuous applause from the audience. In the third stage, the girls stand in a row and start dancing accompanied by beating of drum and cymbals without song.

In the fourth stage, the performers stand in a row and sing. This is accompanied by beating of drum and cymbals. The movement of the body changes according to variation of rhymes in the song.

In the fifth stage, no cymbal or drum is used. Here, dancers may stand in two separate rows, face to face, start dancing accompanied by songs. Boys and girls may join together or dance apart. This is also a competitive dance and a performer tries his or her best to out do the other. This generates a lot of fun and provides enjoyment.

The Akas believe in a supreme being *Tcharo*, who is magnificent and benign, presides over all animate and inanimate beings.

They identify a few deities with forces of nature – the sky, the earth, mountains or the water. A powerful deity – *sikchi*, reigns in the under – world where all go after death.

To ensure the blessing of *Tcharo*, he is appeased from time to time with appropriate sacrifice of animals. Any negligence may result in immense sufferings and so it is of utmost importance to observe the ceremony once a year. The time for the ceremony normally falls in the month of April or May after the preparation of Jhum and may continue from two to ten days depending on sacrifice of animals. Longer time is required if a Mithun is sacrificed.

The most important functionary in an Aka village is the priest – *Mugou*. *Mugou* is consulted in every affair – marriage

ceremony, community function, illness, death or cultivation. He reads the omens, finds out the effects, pronounces the verdict which is then binding on every one. In all functions, *Mugou* is indispensable as he is the media between the laity and the spirits. It is he who can identify a spirit and appease him with appropriate propitiation.

Incidentally, a village chief – the *Gaonbura*, might be a *Mugou* who combines his office with mundane duty with ritualistic performances.

A person is always haunted by *chige* – the spirit. It is they who render the life of the people miserable and all steps are taken to appease them by appropriate propitiation and sacrifice. In some serious case, when an obdurate spirit refuses to leave a sacrifice of Mithun might be necessary. The propitiation may continue for six to ten days during which no one is allowed to enter the house.

Several malevolent spirits who hover round require propitiation from time to time. In the cultivation field too – the spirit – *wecoeseche* who is present in every operation, must be appropriately appeased. This is done just before the sowing starts. At that time, the field remains out of bound for a fortnight. There might arise the need for further propitiation if sudden calamity struck – like pest attack, heavy rains or drought.

The Akas practice burial. The ceremonial mourning continues for ten days when all other activities come to a stop.

They believe in after life. The soul travels to a place – *Jana* – from where different path are followed according to merits or demerits during the life. Interestingly, Akas believe in transmigration of soul. The *Mugou* makes the prayer to let the soul take birth in same family.

The Institution of 'Rani' is prevalent in Akas Society. The Ranis are descendants of the Chief who once ruled over the land.

The Rani is called *Nugun* and given a high social status, and has great deal of respect and influence. She is invited in all important meetings and entertains the participants with food and drink.

Earlier, there were two Ranis of *Jamiri* and *Husigaon* villages but after the death of Rani at *Jamiri*, who left no issue, the only Rani now exists in *Husigaon*.



In Aka society, affluence of an individual counts for his status. But in order to command influence and respect, he must be concerned about the well being of his people. Thus, he should be benevolent enough to help the needy, arrange proper justice, take active initiative in community functions. Such a person who is well respected and regarded by the people is called *Nichleu – Nuggo*. There are only few persons of such eminent status to be eligible for the term *Nichleu – Nuggo*.

The affairs in the village rest with the council or *Mel* which consists of *Gaonbura* or headman, his associates – the *Bora* and *Gibba*. They too have to be influential in the village to command respect by their performance. Besides them, the elderly people, also participate in the *mel*.

There is no fixed place for the meeting of the *mel*. In earlier times, the village council had important voice, but with the advent of Panchayati Raj – the grass root democracy – its importance has been relegated.

## The Long Detour

My first visit to an Aka house was in Giziri village – just half a kilometre from Thrizino across a depression. The village had eight houses, but none showed any affluence. In fact, it appeared that Akas just live on some how and have never been interested in hard labour. The houses require repair or reconstructions, but even then, in worn out condition, the families stay and I was amazed to see none was in sullen mood.

The headman of the village Glow Aglasaw, an old man with an innocent face, invited me to his house where he offered *Mingri* – the millet beer. His son, Nichiew, was a budding contractor having good income. He did not stay in the village and constructed a house in Thrizino.

As I chatted for long in Semi dark room, I never knew that the Aka houses were full of minute fleas, almost invisible to the eyes, which give a painful bite. People have developed immunity, but on our soft limbs, parasites found a wonderful pasture!

Soon I came back to my house – the whole night passed without a wink. Dozens of fleas had quietly found a comfortable niche in my clothes. In the powerful beam of the torchlight I could find nothing yet suffered terrible itching.

Next morning, all the clothes were taken out to the sun and thoroughly dusted and the room was washed with phenol.

The other menace was dimdam – *Simulium Indicum*, a small pale white fly which bites on the exposed limbs resulting in irritation. Scratch may turn into a festering wound if not treated properly. The dimdam appears only in summer.

We reduced the menace to some extent by clearing our compounds and surroundings. Luckily the dimdams never come inside the house.

Ten kilometres from Thrizino was the biggest Aka settlement — Dizangania with 45 houses. The foot track never followed an easy gradient, always there were heavy climbs and descents. In fact, no where the journey had been easy.

Pecha Sidisow was the headman of the village — whose son, Sidi was now an important member of the district council. Sidi stayed in Thrizino where he built a double storied building with the money collected through contract and business. He had ponies and was biding his time when road would come — to purchase a truck.

Pecha was now around fifty and quite active. He had some grand ideas of developing his village. Soon, we initiated a number of schemes — piped water supply school, community hall, model houses, but his people were indifferent — some of them even shifted their houses to another part. Pecha understandably fumes and frets, his son gone to Thrizino, All young men are now interested in easy life — gone are the good old days! Pecha had three wives, yet he contemplated to bring another one! Two years later, just before my departure Pecha had fulfilled his aim — a young girl hardly in her teens came to his house!

Pecha seldom moved out in important business until he read the omen. Once he told me how he escaped from sure death when a big tree suddenly fell on his path. This he later found out — the spirit was displeased with him.

The epidemic of dysentery breaks out every year in Aka villages just at the harvest time. There were deaths especially among the children. Too much consumption of immatured maize was found to be the cause. The scarcity of food forces them to premature harvest.

Pangku Sidisow — a smart young man who is closely related to Pecha, now maintained defiant attitude towards him. He had shifted his house along with half a dozen families to a kilometre further down the village. Pangku would not listen to any one as he thought his new found place was the best for a model village. Our programme of a model village remained as it was as people were never united.

Pangku was otherwise a jolly good fellow – always in happy mood. He had some education, but left the school half way like most young Akas. Education some how never interested them – better to lead a carefree life!

Pangku's wife – a Mizi girl was from Nafra – 56 kms from Bomdila. Like Pangku she had also charming face.

He had ten people in his house – all descendants of former slaves. They did not desert him – looked after all his works while he moved around leisurely.

Pangku became my instant favourite. In my long distance tour, I always took him with me. He went on chatting endlessly narrating interesting stories. I gave him the name record player – Put the Pangku's tape and it would go on and on!

Just at the outskirts of the village – there was a rest house – building with bamboos and thatch. A caretaker, Ram Bahadur Mogor, stayed with his family. He had eleven children – an alarming rate of growth! To feed so many mouths, the poor fellow was in perpetual anxiety as we could not provide so much of ration from our meagre stock.

Six kilometres from the village, down the hill slope is a sprawling valley – Keya, where a meandering river of the same name leisurely flows.

The immense potentiality of the valley with huge deposit of humus remained largely unexplored. The meandering Keya – brings enough of organic matters in its twenty kilometres course and deposit these during every flood. The river is devoid of stone or sand and abounds in plenty of fish.

The surrounding hills forming a rim – gently rolls down to the edge of the valley. The total area exceeds 1000 acres and much more could be retrieved by clearing the jungle.

Only an enterprising farmer – Monai, a middle aged fellow, now stooping with the burden of works had cleared some patches where he had raised beautiful crops of paddy and maize in bunded fields. The yield was so much that he even sold some of this produce to the people. More over the river provided him with enough of fish.

Monai was the descendent of a slave and hence had no social status. Though he is now fully identified with his one time master – the Akas, Yet his position has not improved inspite of his better economic condition.

Wanja Sidisow, the brother of Pecha also had some cultivation field. Wanja, otherwise a nice fellow but like most Akas, had never been serious in cultivation. He had luxuriant maize crops, yet he seldom visited the field. Wanja too is a budding contractor which is a more attractive profession.

Pangku too had some plots of maize but seldom visits his field. It was not unexpected that with such fertile land Kaya valley could become the granary of the district.

Abundant bamboo in Kaya valley was the source of conflict between two villages – Dijangania and Pichang as young bamboo shoots form important diet as pickles. As the river changed course after a flood, both the villages claimed new areas on the river bank where the bamboo forest stood. A part from this conflicting claim was the tension built up due to elopement of girls – traditional system of forcible marriage.

It was the Pichang which had inferiority complex being subordinate to Dijangania – a powerful Aka village.

Both the village had influential headmen – Dibru at Pichang and Medi at Dijangania and were itching for a show-down.

It was some time in 1968 – when the river again changed its course and some part of Dijangania land went to the other bank. Medi sent ten sturdy youth fully armed to see the area and found Dibru already there. Immediately, arrows were released and Dibru died on the spot.

There was cry for a war soon after, and both the villages arrayed against each other with full battle gears. They dug defense in opposite banks, but before the situation escalated, the Government moved swifty. Rashid Yusuf Ali, Deputy Commissioner, Bomdila and Sono Lobraj, Addl. Dy. Commissioner, Seppa camped at the Kaya valley with Police force. Though at first, leaders of Dijangania came but soon they fled the place for fear of being arrested. But later, some of them including Pecha Sidisow surrendered and rendered to custody for two years.

After their release from the custody, it was thought the situation had become normal, the police post then moved to Thrizino. But Pichang people did not forget the incident. Secretly, they were trailing the path of Medi – the headman of Dijangania.

On a fateful day – Medi with few men were going by forest path to Bameng village of East Kameng District when suddenly he was ambushed and killed by gun shot. Though situation became tense again, but the Government moved swiftly and established a police post at Pichang. Since then, there were no more troubles though underlying tension still continued and victims' families avoided visiting each other's place.

Three Bangni village – Talam, Pangkar and Chumbokliyak border the valley. Bangnis belong to the greater Nishi community with some variation in house building, village settlement. Unlike Nishis, their houses are not widely dispersed. The other difference is in their dance and song which have more variety with elegant pause and melodious tune.

Yet the same system of 'Yalung' – the quasi Judicial Meeting prevails, where endless bickerings on marriage and dowry occupies much of the time of the people. They are otherwise very simple and hospitable. Compared with Akas, the Bangnis are much more active and their houses never gave a worn out look.

Our mail runner was an active young Bangni – Tafam, who belonged to Talam. Honest and simple. Tafam soon proved an asset to us. He became so much attached to me that my welfare became his personal concern. At the time of my departure from Thizino there was an emotional scene. He never expected that our stay would be only momentary and day would soon come when we must part.

From Kaya valley I made a wide detour of 20 Kms across the thick bamboo forest to Tulu – a small Aka village from where I arrived at Palizi 4 Kms from Bichom river. So much of bamboos in the area now remain in waste.

Tulu, affected by a dysentery epidemic, decided to move down near Bichom river side. How often people shift their locations – almost developed into a migratory habit. In Aka area, it is really difficult to under take any meaningful works because of unstable villages.

Palizi's man was Gobardhan Nimachow. A hefty fellow just past middle age. He had opened hotels, shops on the road side. A private bus ran from district town of Seppa to Tezpur every alternate day. Besides, dozens of trucks move up and down and there had never been shortage of customers.

The rickety bus hardly accommodated a dozen of passengers, all cramped in a small cabin. The rear portion is utilised as luggage hold. The private or Government trucks carry the passengers though legally not allowed, but it was difficult to withstand the pressure as there was no other transport. No one really feels, the hazardous journey on the rough boulder pitched road, and there were quite a number of fatal accidents when the driver lost control on the steering. In one accident, I had to go – a truck fell 400 ft. down the precipice and none of the ten occupants survived. It took two days for the army recovery vehicle to pull out the truck.

For us Palizi appeared a heaven. At Thrizino we only saw the head lights during the night but nothing else – not even the sound. How lucky the people are to be near the road side from where they could go and come as they liked.

Gobardhan was a nice fellow, except his aversion to works. Most of his jobs were carried out by scores of people whom he had employed on regular payment which anyway he could afford from numerous business income.

He had five wives and another one was planned to be added soon from Buragaon. A lot of heat generated not because for his penchant for more wives, but on controversy on cross cousin relation which he did not accept as valid. He had already paid enough of dowry and no matter what so ever, he must get the girl! The dispute almost resulted in to a fight but luckily nothing such happened and Gobardhan managed to lift the girl to his house in a triumphant procession!

I was amazed to see that none of his wives were in sullen mood. All had proper distribution of works in running so much of business of Gobardhan. He had only one daughter whom he gave a romantic name Vaijyanti, a nice cute girl who was reading at primary school. Though Gobardhan had some ambition about her – even told me to arrange admission in a convent outside, but the girl followed the traditional custom – within a year she got married.

Gobardhan's new venture was a saw mill – which he rented out to a businessman on monthly payment. But the amount was only a peanut considering the money spun out by the mill. The businessman – a shrewed Manipulator brought elephants and trucks for extraction of timber from the deep forest. The beautiful forest, alas! will no longer retain its pristine glory.

The mill had not benefited any one except limited financial gain to Gobardhan. How ironic it appeared – the Policy of the Government is to provide trade and business avenues to the tribals, but in reality they possess only the title deeds and nothing else. The shrewed manipulators from outside keeps the owner happy with few chips and run away with huge profits.

Gobardhan, like his kins elsewhere, did not understand economics. He was only too happy with few perks, without any labour or initiative.

Gobardhan had three brothers – one was in the village, the second was a teacher who was never found in the school. Sherfoo, the youngest one, was a talented boy. He stayed in Bomdila as a tourist reception officer with his Sherdukpen wife.

There was a primary school at Palizi with twenty five students. Aka parents seldom take interest in education of their children. It was to the credit of Kumar and his sister – both teachers – that they managed to maintain the regular attendance. Kumar even built a Semi permanent building with the donation raised from the people.

Palizi being a road head, the stores brought from Bomdila and Tezpur were dumped here. It was hardly a matter to transport the goods from so far yet to lift to Thrizino – only 17 kms on foot tract, it had remained a constant worry for us.

Ten kilometres from Palizi, at the road side, was Ramdagania. A murder took place just before my arrival. A man shot dead his alleged adulterous wife. Akas are very revengeful on the infidelity of their wife and never hesitate to take the extreme step. The man was arrested and gun seized, but while the court was taking its own time, the people had already settled the dispute with payment of heavy compensation.

There are inherent merit in tribal justice where the guilty is duly punished according to customary law. While the heinous crime



might be kept outside the purview of tribal justice, the other crimes could be dispensed with by customary laws. But with the coming of grass root democracy and growth of Political organizations, the age old system is now under severe strain and might not survive for long.

Forty kilometres from Palizi, on the road, is Khuppi – a place which had a dubious distinction where the sun seldom appears. Most of the days it was misty with occasional drizzles. Being situated at a height of 5000 ft and sheltered by hills, the clouds never really pass away but hang around.

The place was in a reserve forest marked by plantations on either side of the road. Eight kilometres further down the hill on the southern edge a jeep road twists and turns and goes down to the Kameng river bank. Across the river is the Pakui wild Life Sanctuary, spreading over 860 sq kms area. The forest is mercifully virgin and being a sanctuary it is now a protected zone.

I was the guest in the house of Sagio Jebisow – the headman of Kimi, who went all the way to Thrizino to take me to his village.

The river, hardly a few hundred feet away, made a wide curve before it disappeared between the folds of the hills.

The village rests on a higher elevation at the height of 3000 ft., from where a clear view is obtained of the spilling forest spreading far across the hills.

The forest held immense reserve of flora and fauna. The occurrence of Agar – *aqualaria agallacha*, have interested many, but inaccessible terrain fortunately made all their attempts abortive. Not all the trees of Agar produce the valuable scent. Only a few plants infected by a fungus give the scent.

Another plant which has great medicinal and aesthetic value, the Rudraksha – *cleocarpus galitrius* is also found here.

Most majestic are the elephants who move in herds. I was lucky to see them in one early morning moving along the river bank. There were altogether twenty in the herd including the baby elephant. A big shouldered hefty one remained behind, with an intent gaze towards the village, but Sagio assured me that the herd never came that way.

The most convenient place for nature observation is from Tippi – a few kilometres from foothills of Bhalukpung on way to Bomdila. Here, a beautiful forest bungalow, situated on the bank of Kameng river, faces the famous sanctuary.

Down the steps of the bungalow the river flows in swift current – a nice fishing spot where anglers could be lucky with the rod.

Sometime in early morning or in moonlit night herds of Sambars or elephants come to the river or one might see a tiger just making a casual stroll before going to the forest cover.

The herd of elephants swam across the river to come to the side of the bungalow, the forest department had erected low voltage electric fence which kept the elephants away.

Near the forest bungalow is the Orchid Research station where Orchidologist, Dr. Sadanand Hedge, had built a beautiful station with 250 varieties of orchids including endangered species. Amongst the endangered species were *coelogyne barbata*, *cymbidium longifolium*, *dendrobium desiflorum*, *Galcolalind Leyona*.

He had planned tissue culture and an orchid sanctuary. The orchid sanctuary had already come up near Sessa – a few kms up the road to Bomdila where orchids could be seen in their natural habitat.

Fifty kms further up the road to Bomdila is Jamiri Point. The village Jamiri is 4 kms away, approached by a foot tract.

Jamiri village belongs to Sinam Dusosow – the member of territory's legislative assembly. His son Jawahar – a bright young boy had his education in an outside school.

He now helps his father in his political activities and business.

Sinam had a cane manufacturing centre at Jamiri point where beautiful items of furniture are made by expert craftsmen.

Buli Jebisow – another youngman was a teacher for some time and so he was called Buli master. Buli master had shifted his residence to Jamiri point where he too opened a shop.

The Patriarch of the village was Atu Ram – a grand old man much respected by the community. Though quite aged, yet he move

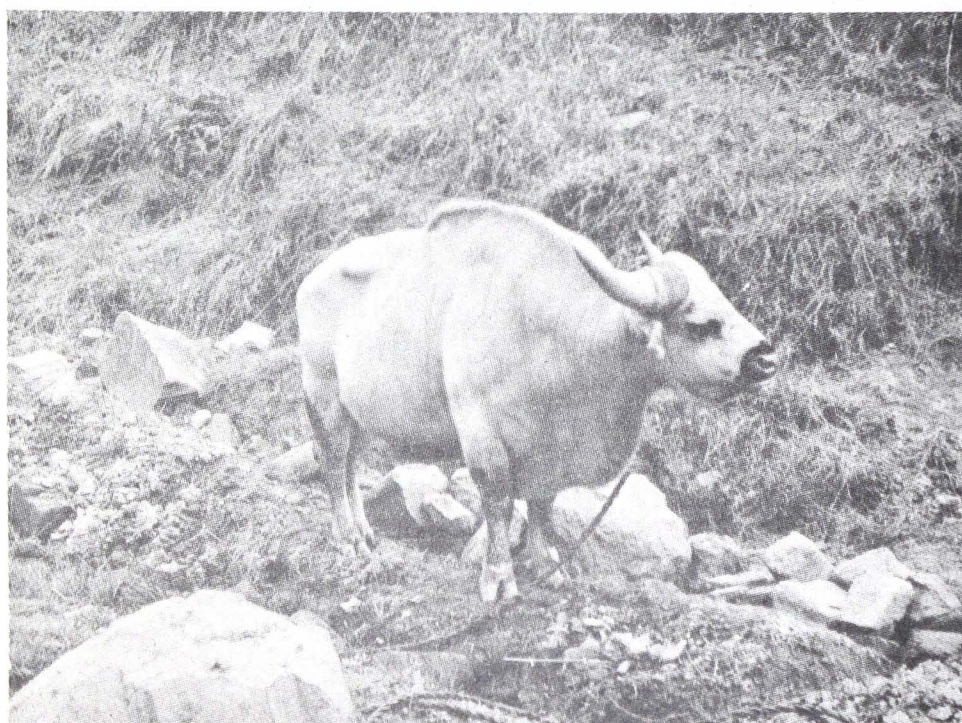


Author with Adi Village leaders — West Siang District





A view of Monpa house



A Mithun





Preparing the Millet Beer



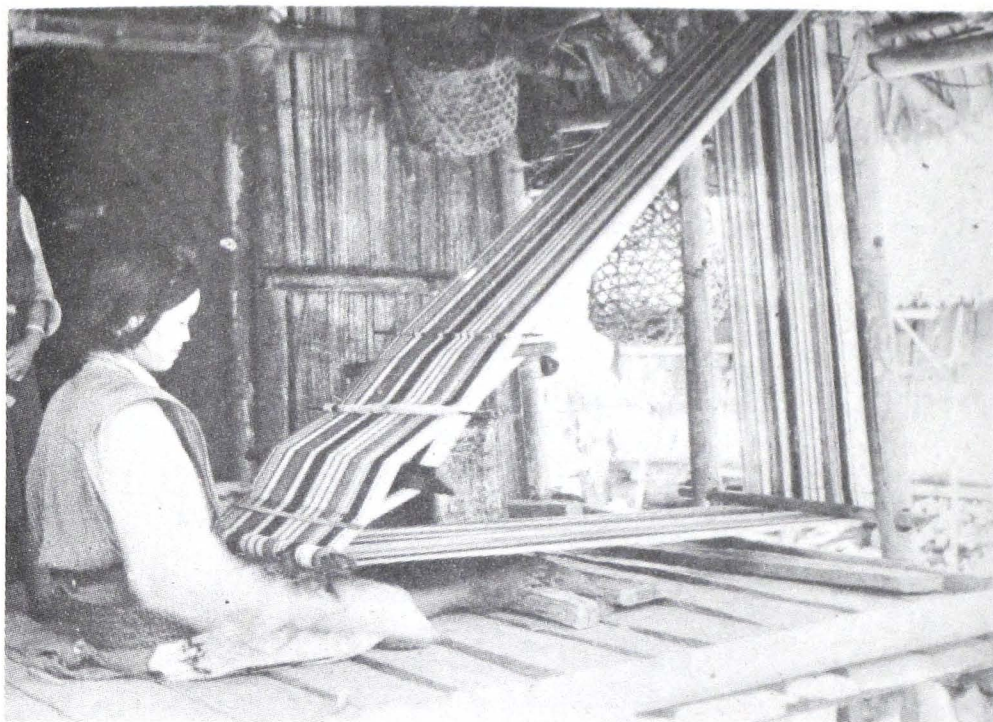


Miji dancers



A Miju woman with her traditional hair style





A Monpa girl in her loom

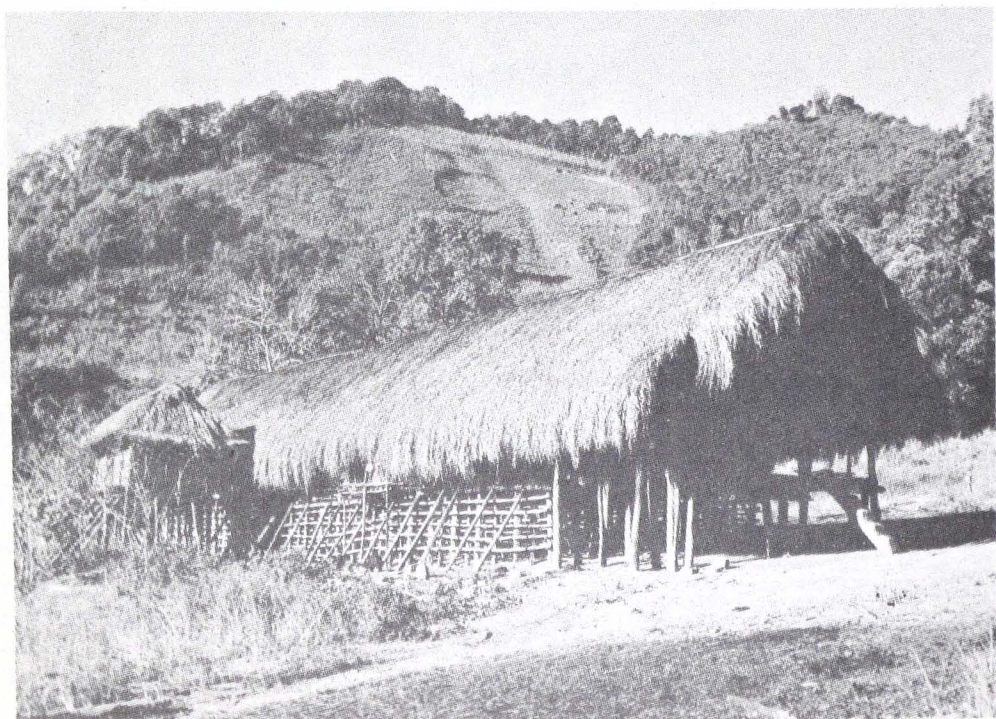


Monpa dancers





An Idu couple in mustard field



An Idu long house — Dibang Valley



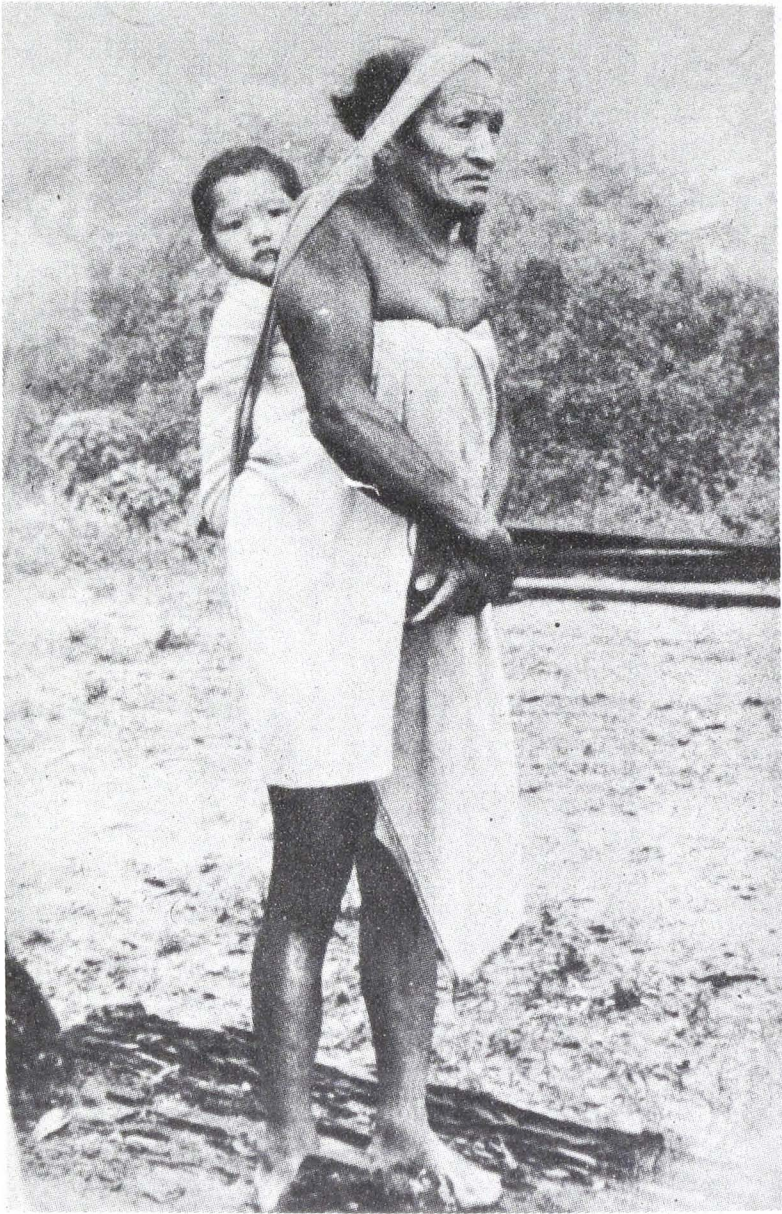


Idu Women in their Loom



Idu dancers — Dibang Valley





Carrying a child in traditional stye.



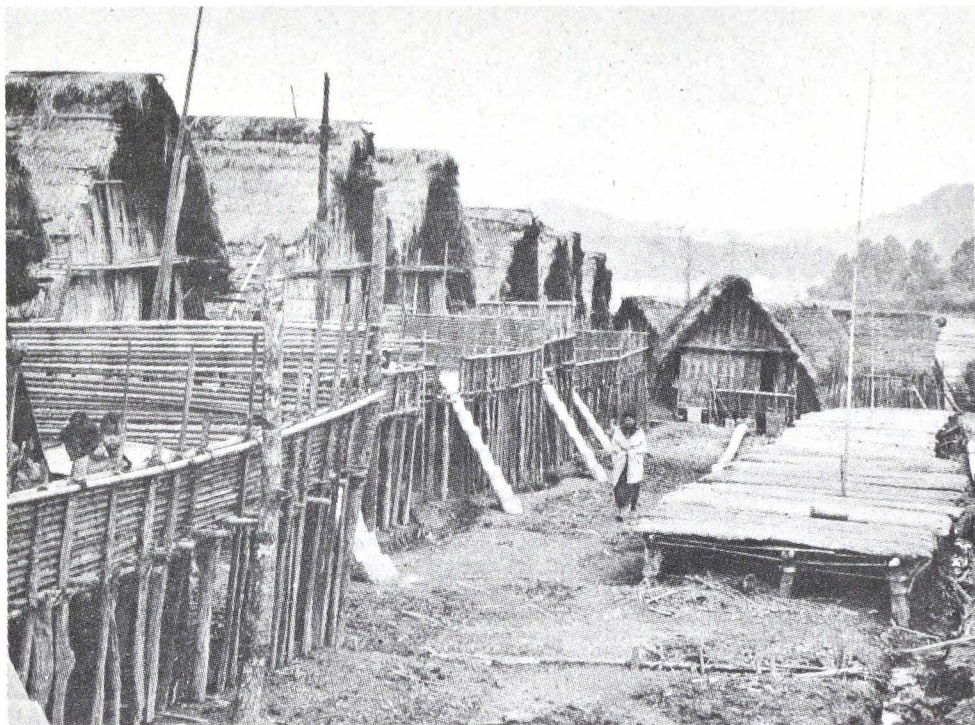


Aka Belles



An Aka Archer





An Apatani Village Scene — “Lapang” in the front



Author with an Adi Family

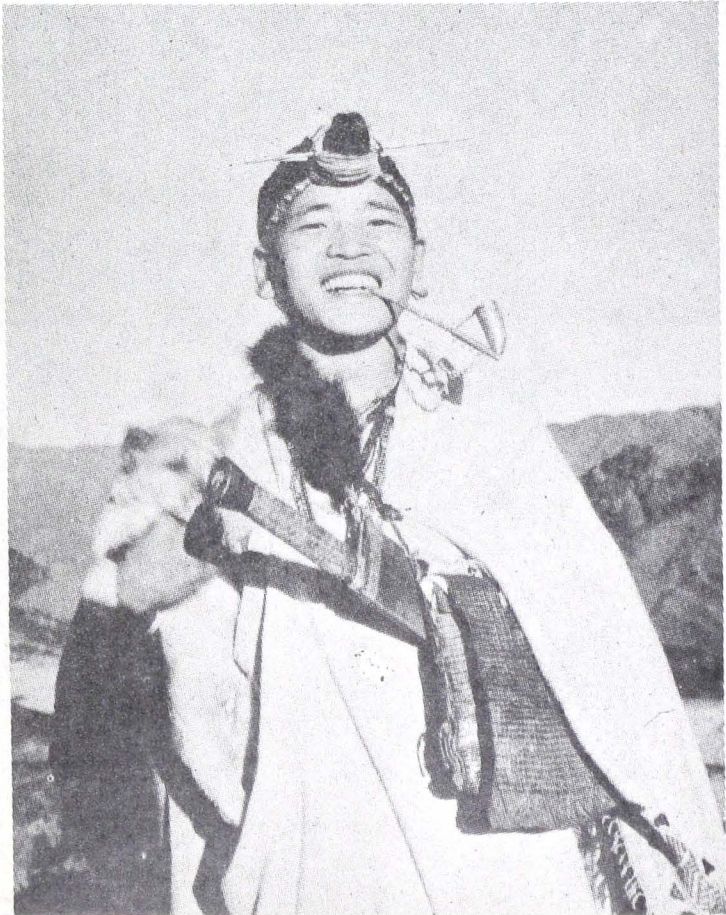




A Nishi couple with their young child



Nishi tribes men







Young Apatani Girls



Apatani Belles



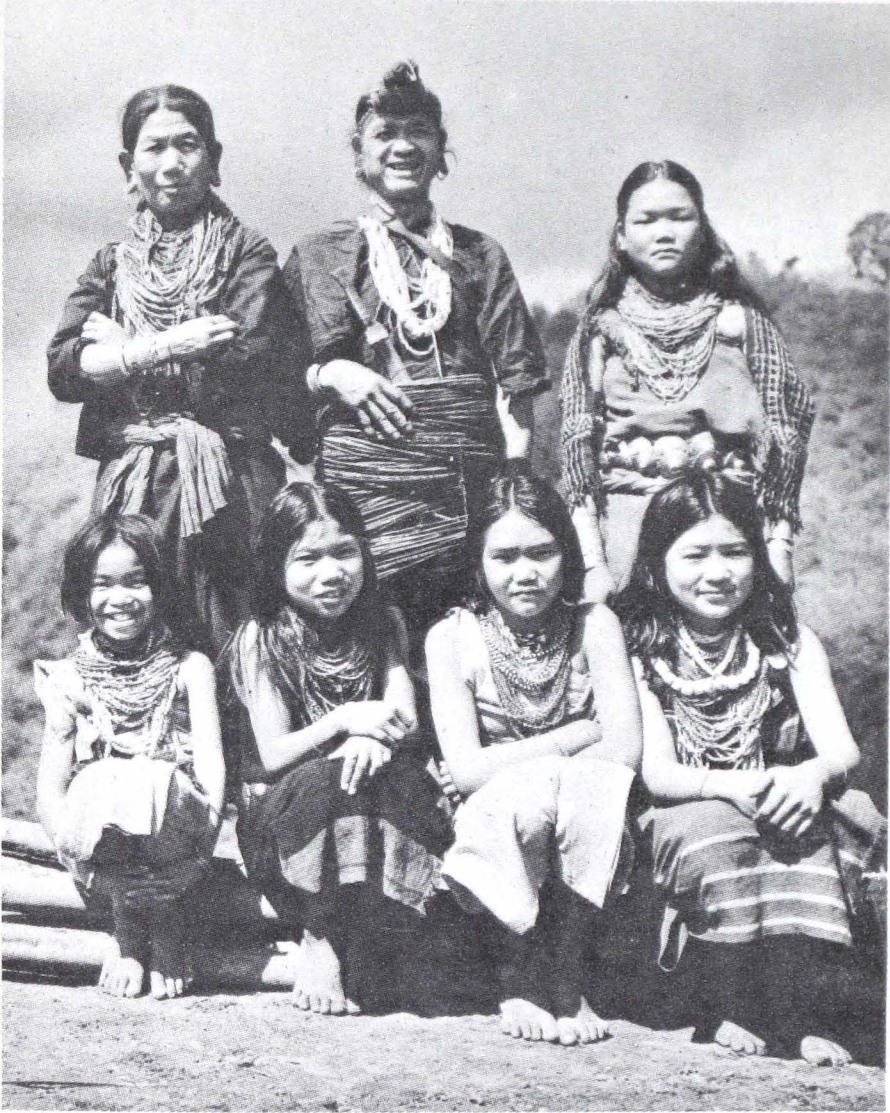


“Ajilamu” dancers — Tawang



Aka dancers with cymbal and drum





A Nishi family



Carrying firewood

around with his frail body, and till recently even took part in community hunt. He told me about his grewsome encounter with a bear.

He was on way to cultivation field in one early morning. The thick maize crop was just ripening and he had expectation of a good harvest.

Suddenly, he heard the sound – the tearing off the plants. A bear had come into the field and all the labour of so many months would just go in waste.

He took out his long sword and moved silently. But by then the bear also was alerted. It must have sniffed the air and found an unusual smell and stood up. Its long claws ready to tear off the face, and Atu Ram had to act very fast. In a flash he charged forward and swung his sword in rapid stride. The sharp sword cut through its hands. So powerful was the blow that the bear rolled down to the ground. Never before a bear had succumbed this way – it always gave a fight and was impossible to kill it from close quarter.

But Atu Ram did it, his bravery soon became a talk in every village.

Atu Ram was a jolly good fellow. Like all Akas he had the sense of humour and never mind telling his exploits in lucid details!

Near the village on a hillock was a small circular building with roof but no walls. This had been constructed for priests, called Gohain, who occasionally come for a visit but the religious influence if any was not discernible, though people receive the venerable priests with due solemnity. The contact was supposed to have been from olden times during Aka chiefs forages in the plains.

A small village ten kilometres from Jamiri was even named as Gohainthan – the place of worship of venerable priests.

Twenty kms further interior from Jamiri and twenty five kms from Thrizino is the oldest Aka settlement – Buragaon. The first administrative centre was opened here in 1954.

Situated on a table land – over 3500 ft. height Buragaon has a moderate climate and favours cultivation of oranges. But Akas with their indifferent attitude had not taken up the cultivation in



large scale. The orange of Buragaon is delicious — what a boon it would be if people know the management of their orchard.

Only middle school of Thrizino circle had been in Buragaon but even a decade after the establishment of the school, the enrolment hardly exceeded sixty. There were few girl students. Being a Government school all facilities were extended even full compliment of teaching staff, yet progress in education remained static. It is difficult to understand why the Akas remain so indifferent to development. They were not individualistic like the Idus, have some sort of communal organisation, yet are so much averse to works inspite of fertile land and adequate rainfall and congenial climate.

The headman of the village was Chawang Jebisow. His daughter Khlim was the only matriculate amongst the Aka girls. Khlim was not yet married — an unusual departure from the custom. Later, she got a job in district office at Bomdila.

Mosses Roy Lyndem, who was with me in Tuting in Siang District during sixties, was at Buragaon as a village level worker — the agriculture field assistant. Mosses was a work horse, he moved around to motivate the people, doing many works by himself to demonstrate, but sadly very few rallied behind him. Mosses, understandably dejected now wants to go anywhere where people would listen to him and work.

Pema Jebisow — a hardened criminal belonged to Buragaon. How he took to crime no one knew. His visits to places in Assam and contact with dubious people might have had an influence. He developed different techniques to fool the gullibles. Once at Tezpur he duped a businessman who had some trade dealings with Sinami Dususow — the MLA, by producing a fake letter from him authorizing Pema — his own nephew to bring cash to meet an urgent contingency! Nothing was suspected — this was so authentic as being written in the letter pad that businessmen handed over packets of cash to Pema!

At another time, he got an entire truck load of canes sent by Buli Master to his depot and sold this to some one else, hurriedly producing a forged letter authorizing Pema — his own brother to dispose off the entire load of cane immediately and bring back the money!

Every time he was caught, thrashed mercilessly – even kept in the stockade without food and water, but mysteriously he survived and again after some days was back to the profession. He even duped a poor Assamese girl – married her, brought to Buragaon and reduced her to near starvation.

But a cunning trick once he played on a party of illegal dealers in elephant tusks showed his intelligence. He quietly met them and struck a deal. Being an Aka from the hills they had least suspicion. He took the full advance payment and asked them to park their vehicle on certain place on the main road at a given time. The party was waiting as told. Pema – the great cheat, wrapped in gunny bags two imitation tusks – the tips only shown outside – very nicely polished, arrived in a great hurry and told them to immediately load that and go, as some how forest guards had been alerted and were following his trail. The fools swallowed his words and drove as fast as possible out of sight!

Pema's father, Rijou, was a broken man. He cursed his son with all the invectives and blamed the Gods for giving him such a worthless fellow as his son. For crime committed by Pema, Rijou had to pay the compensation. Surprisingly, both he and his wife, another son were so good never known to have committed any mischief.

When Pema's activities became intolerable, I got him arrested and sent him for trial at Bomdila.

Tragic though yet it might happen, there would be many more Pemas, who are exposed to subtle influences of outside world.

Banipu was the village of Khawas who call themselves Bugun. Their dress and custom had much similarity with the neighbouring Akas. Except the language, the difference is indistinguishable. Their houses are much smaller than the Akas but has some influences of Sherdukpens who also are their neighbour. Their poor economic condition could be judged from payment of brideprice – instead of Mithun they give cows.

Exact history of the Buguns are not known, but they are believed to have come before the Akas. In course of time they became completely dependent on them who though later settled in the hills,

wielded much more power and authority. All Buguns labour for the Akas and no matter their position or the status they remain subservient to them.

Spread in ten villages, Bugun population hardly exceeded eight hundred – though they have enough of land. Low birth rate was one of the causes of declining population.

Bugun village of Banipu, is situated on the saddle of a hill – ten kilometres from Jamiri. The village belonged to Achibu Lali a nice man who was a member of regional council – the Anchal Samity. Achibu had lot of grievances against the Akas who always interfere in their affairs.

The approach to the village was through a forest of silver oaks – the species not seen in Thrizino or Buragaon. Being situated at a height of 5000 ft. apple was growing very well – in fact it was a source of income now as apple found a ready market.

Docile and submissive Buguns are a peaceful tribe – Never known to have committed any crime. Because of their submissive nature they were easily exploited, but now Bugun leader like Achibu Lali became assertive, organising his people to have independent views and opinions.

Five kms from Jamiri point, on the main road to Bomdila, was a Nag Mandir or snake temple. Scores of devotees visit the sanctum sanctorium where a dreaded cobra was supposed to be living. The devotees who are outsiders come with offerings of food and money. Once a year, a big ceremony is held for the worship of snake god.

Strangely, some Akas and Buguns who never follow any cult succumbed to the spell of the priest who was reported to have shown them a live cobra sheltering inside the altar!

The area known as Dedza is full of rocky hills through which the road had been cut. By the side of the road, there is sheer drop of 100 meters to the river. Due to low altitude – the place is much warm and naturally provides an ideal den for the cobras.

The story was circulated that an Army Engineer, a Christian had encountered immense problem while laying the road. In every place there were casualties. Even with cutters and dozers, progress

was very slow. Then one day a cobra suddenly appeared on the road with raised hood. That very night, the major saw in his dream the snake god commanding to construct a temple to worship him. He was told also that worst calamity would befall if the warning was disregarded.

The dream was repeated again the next night. Major, though a non believer, then decided to construct the temple and since then all the hurdles were over and the road passed through.

How far is the story true can never be known, but religious zealots seized the opportunity and constructed a big temple any way.

On the road side, there were mushroom growth of such structures and scores of people just became the blind followers.

Near Nichiphu where the road bifurcated to wards Palizi – some one was supposed to have seen a snake lying on the branch of a small tree. The daily phenomenon attracted the followers who quickly put up a structure for the worship of the snake!

The Akas looked to these with surprise and awe.

Though I never believed in such magic or the spell, but once some of my Aka friends prodded me to go up the steps of Nag Mandir. The priest gave a long sermon. I asked him to show the cobra which obviously he could not. He was upset seeing me not even untying the shoe lace of my boots, not making any obeisance. His parting advice sounded as curse that any one showing disrespect to Nag devata would end in a disaster!

Many years have passed since then despite the ominous curse, I still survived!

A kilometre further from Nag mandir on the road to Bomdila is New Kaspi – the new found settlement of the Buguns who had come down from the hills.

The village now had a primary school with two teachers and thirty students, but only five were Buguns – the rest were the children of road labourers. Buguns like Akas were not interested in education inspite of Government's liberal assistance.

The village belongs to Nichu Mosung – a youngman now an Anchal Samity Member, who devotes most of his time in moving

around but actually doing nothing. It was not his fault however – he had just followed the tradition of his people who prefer to while away the time.

Nichu was quite interesting – he had grandiose plan of development but when we actually sanctioned some schemes, he had a hard time – none of his people could be motivated to do the works, instead, out side labourers were engaged. Ultimately, he quietly backed away giving us enough to humour him.

Nishu's brother was the school teacher, the shortest fellow – hardly 3 ft in height. I had not seen anywhere in the frontier such abnormalities. His sister too was of the same height, though much advanced in age. Only Nichu was the exception – he had normal growth. Could it be due to close inbreeding? I never found out but mystery remained.

It was a comic scene when I visited the school and found Nichu's brother quietly sitting in the chair. I thought he was a student, got visibly annoyed at the insolent behaviour and was about to rebuke him when some one quietly mentioned that he was the teacher.

Raji, the village level worker, and his wife were from Daporijo in Upper Subansiri. They were a nice couple, adjusted well with the Buguns though at times feel quite home sick. They found in me as if some one had come from their home, when I spoke in their dialect.

A young man Mazumdar was posted at new Kaspi as domiciliary health visitor. He developed enough of interest, and thereby gained popularity. His job was to collect blood specimen to detect Malaria Parasites, provide prophylactic tablets and also to spread health education. All these task he did diligently. Unfortunately, there were not many officials like Mazumdar who had so much devotion.

Near New Kaspi, solid rock hill rose to several hundred feet high. Perched in the crevices were the hives of rock bees. With the help of rope and ladders people go, drive out the bees with smoke and fire and extract the honey. New Kaspi rock hill was the only place where numerous hives were seen.

Accompanied by Mazumdar and Mosses Roy Lyndem, I made a daring move across the hill to reach Nafra – fifty kms away. It was a climb of two hours to reach the top of the hill where from we



got a grand view of serpentine metalled road, cluster of houses at Dedza, Jamiri, Nagmandir and river Tenga.

The original Bugun village of Kaspi now remained with six houses. Only old men and women stay now as all young people had gone down to road side new village.

The scenery of Kaspi was so enchanting with pine, silver oaks, rhododendrons, that I felt pity for the people who had migrated below just to be close to the road. The water here was clear, air so cool and crisp that very few people suffered from illness.

We had now entered the coniferous belt, the tall blue pine – *pinus wallichiana*, predominating. It was so pleasant to walk over the undulating land.

We had a comfortable night halt at Bugun village of Namphri. The people here grow enough of maize and now earn a lot from the sale of Apple.

At Namphri, I saw herds of cattle – 300 in Number grazing by the side of shallow meadows. The herdsmen were Monpas from Kalaktang, who had brought their cattle here where enough green grass grows, Bugun farmers were benefited by huge droppings of dungs and urine which added so much manure to the soil. The bumper harvest every year was due to this reason. The herdsmen give some butter and cheese in lieu of free grazing of their cattle in Bugun's land.

We moved further ten Kms through the enchanting forest and came to another Bugun village – Mago pam. Bugun like Akas shift their settlement to the field houses called pam which ultimately turn into a village.

No one visited Mago Pam – It was so remote. I was somewhat elated when told that I was the only officer visiting their place after Geoffrey Allen, the Political Officer, who came here in 1948.

Yet Mago Pam is set in so lovely surroundings. Amidst the tall pines, meadows, suddenly I realized a serene beauty – and how lucky would be those who would be here for ever.

During the night, we saw the lights flickering in Bomdila – it looked so wonderful.

Next morning we walked down hill — another eight kms to the twin village of Sito Ramo — the last of the Bugun settlement. Here we saw large fields of oats along with maize.

No other trees grow here except the pine. Moving down hill along the gentle slope, Mosses and I suddenly felt home sick. We had in our land miles and miles of pine forest over the undulating land so similar to Sito Ramo. For how long we sat on the grass land enjoying the beauty and inhaling the fragrant air!

We went down another four kms to arrive at last at the bank of Bichom river where was a beautiful rest house of the Kameng Hydel Project. The river is proposed to be dammed to produce 500 megawatts of electricity. The water will be diverted through long tunnels across Buragaon and thrown to Tenga river from where another dam will impound the massive water. This will be then diverted through a tunnel to the power house near Kimi on the bank of Kameng river.

The camp area at Bichom was very hot. In July the mercury shot up to 32° celcius. Yet it was surprising that there were only pine trees in and around Bichom — but pine stop at the hill feature of Buragaon and are not seen near Thrizino.

22 Kms from Bichom was Buragaon by a bridle path. Once Mosses and I were coming from Buragaon and saw to our horror fresh pug marks of a big tiger which had just gone ahead of us. It was a nightmare journey as somehow we managed to cross the hill. The same tiger killed a number of cattle after a few days, but it could not be traced despite frantic search by the hunters.

A kilometer from Bichom is the confluence of Dirang and Bichom river. A jeep road has now been planned from Nafra 25 kms further to the west.

We followed the path through pine forest. Large tract had been leased out to an outside firm for resin tapping. Everywhere small containers were dangling on the tree. Over this incision was made on the tree and liquid dropped into the tin in trickles. The filled up containers were then deposited to the collectors who paid 25 paise for each to the owners of the trees. The amount was negligible compared to huge profit margin. The forest department realises a

portion of the amount as tax, but it appeared to me that people or the Government are surely losing a sizable income which was going to an out side agency. To get more resin, the traders surreptitiously inject a chemical to the detriment of the health of the trees which after a period of poor growth die out.

No one really cared for preserving the precious forest wealth. A few persons were however benefitted by sale of resin to the collectors.

Nafra is 56 kms from Bomdila and is approached by a motorable road. But vehicles stop at Bichom river as the bridge had not yet come up.

Because of short distance to Bomdila, no one did feel isolated like Thrizino. There were electricity, water supply, a hospital, co-operative store – all contributed to the growth of the township.

The place is at 3000 ft. height but falls in rain shadow area. The summer is very hot. Like Bichom valley there is extensive pine forest in Nafra and its surrounding areas.

The valley opened up like a funnel and flash flood might cause disaster. The trees were cut at random – a tragic phenomenon in all over the frontier that caused land erosion. The small streams now became a threat in every summer. Already damage had been extensive when a stream just changed the course and brought huge piles of stones. To save the town from further damage, a master plan was taken up but it appeared to me, Nafra's future would depend on extensive tree plantation to check the erosion. But lucrative business on timber was luring many people who were blissfully ignorant about the danger.

People of Nafra are Mizi similar to Akas except the dialect. They have identical custom, have marriage relations and social bonds. What is striking is that like the Akas, they have the same temperament and indifference to Agricultural development.

To the outsiders, they are called Mizi but amongst them are known as Dhammai though this term is only restricted to them and Miji is more commonly used like Aka.

Spread over 25 villages, the area under the occupation of the Mijis borders the snow capped mountains on the north.

The staple food of the people is maize cultivated in Jhum field, but in certain pockets they have followed their neighbours – Moupas, permanent cultivation in terraced field. In higher alleviation over 4000 ft. around Nakhu village – Apple is now being raised in orchards which might provide them with stable income.

People rear goats – a very profitable venture now – a – days because of demand for meat.

Mijis were turbulent a few decades ago. They created enough of panick amongst their neighbours – Monpas and Sherdukpens, by foraging in their territories. Exasperated by lawlessness, the Government established a post in 1944 at Booth – 25 kms from Nafra on way to Bomdila. This had some effect as Mijis did not dare to antagonise the powerful Government for fear of strong reprisal.

Booth and Khoina people are an admixture of different strains now difficult to identify. They have certain affinities with the Sherdukpens and follow Buddhism. But traditional belief is still prevalent.

They are however good cultivators, rear cattle and horse, construct their houses with some what stable foundation with stone and mortars. Around these two villages there are abundant silver oak forest which provide them timber. They use the dry oak leaves as manure in the field. Soon after the harvest, the heaps of leaves are spread in the field where animals were allowed to graze. After a few months, the entire mass turns into very good manure.

Because of prevalence of oak trees the government had opened a silk producing centre near Booth.

Booth is situated over 6000 ft. which has given it a temperate climate, ideally suited for Apple cultivation. Being hardy and tenacious, they have buoyant economy now and with the government help, are improving their condition significantly. What a contrast with the Mijis and Akas who are so much indifferent to Agriculture despite abundant fertile land.

An interesting incident occurred in Booth. A desperado, a young man from Khoina, turned into a thief. He built up a camouflaged tunnel furnished with all necessities of life. From this hide out, he went on periodical foraging mission. No one could find

him, but to his ill luck once he left behind a trail and soon was found in his hide out.

People would have lynched him to death, but the Government moved in and put him behind the bar.

Ten kilometers from Booth, on way to Bomdila, is Salari near the bank of Dirang river. Being in rain shadow area and low attitude, the place is very hot in summer and a den of cobras. A farmers' Training Centre and a farm have given the place an importance and slowly the area has been developing. The people are alike to Monpas, Buddhist in their faith and very industrious. The place is slowly emerging as grape producing area – a lucrative cash crop.

Salari belongs to the inlaws of Rinchin Dorjee – the district social and cultural officer. Smart youngman with enough of intelligence, Rinchin had been in forefront in many developmental works.

He was a Monpa, belonging to lish village. The village is set in an idyllic surroundings, a few kilometres north of Dirang. Considered as grain bowl of the area, Lish Monpas are very rich due to extensive Apple orchards which they tend with care.

Japhu Deru, the nominated member of Territory's Legislative Assembly was a nice youngman. He had brought a lot of improvement in Nafra circle. What was striking was that without a formal school education, he had managed to teach himself and now could read and write fairly well.

Rinchin Kharu, the Ex. MLA was however a shade different. He was only a fine orater, but did not have initiative in works. He had gathered lot of money from resin tapping but just wasted the money in unproductive works.

Ramjang – the Zilla Parishad Member, an affable fellow was always with a smiling face. Laling – the previous Zilla Parishad Member defeated by Ramjang, was now fallen from power and sulking in his defeat. How strange, the people learnt the craft of politics with shrewed judgement and manipulation!

Leighandu, the Circle Officer, who was with me at Ziro for some time had come to Nafra. It was a pleasant surprise for me to

meet him after a long time. But tragedy followed – after a few months, Leighandu died of suspected cancer. He was such a nice fellow. No one knew that he was harbouring the dreaded disease in him.

Tedi Tana Tara, a Nishi from Lower Panior valley took over as Circle Officer. He too had a pleasant disposition. The good quality of Tara was that he seldom compromised with principle and soon proved himself as an able administrator.

Nafra is also a den of Cobras with stones and boulders littered every where. They definitely found a most ideal place. People raised stone fencing where the dreaded snake found another niche to hunt for rat. Every year there are deaths from cobra bite.

Dr. Dey, the Medical Officer treated a number of snake bite cases. If the victim was rushed at once, he managed to save by antivenom injections but little delay would be fatal. A young girl was bitten during an evening – the doctor was called half an hour later, he tried his best possible way but could not save her.

Once, Dr, Dey also narrowly escaped a bite. During night, he was returning to his residence. A black cobra just coiled and lay on the way. His torch light luckily caught something glistening hardly a few inches away. He at once jumped away to a safe distance.

Though it did not happen to me, but some one had a night-marish experience when a cobra came through the toilet closet and quietly lay on the pillow!

I was so much scared of the deadly snake that whenever I came to Nafra, I took extra precautions by tightly bolting the doors and windows lest the snake should sneak through narrow apertures and land on me!

To visit Nafra, the easiest way was by road from Bomdila. It took hardly three hours by a jeep to cover a distance of 56 kms, 13 kms of which was by a beautiful metalled road going further to dirang and Tawang.

Thrizino in another corner approached from Nafra in two days by a tortuous hill track over 50 kms. But there was an exhilarating experience to move through miles and miles of virgin pine forest.

Mercifully, no wood cutter came this way, so remote was the area and extraction would nevertheless have been easy. I saw different species of pines – *Pinus wallichiana*, *pinus merkusi*, *Lyonia Ovalifolia* *Alnus Nepalensis*. Some of the trees attained great heights with extended branches.

But after covering 25 kms the pines retreated as if by magic, yielding place to moist forest. There were wild banana, tree ferns, sago plants, bamboos appeared from the clear divide of two distinct zones. Compared to Nafra, which is in a rain shadow area, Thrizino had a high precipitation of 2500 mm average annual rainfall that caused such variation in flora.

A motorable road had been planned from Nafra to Janachin across this vergin forest, which would further be extended to Seppa – the headquarters of East Kameng District. While this would no doubt hasten the development in backward region, but would also strike the death knell on the beautiful trees.

Surprisingly, there was no leech anywhere on the way from Nafra. Leech is not found also in Thrizino to Jamiri or in Kaya valley but ten kms west of Thrizino in Challam, Janachin, this obnoxious pest makes the journey so uncomfortable.

In Aka or Miji villages people kept ponies – though they never look after the animal like the Monpas or Sherdukpens do.

Bisa the supply contractor at Buragaon had twenty five ponies which made him quite rich. His ponies went so far thirty kms to Dedza to bring the stores to Buragaon.

Though Bisa was descendent of a slave – long since emancipated, yet his status remained the same. In Aka 'Mel' he dare not sit in front row, but finds a place elsewhere. Bisa's daughter was married to Renu – our Peon in the office. Renu was also a descendent of slave and had turned into priest – *Mugou* and combined his official duties with the mundane function. Often, some one would call him for medication but obdurate spirits might not leave the body so easily. Once Renu told me that some spirits are really obstinate and naughty and give enough trouble. So he had to lose his temper and fight whole night to drive them away!

Renu cannot leave the job of priest – it is just not possible, he would remain so till he dies.

Renu's problem was his wife — a plump woman, rather flirtatious. She ran errand causing much annoyance to Renu. Once he actually ran after the fellow who had enticed his wife. It was with great difficulty Renu's temper cooled down, other wise he wanted to kill that man.

Yet, Renu loved his wife and did not agree to a divorce. But a day came when he could not bear it anymore, went to Bisa asking for separation. When it was settled, Renu, suddenly overwhelmed by emotion, rescinded the decision and quietly brought her back home!

His small child — a nice cute boy was named Mukerjee. Renu gave the name in grateful recognition to the person — Badal Mukerjee who was the Administrative Officer in early sixties and who had emancipated Renu from the slavery and given him a job in the office.

Kharu — the tall lanky fellow was our dak runner. He was from Sakrin village — 3 kms from Thrizino. Kharu's Stamina was astounding — he could walk 40 kms a day! Later, we made him a Political Interpreter — a more respectable position where he functioned effectively and did not have to go on long distance duty.

Kharu, Renu, Tafam — the trio in our office were an asset. They did not know fatigue, were always available at any time of the hour.

Kharu became the rallying figure in all my fancy programmes, from tree plantation to road construction. He was convinced, I could do no wrong and so he moved liked a spinning top, never actually took rest.

Madhu who first accompanied me to Thrizino, was also from Sakrin village. He had a shop with hardly any income.

Madhu was a nice fellow always with a smiling face. His poor knowledge of economics landed him in trouble. Later, we provided him with some income by giving a license for tea canteen in our office complex.

His wife — a middle aged woman suddenly created a stir. She ran with one of our labourers to a far away place. By the time we



knew, the woman with her paramour had already got in to a truck at Palizi. They bluffed their way through the check gate at Bhalukpong and escaped. Madhu ran after her, even went to the plains of Assam, but found no trace of her.

It was the first time, I saw him really depressed. His wife took away whatever savings he had and left him in shame and disgrace.

A year later, Madhu again remarried a good looking Miji girl from Nafra. In all appearance she was a flirt, yet Madhu did not leave her.

Because of Administrative centre and growth of a town so many young people left their villages and came to Thrizino, without any works but just to while away their time. They moved in ease, visited the office, would draft a petition and do nothing. Sashu Sasusaw was such a fellow. Before my arrival, he had created commotion by becoming a self proclaimed guardian of an Adi girl who wanted to marry a Junior Engineer an outsider. Sashu actually manhandled the poor fellow and the department took the unusual step by withdrawing the entire Engineering Section from Thrizino.

I had to sternly deal with Sashu. I stopped his visit to office and residence of officials without any valid purpose. This had a salutary effect not only on Sashu but on all other such fellows who had no works.

Sashu was an upstart — aspiring for a political career without a support base. But soon he became my obedient follower and never gave any trouble.

I had found every one had some potentials — only one should know how to tap these for productive use. Sashu's talents too soon manifested in some organisational works.

Ajin Sonam was Bangni but had long since settled in Dijangania. Ajin's wife was an Aka — a departure from convention. She did not bore him any child and so Ajin was depressed.

He had pleasant manners and did lot of works for us. He contributed sawn timbers to our community hall and never asked for money.

Ajin's pony was hired for carrying loads, but at times it carried our staff too. The pony had crude saddle and harness. A blanket

rolled and strapped on its back provided the seat for the rider. It was difficult to balance and move. For long distance journey, the seat was far from being comfortable.

The pony did not gallop but trot leisurely — poor fellow, what else could it do with meagre diet!

The approaches to all villages were over rough terrains involving considerable climb and descent. It became so irritating when one just felt exhausted with sweat and heat. At times, I took the pony especially on journey to Buragaon — a long 25 kms stretch.

It was hair raising experience when the pony moved down hill. Every time my body lurched forward as if to throw me off balance.

Once the pony skidded on the slippery log bridge and I narrowly escaped a crash.

The path was tortuous with pot holes. The pony always preferred to move in the shade. It once happened so — a snake was on the branch — some one just saw it in time and pulled the pony off, otherwise I would have surely got a bite.

Pony owners were so apathetic that if the animal slipped off the track and lay injured or dead, they least bothered for that. Near Sakrin village, a pony fell from the bridge and died after great agony. No one came to look after it. But Monpas or Sherdukpens would never do so — they look after their animals with so much care and attention.

Road to Palizi passed through a thick bamboo forest. Somewhere the venomous wasps had built up a nest. Coloured in black and yellow, they give a painful sting — a dozen or so might prove fatal. Those who knew avoided the path and went by long detour. Usually, some one put a warning sign by broken twigs.

Dr. Nath, our Medical Officer, did not notice it. Soon he came near the nest and was chased by the swarm. By the time he reached a safe distance, half a dozen stings were already in his limbs and face. When he arrived at Thrizino his face appeared like a big pumpkin. He suffered such a terrible ordeal, but luckily did not have any other complication.

A tiger suddenly appeared near six kms post on way to Palizi. Its pug marks showed it was a big cat. At least half a dozen cows and Mithuns were killed by it.

Immediately, alarm was raised in Dijangania village in which area it was moving. When the hunt was on, suddenly the tiger pounced on an old man but luckily he survived though badly injured.

Ultimately it was Sidi — the son of Pecha Sidisow, who killed the tiger with a gun.

The big tiger — at least 6 ft. long, was tied upside down on a pole, covered with leaves, triumphantly carried in a procession around our place. There were shouts of Ho! Ho! Ho! and grunting sound of grue! grue! grue!

For Sidi, it had been a long wait in the jungle as elaborate rituals and taboos had to be observed.

The tiger was believed to be the one which moved in Buragaon hill where once we had seen its big pug marks.

It was already two years since my arrival at Thrizino. How long more to pass the leisure hours in star gazing or in serene contemplation!

There were nagging problems of supply as many officials were posted with expansion of activities and quite a few of them brought their families. Now there were too many mouths to feed and all looked at me as if to find a solution.

Sometime back I was promised a jeep. But without a bridge over the Bichom river it would never come to Thrizino. A road was constructed in early seventies but now with land slides in several places the width of the road became considerable narrow. While blocks could be cleared, but what about the bridge construction? Government as usual dragged the feet with endless survey and querries and it appeared construction would never start.

Then suddenly an idea struck; why not build a bridge by ourselves?

No sooner had we thought of it, a meeting was called at Thrizino with representatives of all the villages. Never had they dreamt of such possibility and looked in wide eyes with quite disbelief.

We asked for volunteers — 500 of them with simple tools like dao and crowbars but promised them no fund and all works must be voluntary.

It was a hushed silence for some time till Pecha Sidisow, the headman of Dijangania village, stood up, told the gathering – let us follow the Extra Assistant Commissioner who wants to show us something new like the trees planted in the township.

The speech had an affect. There were nodding approval from the gathering. The deal was struck.

Akas normally averse to work, came out in hundreds and gathered on the bank of Bichom river.

The moving spirit behind this was Dr. Norbu Thungon – our young Medical Officer. He became excited with grandiose programme, the moment I spelt it out. Sometime later, both of us made a detailed survey of the river and felt how easy it was to build a bridge!

But no one knew how and where to begin – some said let us make it like a cantilever bridge, but no sooner the logs were raised, these crashed into the water with a big bang!

The span of the river was 300 ft. with considerable discharge of water even in winter.

Then an idea struck me – why not raise bamboo cage pillars filled with boulders?

It was an experiment. Huge bamboo cages were made and lined in the river front. On shallow water facing Palizi, where the stretch was 30 ft, we piled up stones to provide a platform. Three cages were fixed in one line filled with boulders. The people stood in two parallel lines, passed the boulders from hand to hand in quick move to save the time.

We narrowed two pillar lines by 20 ft. A small passage was made for movement of people.

Upto 7th line, the depth of water was hardly 4 ft but from there onwards it was deeper and deeper till it reached 12 ft where we encountered the real trouble.

The water was black and we never thought of a strong current.

The huge cage dragged by ten people was swept away, snapping the cords. There were instant risks of some one falling into the water.

Suddenly, I surged forward – leaving every one behind. If death come, it could be me so that no one would be held responsible.

Doctor got clearly alarmed seeing my determined move. He continued shouting – Mind your steps

A huge cage was again brought up with strong cords held by sturdy youths. Simultaneously, we readied people with boulder in hand. Soon the cage was lowered in water it tilted, but before it could capsized we rapidly threw the boulders thus successfully stabilizing it. As soon as it was settled – then other two cages were easily installed.

We floated down the beams and rafters from upstream and lifted them to the pillars. When these were fixed and nailed, then a platform of 8 ft wide was laid across the 300 ft long bridge which was then ready.

But the job was far from being over. The approach from palizi end had a drop of 40 ft in 200 long stretch. The road must be cut across the wall to have an easy gradient for movement of vehicles. Again, hundreds of people came with crow bars, shovels, pickaxes. They flexed their muscles and completed the herculean task.

Doctor Norbu burst in repeated cheers – Christened this massive works – a battle of waterloo! Surely a war was won against formidable adversary – the river.

The road-blocks upto 11 Kms. were cleared and widened for a jeep to pass.

Then we sent information to Sinam Dusosow – the MLA, to come with Executive Engineer for an opening ceremony. The MLA was crest fallen and heard it in total disbelief. He thought the EAC was a sobar fellow, but never knew how he went crazy!

But when the official gave the detail, he came with the Executive Engineer, when they saw the bridge, it was a great surprise to them. The Executive Engineer had to hide his pathetic face when he saw his own failure to do anything for so long.

There was spontaneous joy. Hundreds of people gathered in the water front in colourful dress and danced whole day. The jeeps rolled triumphantly and came upto 11 Kms. of the road, 6 Kms. short

of Thrizino. It took another fort-night to clear the blocks upto Thrizino.

But before we thought of a grand function, a district official suddenly arrived unannounced.

As the jeep sped through the road and head lights scanned the horizon, scores of people rushed from their houses to see the incredible thing that had happened at Thrizino.

The entire works of construction were done by free labour with no expenditure from Government. It remained steady for seven months till the second flood came when the river water rose 10 ft. high and swept away every thing — leaving no trace of it !

The bridge immediately solved our vital need of transporting stores. Soon a jeep came to us and we could lift our provisions speedily from the stores at Palizi.

Anyone who saw the bridge was simply amazed — how was this task so easily done !

The new Deputy Commissioner was no less surprised. How could we do it? My reply was — sheer will power — nothing else.

Deputy Commissioner a lady IAS officer from Delhi, however never could appreciate the team works we generated. She made no mention to the government for any award to our workers.

Her behaviour at first was simply eccentric. Wearing tight jeans with high hill boots, she hopped like a comic figure. In spite of our caution she moved in rapid trots and soon had a bad fall, cramping her feet!

Many a time her behaviour caused us annoyance. She was never steady, drove the jeep herself in incredible speed, seldom slept during night, chain smoking and shouted at the staff on any pretext.

Once her behaviour was really astounding. I came all the way from Thrizino being called by her for an urgent discussion.

It was evening when I arrived at her place. She just looked at me, said nothing and vanished behind the door screen.

I kept waiting till at last felt impatient and called the attendant who informed — memsaheb has already left the house!

Much later, I found her a changed woman, perhaps mellowed by age and experience in the frontier, She was now a polite and gentle lady.

It reminded me of our earlier times as young officers of the civil service and what Verrier Elwin had always told us – to shun the superiority complex and never to consider ourselves as most intelligent beings.

It was time for me to move out of Thrizino when the summer of 1982 was coming to an end. Two and half years was enough for a tenure, and I sought a transfer to another place.

The order came much later. As assignment was given in newly opened rural development department with a posting to Tawang. I handed over the charge to C.N. Lungkieng, Circle Officer who was posted a few months earlier.

It was a memorable event when the villagers came out from their houses to bid me a touching farewell. So long they had held me back till I would go with an elevated rank. Now since it had come, reluctantly they had to let me go.

It was Picha Sidisow of Dijangania and Setu Sagrasama of Karangania village who gave most emotional speech. Never before, they said that they had realised a dream of collective works, self reliance and the trees planted in the township would bear the witness for the posterity of the memorable past.

I left Kharu, Madhu, Renu, Sashu, Ajin, Sidi, Pangku, Vanja, Tafam, and scores of others with whom I had passed my happy days.

It was a pang of sorrow when the jeep at last sped through the road over to Palizi towards Bomdila

## In the Hallowed Land of Monyul

It was November 1982 when I left for Tawang. The 180 Kms. long metalled road made a steady climb after 40 Kms. from Dirang. Far above was seen a thin line of zig-zag road going upto 14000 ft., Se-la pass.

Soon after crossing the Sengedzong; the last village of Dirang circle, I encountered the snow sweeping across the mountain side.

The metalled road was full of slush as dozers removed the snow. As tar cover had already gone, the speed of the jeep slowed down and began to rattle over the exposed stones.

Over the army post at Baisaki the snow became more thick. The tall fir, tsuga trees and rhododendrons had already shed their green and turned all white.

For army vehicles fitted with chains in the wheels, the progress was better but for our jeep the going was rough over the sodden track.

At last I arrived at Se-la pass strewn with boulders and stunted trees badly mauled by howling winds. The cold was intense with snow flakes as I stepped out to have a glimpse of the frozen lake of Nuranang.

There before me on a cemented plaque was the quotation of the beautiful lines to cheer up the weary travellers:

“When you come to the end of the road my old friend – there is a vale and a peak where your spirit is lead.



There is a fold of green and hush of snow — Which you must know, where you must go — so our blood and our bone — ours through earths mighty Lord and the end of your track is the start of the road".

A sudden blizzard shook me off — drying the marrow of my bones, across the thick parka fold. The wind swept over the face with icy chill and I managed to rush back to the jeep and moved fast down the slope of the barren mountain top.

At some distance where the lake water appeared in a stream, the fishery department had a trout hatchery farm — the first of its kind in the frontier.

There in number of ponds, the eggs were released for natural breeding. Full grown trouts were now sold to the market earning a revenue for the Government.

Stately fir, Tsuga, Junipers, rhododendrons and bushes were fast disappearing from Se-la. The road had kindled immense hope but had also brought curse. Scores of labour gangs had pitched up tents in high mountain pass. In intense chill and blizzard the only hope is fire to bring some warmth. Where from they could get it except the wood, and so merciless onslaught was on the trees — even stumps also were not spared.

Early travellers had mentioned about Se-la, white and red bloom of rhododendrons and myriad of other flowering plants, but now only a bleak mountain slope stood with exposed rocky profiles.

Nuranang stream rushes in torrents when it reaches the down hill. There was a proposal to tap the water for hydro power generation — a viable project if ever materialised.

A few kilometers from Se-la is Jaswantgarh — so named after the valiant fighter Jaswant Singh who laid down his life fighting alone against a vastly superior enemy troops during 1962 war.

Many stories are circulated now that, during midnight, any army vehicle moving up or down the road slows down mysteriously, and gathers the speed again when the occupants give a smart salute to the unseen figure standing on the road. Every one believed that it was the ghost of Jaswant Singh, the valiant fighter still on guard in the post.

Such stories — fact or fiction circulated any way in the areas where fierce fighting had taken place. Travellers were supposed to have experienced peculiar sensation at the particular stretch of the road where ghost soldiers still parade. One such place was near the Chugh bridge at the bifurcation of Rupa — Bomdila road when late night vehicle going up hill suddenly slows down and heavy body of unseen figure quickly occupies the rear seat. Soon after the bridge crossed, the vehicle again slows down to off load the unseen passenger. This was the ghost of the sentry who fell to the enemy bullets during the war.

In the parade ground of Tawang where fierce fight took place, scores of soldiers had died. Some time during chilly night one might hear faint sound of thud! thud! beatings of the boots on the hard ground and chilly cries.

The road continued descent along the gentle slope through the forest of spruce, Fir, oaks and slender bamboo. Some where from vantage point appeared the magnificent view of Tawang in the distance. Towering over the sprawling valley, spread on the spur of a hill, is a fort like structure — the monastery of Tawang.

Dotted around the valley are the cluster of hamlets- the settlement of Monpas amidst terraced fields and groves, forest. A solitary stone building stood apart, above the village- the religious shrine — the Gompa.

Below the valley floor zigzagged a milky white course- the river Tawang Chu flowing westwards to Bhutan. The river originates from 23,300 ft. height Gorichan range -- the highest mountain of the frontier.

Far above the valley rose the massive mountain brushed white by deep snow. In the crags of the mountain wall stood perilously the isolated monasteries, far away from the crowded village, where lamas go for long retreat.

The jeep sped through Zang, crossed the river by an Iron bridge, made a gradual climb through Lao, Khrimu, Bomdir, Lumberdung, Champung, Chambu to reach 10,000 ft. height township of Tawang.

Unlike Bomdila, Tawang is on a Plateau with enough of room for lateral expansion. Being a district headquarters, there were quite

a few activities with large concentration of officials to implement the developmental programmes. A hospital, craft centre, higher secondary school, Hansen disease sanatorium, Potato Seed Producing Farm, Poultry and cattle farm, all contributed to the rapid economic growth. A 1.5 Megawatt hydel project produces electricity to supply to the town and villages. A low powered Radio station beams regular programmes within a radius of ten kilometers.

Besides the main road to Bomdila, lateral roads of 100 Kms. have now been constructed to connect the circle headquarters of Lumla and Mukto.

I got again a few known faces. Lhendup as DC, Rohluta and Malhotra As EACs, Dr. Nath as Medical Officer, Luinkeng and Das as Circle Officers. The other officials were Jacob – the district education officer, Jawhar Datta Roy as DAO, L.R. Jyrwa as Agronomist, Nair as District Veterinary Officer, Boruah as Executive Engineer, Kakoti as Assistant Director of Industry, G.C. Yadav as Principal, Higher Secondary School.

A number of colonies widely separated from each other housed the residential quarters of the officials.

There were two dozen shops run by enterprising Monpas and Tibetan refugees. As born traders, they have excellent business acumen and run their shops with quite efficiency. Many of them bring their goods from the far away markets. No where in the frontier have I seen people like Monpas who excel in all trades.

Winter is severe in Tawang with frequent snow fall which apart from blocking the pipe lines made the roads slushy. The heavy army vehicles made deep ruts and caused enough of inconvenience.

Both firewood and charcoal were very costly commodities. Yet, without a fire it was impossible to stay. With the increase of population, the town area is now rapidly denuded of trees. It is though sad but true, not now, nor in the future will Tawang ever get back the green cover. Surprisingly, it was not the Monpas who resorted to random felling, but outsiders desperate to warm themselves pullout the trees for firewood.

State transport bus made thrice weekly runs to Bomdila. The journey was never easy, especially in winter when snow might bog it down in midway.

It was major R.K. Khating of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service who established the post at Tawang in 1951.

Khating affectionately called Bob had a chequered career spanning over 30 years of active life. As an officer in the Assam Rifles, he was in Brigadier Wingate's famous 'V' force who fought the Japanese behind their lines. The story of this force has gone down in history as one of the most daring adventures.

Bob was decorated with much coveted Military Cross.

On release from the Assam Rifles soon after the war, he had been a teacher for some time in a school in Assam, but the Government already knew his talents and brought him to the frontier, first as an Assistant Political Officer and then as Political Officer of Se-la Sub Agency, later renamed as Kameng Frontier Division.

His assignment as PO was equally remarkable. Never used to a cosy life Khating made extensive tours in the interior in those days of difficult communications and went round establishing chain of Administrative Centres in far flung areas — his gifts, and contribution these were.

His last assignment was as India's Ambassador to Burma from where he finally retired.

When he died at the ripe age of 80 years, scores of people lined up in Imphal Valley to pay respect to the gallant man. As if to fulfil the desire he was with his old force — the Assam Rifles — where he breathed his last.

Sadly, in the frontier where he rendered so much of service, there was no eulogy nor even a condolence in Government Circles. How soon were forgotten the pioneers of yester-years!

But old soldiers never die — they just fade away.

The valley of Tawang gently sloped down to the bank of the river. Tiers after tiers of broad terraces were constructed where they could drive their Yak ploughs. The soil is fertile by the deposit of organic matters. Before each cultivation, the soil is tilled. In every conceivable place they have planted trees, mostly oak. The bunds are strengthened to withstand the soil erosion from the on rush of water.

There were broad paths where ponies could move, and so after each harvest the grains are put in bags and brought to the house by ponies.

All the twelve villages holding large population were self sufficient. The granary of Tawang, the Kharsang area situated over 7000 ft., was the highest paddy growing pocket in the world. The variety named was Kharsanam – a medium coarse with less glutinous characteristics, not found elsewhere. The terrace covered the entire slope where paddy, maize and millets were grown. The irrigation was now provided from the tail water of hydel channel which had benefited the farmers. In the upland, fruits like Apple and walnut had become popular.

But most remarkable was the potato cultivation not even known a few years before. With certified seeds supplied by the Government, the Monpa farmers had started large scale cultivation of potato when they saw its potential. With the help of co-operated society, the disposal did not pose any problem. Tawang potato even found markets far beyond to other states.

Income generated by potato cultivation had been a staggering amount. One enterprising farmer earned a profit of Rs. 50,000/- in a single season of sale!

The Monpas use their land for high productivity. After the harvest they spread layers of dry oak leaves and allow the animals to graze at will. Any Monpa farmer would feel too happy if anyone let his animals to the field during off season. They even had the ingenious way of utilizing the night soil. The bottom of the latrine pit are covered with dry oak leaves – the dropping falling on this turn in few months to highly valuable manure which are then carted away to the field.

With few showers which fall before the sowing time, wooden ploughs driven by Yaks till the soil. The tillage operation now a days has been improved by better tools, though tractors have not yet come. Men and women equally work very hard in the field and for this reason they reap a good harvest.

They have never known to have suffered from food shortage. In summer months, every family raises vegetables in some areas of

the field. Most common crops are radish, turnip, beans. Radish and turnip which grow in big size are cut in pieces — dried and fed to their domestic animals during winter. Exotic variety like cabbage, lettuce, spinach, carrot, tomato are nowadays cultivated in view of potential market.

The Monpas greatly value their cattle which provide them much needed butter and cheese. They always look after their cattle with due attention. Though non vegetarian, they just donot kill though they would not mind eating meat. Interestingly, fishery department found poor response as rearing of fish just for table did not find favour with many pious Monpas.

Most valuable draught animal is the yak. A hefty creature with a crazy look. It has prolific hairy growth and moves with slow trot. Yaks possess tremendous stamina and strength — carry huge loads over the difficult mountain routes but seldom survive in lower altitudes.

The animal is considered a precious possession as it has multipurpose use. Apart from carrying men and loads, it provides milk from which cheese and butter are made. The flesh is eaten, the skin sewed to provide tentage, rough cloth, its bushy tail for sacramental use. It ploughs the land, its dung is used as manure or making fire in the oven. In Tibet, yaks skin is sewed and made into a raft to cross the river.

Ponies are well looked after. Fed and nursed well, the animal looks very healthy. There are leather straps and saddle which give much comfort to the rider.

Pigs and chickens are reared for meat, Pious Monpas donot like to kill by themselves, but would not mind some one doing the job.

The district, with an area of 2085 Sq. Kms. and a population of 21000, is divided into five regions. Tawang proper as Shar-Tsoksum, Lumla as Dakpa-Tsozey, Zemithang as Pongchin Dingdruk, Mukto as Rawla Gangsum, Thingbu as Makthing Lungsum.

The highest settlement — Lumthang is at 14,200 ft. height with seven houses and forty people. It is in Thingbu Circle. Earlier the

circle headquarters was Mago at 12,500 ft. height approached only through a pass at 18000 ft. — Thakurla, which remained snow bound for long time and hence the headquarter was shifted to Thingbu at slightly lower altitude of 11,500 ft height by the side of the river Tawangchu.

There is a hot spring at Mago which spewed out hot water mixed with sulphur. A dip in the water is believed to have curing properties in skin diseases. A small rectangular tank had been made at the spot for comfortable bath.

The highest Mountain peak, 23,300 ft. height Gorichan is beyond Takurla. The snow capped Gorichan is visible from far distance from Shillong, and many even mistook this as Kanchenjunga of Sikkim himalayas.

Inhospitable Thakurla claimed many victims. Skeletons of the ponies, yaks were seen littered in the pass — must have been caught in a blizzard.

In winter, Mago and Thingbu people migrate to Dirang — 140 Kms. south of Tawang, with their sheep. They sell butter, cheese and wool and bring back provisions for whole year. Except the old and infirm people who are left in the village, others withdraw at the time. Being healthy, they are sturdy mountain dwellers. As crop grows very little — the animal products are mostly used. They wear a yak head dress and blue, pink bead ornament.

Lumla at 8500 ft. height is situated 56 Kms. west of Tawang and approached by a motorable road. Being in lower altitude, there are many grazing grounds. The area has vast agricultural potential which have been exploited to their benefit. Citrus, Apple, Walnuts are now grown extensively beside maize and millet which is the staple food.

30 Kms. west of Lumla after the cheek post at Bleeting is the border of Bhutan. The river Tawang chu flows westwards, takes a southern course after entering Bhutan and goes down to the plains of Assam where its name is Manas — an important tributary of Brahmaputra.

25 Kms. beyond Lumla towards north is Zemithang by the side of the river Namjangchu. Zemithang is in far lower altitude-only 4600 ft., and has warmer climate though the snow range is not far.

People of Zemithang have tall sharp features with reddish glow complexion which some what distinguishes them from their neighbours. They wear a cap – *pangchappa*-fitted with what appears as peacock's feather and play flutes in soothing tune while grazing the herds.

The most famous land mark near Zemithang is *Gorcham Chorten*.

The hemispherical dome rests upon three terraced plinth. Four miniature stupas are set on the four corners of the lower most terrace of the plinth. The base is square with each side about one hundred seventy five feet in length, with niche running all along its whole length and 120 'Mane' are in frames of wood in the Niche of each side of the base. A paved path goes all around for the pilgrims to follow the respectful circumbulation keeping the *chorten* on the right, turning 'Mane' and uttering 'Om Mane Pema' – the jewel in the Lotus. The dome is surrounded by square capital with a spire of thirteen steps like segments topped by an umbrella.

Legend says – the *chorten* was constructed by one Lama Pradar, a Monpa Lama, who after his religious training in the monastery of Tsona, conceived the idea of the grand stupa. He got the blessing of Dalai Lama along with three sets of copper images of Lord Buddha in different sizes.

The *Chorten* was constructed in twenty years during first quarter of the eighteenth century. Some believed, it was modelled after Bodhinath stupa of Nepal. The Monpas call this *Beyu chorten*.

Lama Pradar had made an exact replica of Bodhinath temple curved in a piece of radish, and the model soaked in water was preserved till the completion of the stupa.

There are secret doors not visible, nor known to common people. Only few lamas knew their exact location. It is said that the passages lead to underground chamber where sacred religious texts and properties of well known Monasteries were kept.

*Chorten* as Buddhist, believe is a receptacle for offerings. W.Y. Evans – Went in his book – 'Tibet's great Yogi Milarepa', explained – exoterically the *chorten* symbolizes the fire elements into which man's body is resolved after death. The square base typifies the



solidity of the earth and thus the element earth, the globular portion – the water drop element fire, the crescent like the inverted vault of the sky – the element air, the accumulated circle tapering in flame in the space – the element ether. Exoterically it symbolizes the way to enlightenment from the earth progressively through the thirteenth Buddhist heavens to the informed, uncreated, beyond nature '*Nirvana*', beyond the reach of ether, wither the flame (Known as Jyoti or sacred light of Buddha) points and is lost in the voidness.

Two villages of Zemithang – Khubetang and Lumpu were believed to have belonged to black magicians and sorcerers. The victims are poisoned unnoticed and as a consequence to this, they suffer from incurable ailments leading to certain death. The poison it was told was prepared from rotten eggs and snake venom.

Sorcerers are even more dangerous. They dwell with ghosts and Goblins who follow the victims every where to create hallucination, unusual behaviour verging to insanity or even death.

For black magic – any portions of victim's favourite item is taken or even the trace of foot prints. After due ritual, the Ghost is commanded to follow the victim.

Fact or fiction – I could not verify but most people even the officials did believe this to be true.

From Lumla on way to Tawang are the villages of Magnam, Thrilum and Sykkur. Here the slopes are covered with Lemongrass. People had no use of it except rubbing the leaves on the limbs to keep away the insects. But lemon-grass contains valuable oil which is in high demand for perfume and medicine industry. A pilot plant had been installed at Thrilum but it never did actually operate.

A bright youngman Leiki Phuntso belongs to Sykkur village. He had his education in Bombay and now had joined the Government service as Assistant Director of Industries. His house was a double storied stone building with wooden panels.

Leiki's father has a power driven wheat mill which has provided him with steady income.

Mukto situated at 9000 ft. height was three hours foot march from Tawang by a winding pony track. The river Tawangchu is crossed by a suspension bridge.

The legend says that the bridge was constructed by a religious teacher Tangston Gyalpo, who was also a famous engineer.

It is said that Tangston Gyalpo came to Changkhargor in Kitpi once, where he meditated in a cave near the river Tawang Chu. As the river was not fordable, he conceived the plan to construct an iron chain bridge to connect Mukto area which was known as Rowla Gangsum.

The bridge called Chaksam still stands over the river even after four centuries of its construction. Tangston Gyalpo smelted the iron brought from a hill, the chunks were carried by the goats.

The six iron chains, which have interwoven rings, span the river. Since then the bridge had been maintained by the people as part of their social and religious duty. In the 'Mane' across the milky white river on way to Mukto, is a beautiful painting of Tangston Gyalpo with his flowing beards and deep penetrating eyes.

A 34 kms. approach road, now under construction from Zang to Mukto, would help in its rapid development. Perceiving the wind of change – the enterprising Monpas had started cultivation of fruits and potato in large scale.

Khirmu is the village of Tsering Tashi – Minister of the Union Territory.

Gentle and Sober, he had an analytical mind and pragmatic approach. Like many Monpas now-a-days, he too had his education in an outside school. His younger brother Tempa had completed his post graduation course of Delhi University and appeared in the competition for IAS. Later, he switched over to the revenue service, but resigned to Join Politics. After Tsering Tashi's departure from the ministry Tempa has now become a minister.

Tempa is a nice fellow. Like his brother, he too is Sober and intelligent. Tempa's wife Jigme Chodem is the first Monpa post graduate girl from Tawang and now a teacher in a Government College.

Tsering Tashi's brother-in-law Karma Wangchu, a tall fellow with gentle face had been an MLA of the union territory's legislature. Though he had no formal education, yet functioned quite effectively in various assigned duties in the Government.

Lobjang Dorjee, the young Circle Officer, belonged to a respectable family of Urgeyelling village. He was the only Circle Officer amongst the Monpas of Tawang. His sister – a graduate, was a teacher in a school and brother Yeshi Tsering has successfully competed in IAS and posted at Shillong as Assistant Commissioner.

Lobjang Dorjee, now belongs to the new generation of Monpas acutely conscious of their identity. Many hours we passed together when he explained to me his concept of development. While progress must be made but not at the cost of their culture and heritage. Soon they would leave their own self esteem and turn into degenerated people. Monpas are hard working and never have a dependent mentality; maintain a strong aesthetic sense which have developed in them compassion and love for all beings.

Yonten Dolma, a nice looking plumpy girl was from Urygelling. Daughter of Lama Dor Tsonam, Yonten was a graduate and was working as a teacher in higher secondary school. Her brother, Norbu, was the research officer and posted at Along in Siang District.

Pem Thiley – the Political Interpreter, belonged to Sheo village near the Tawang Monastery. Most of the people of Sheo were of Tibetan extraction and work for the Monastery. The village had lovely trees, gardens and present an aesthetic beauty.

Pem Thiley had a chequered history. Initially he trained himself for some years as a lama in a famous Monastery but subsequently due to his marriage had to leave the Monastic duty to become a laiety. He soon earned a good name because of his gentle nature.

Yeshi the peon in DC's office also belonged to Sheo village. Affable and of Loving nature, Yeshi never knew complaint and carried her task cheerfully.

## The Elegant Tribe

The traditional Monpa dress consists of a full sleeve cloak of coarse woolen dyed red which reaches little above the knees. The cloak is worn loose and tied with a sash in the waist. They wear trousers and boots of local manufacture.

A coarse felt with edges of fur is worn on the head. There are exquisite design in the works. The boots may be of leather or made out of thick cloth with fine workmanship.

A short sword in brass scabbard is thrust in sash.

Monpa woman had also woolen clothes wrapped around the body and reach far below the knees upto ankle. The jacket made of wool is worn which goes upto the waist.

Their hair is twisted in a plait behind. On the head, a round cap is worn.

Like men, the women too wear boots.

Women are expert weavers. Finely designed carpets adorned every monpa house. Most of their own cloth requirements, are woven in the portable looms, while carpet weaving is done in larger looms.

Monpa women, like their men, also very hard working. Even in bitter winter, no one sits idle.

Men are expert in wood carving, painting and smithy. These they do meticulously either for domestic and religious chores. As expert wood carvers they bring out masks of human, animals or devils which they wear during religious dance and functions.

Monpas for their religious texts indigenously manufacture paper from the bark of a shrub called *shugusheng* which grows abundantly in the area. At first the bark is removed from the plant

and soaked in running water of a stream. After sometime, the outer coat is separated and removed.

The remaining portion is mixed with ash and boiled in water in a big vessel. After few hours of boiling when the content becomes soft, this is removed from the vessel and beaten by a wooden stave to loosen the fibres and to reduce the mass to a pulp. It is then put in a barrel of water. The content is thoroughly churned. Thin layer of paper floats in water which is gradually removed by a square sized reed sieve and placed on a broad solid board and pressed under a heavy stone to squeeze out the water. When fully dried, the thin sheets of paper of required size are cut into pieces. To make the paper smooth, these are rubbed against polished stone.

The printing is done by wooden blocks containing the letters of sacred texts.

The paper is though coarse but nevertheless good, being insect proof. This can be dyed in different colours particularly when required for special printing.

Monpas are rather fond of drink-their home made fermented brew. During the new year festival – *Losar*, the excessive booze make many of them drunk, and on roads, one might see staggering figures and some even lying flat on the ground. But interestingly, no where a brawl ever heard. People just like to enjoy.

Their another favourite drink is salted butter tea. They mix ingredients and put in a cylindrical long tube and churn it for proper mix. Any visitor to Monpa house invariably will be given fermented brew or butter tea- some times several cups.

To the approach of a Monpa village are tall wooden poles put up with streamers of cloth and paper printed with sacred words as well. These are called *Darsing*. Roof of the house, over the depressions, streams, big stones carry paper flags strung on a cord.

During auspicious days juniper twigs are burnt on the road side cairns which give out a fragrant smell in the air. It is the duty of the laity to preserve the nature for the tranquillity and peace of mind. Trees are preserved to give an aesthetic view and every Gompa has grove where chirping birds wander.

In every Monpa house there is invariably a small chapel in shape of an alter containing shelves where images of various divinities

and ritual articles are kept. Religious books are kept in small shelves. Butter lamps are placed in the niche of the altar.

Marriage system of the Monpas is far liberal. There is no heavy dowry nor the child marriage. The boys and girls might marry at their prime age as negotiated by their parents. Polyandry though once prevalent is but now-a-days rarely followed. Divorce or widow remarriage is permissible in the society.

The dead bodies are disposed of by different methods.

Leaving the corps in high mountains to be devoured by vultures.

Burial,

Cremation of the body,

Cut in 108 pieces and thrown in the river.

The first method is not common these days. The system was prevalent in Tibet only-known as feeding the birds in high desolate plateau.

It is the Lama — who determines the type of disposal of the body. But most common method followed now-a-days is burial.

For a few top ranking incarnated Lamas, there is another form of burial. The body is dried and cured with salt and embalmed. The embalmed body is wrapped in coloured cloths and enshrined in a 'stupa' which is venerated by the people.

Richly endowed by nature, blended with religion of compassion and tolerance, the Monpas have evoked an unique cultural pattern which has found expression in various songs and dance. While some of these dwell on meaningful life, others have been woven around the myths and end with a moral lesson.

Most popular are the Yak and Ajilamu dance.

In the Yak dance, the story begins from Thepa Gali, who had an ugly appearance. The family thought him to be good for nothing and left with him no share except some useless articles like torn hat and shoe which made him very depressed. One day he quietly left the house and came near a big lake where he found three eggs. He broke the egg one by one. But from the last one a black Yak came out which atonce moved to the water. But Thepa Gali some how managed to hold it back with the help of a rope and nourished it carefully.

In course of time, the Yak delivered calves one after another. From that day, Yak came into existence and became a precious possession of men.

Aji Lamu was an old folk dance drama that dates back to many centuries.

The story from the folk legends is a famous one in the traditional literature, and throughout has been recognised for its setting in Kameng district.

Aji was honorific name for a lady and Lhamu means goddess. Such deities are usually shown as dressed up in gorgeous costumes.

Once upon a time there was a hermit who lived with his wife on a hill in a small stone shrine. Being in an isolated place, they were only visited by animals of the forest and spirits of the sky.

One night the hermit's wife dreamt that the rays of the sun and the moon fell on her body at the same time and asked her husband what this could be. He told her that it was a good omen and she would bear a fairy child who would become a queen, and who would be full of compassion, love for all human beings and later would return to her abode in the sky.

As told, a daughter was born soon after and grew up in course of time.

At that time there lived a chieftain whose wife did not bear him any child. He felt depressed and began to shower his affection on his dog and spent more time in hunting animals in the forest. One day, his Minister set out with his dog for a hunt, Ministers two daughters, who had learnt the teaching of compassion and love, tried to stop him from killing the animals of the forest. But he did not listen to them, went far away on his hunt till he reached the hermit's place.

At that time, he found the dog was missing and entered the hermit's place in search of it. He broke in to a room and saw the hermit's fairy daughter whom he at once thought ideal to be his chieftain's bride. He then placed the traditional stick of betrothal. But the girl did not want to marry as she had vowed to remain as a celibate. Yet her parents according to revelation in the dream that she would become a queen, made her change her mind and marriage was solemnised with due pomp and gaiety.

She bore him two children- one became a prince another a princess.

But the first wife of the chieftain became jealous and nursed a grudge, spied on them through her trusted attendants and made secret plots to banish them. She drugged the chieftain and took control of the court herself. She got both the prince and the princess confined and later condemned them to death. But the executioners took pity, released them secretly and brought instead the hearts of dogs to show her that those were of the slain prince and princess.

But her witches who were on guard saw both of them escaping and tried to get them, but then with the help of some people they escaped to safety.

The children's mother — the fairy queen after so much of hardship and suffering went back to her abode in the sky.

But she left behind her cloak in the house of her husband.

The evil woman — the first wife of the chieftain saw through her magic glass the wanderings of the prince and princess and managed to bring them again to confinement for execution. One of the executioners took pity on the young princes and released her to escape into the forest. But the other executioner stood firm and threw the young prince down a steep gorge, but then a huge bird saw him falling from the height and caught him in the midway and released him in a safe place.

His sister in the meantime, met a band of nomads wandering with their yaks who took her away. But one day when they put her in confinement in the old hermitage which was her grandfather's home, her brother also suddenly arrived there. He immediately recognised her voice in an old song which they used to sing together and two then happily got reunited. The prince returned to the home and got his father — the chieftain — released from the clutches of his step mother. Though she fought with the help of her soldiers but could not succeed as he finally managed to kill her with an arrow and buried her in a stone cavern.

After he won the battle, the prince became the king of *'Yul pemachen'* — the Lotus land of the hills.



## Buddhism — The Religion of the Monpas

The people of Tawang profess Tibetan form of Buddhism with the inclusion of some local deities to the pantheon. Prior to their conversion to Buddhism sometimes in twelfth century, they believed in the existence of numerous spirits who they worshipped. The original *Bon* religion though no longer practised, yet many of the supernatural beings are worshipped according to the manner of Buddhist rituals.

The hallowed land of Tawang has been known as Monyul or the southern country wherein a number of religious structures and institutions are scattered over the land, which have manifested the rich cultural heritage of the people. Of these religious shrines the most important is the Tawang Monastery which stands as a fountain head of spiritual life of the Monpas.

Sometimes in eighth century AD, so it is said that great Tantric scholar of the famous university of Nalanda Guru Padmasambhava set his foot in Monyul. Wandering across the vast country of Tibet he came near the enormous mountain range separating Monyul from Tibet. There lay before him a bowl shaped paradise; its rim was guarded by a chain of lofty hills, the valley lined with tall majestic trees, grass land and meadows covered its belly. Milky white water of the river cascading down the slope appeared fuming and fretting while traversing the course. The shrill whistles of birds filled the air and deer and antelopes galloped in gay abandon. The air was cool but not dry — the skin did not parched in howling winds. Here is the place thought the guru, an ideal spot for his quest and deep meditation.

The legend tells about the visit of the Lupon Rimpoche, the other name of Guru Padmasambhava, to seven places of Mon-yul-Taktsang, Jiksang, Baggajang, Kimnash, Terma Bumgen, Bigha and Komefuk, where he has left behind distinct marks. All these places are now adorned with the Gompas, and are venerated by the devotees.

Tradition also says that it was Padmasambhava who predicted the construction of three oldest Buddhist temples at Urgeyelling, Sangelling and Tsorgyelling collectively known as lingsum or three stones near Tawang.

The great master has believed to have hidden away religious texts in caves for future revelation. Pema Lingpa, the son of a Lama discovered some of the hidden gospels of the great master from the bottom of the lake, and he became a famous Buddhist teacher.

Situated at the height of 10,000 ft., the Monastery of Tawang is the fountain head of the spiritual life of the people. It stands on the spur of a hill overlooking the wide Tawang valley and is surrounded on all sides except on the east with mountains of snow capped peaks and coniferous forest below. Viewed from the distance it appears like a fort as if guarding its votaries in the wide valley. The impression is not totally devoid of substance in view of the hostility its founder faced from the Karmapas and Nyingmapas — the two Buddhist sects then dominant in the area and more so from the Dukpas of Bhutan. The Dukpas of Bhutan made several attempts to capture Tawang.

This explains the strategic location as well as the structures purely defensive in nature made in the lay out of the monastery which remained not only as strong base for propagation of religion but also as a Military post against the Dukpa attacks. Mera Lama, its founder, gave so much importance to defence aspect that he lifted all prohibitions against the military activities from the inmates of the monastery.

The spur on which the monastery is situated has rivers in the south and west, a narrow ridge on the north connecting with the range and a gradual slope on the east. The position is strong as it is difficult to approach the monastery from the North along the ridge.

A building houses the huge *Dongjur Mane*. Another small hut is situated near it with a big 'Mane' inside. The resident Lamas constructed an aqueduct from the source of water lying three kilometers away to the house of *Dongjur Mane*.

The water is made to fall from the height to the spokes of these two '*manes*' keeping them under constant rotation. The water is then conducted out of the building by narrow wooden channel. The building is called *Chikang* – the water point for the Monastery.

The path passes by these and through a gate – *Kakaling*, at seventy five fts. to the south of *Chikang* and just on the end of the ridge, which is only twenty feet wide where the *Kakaling* stands. The ceiling of the *Kakaling* is painted with pictures of many divinities. The upper side of the inner line are brightly painted with murals of divinities and saints. One of the murals of Southern wall, the ninth one from south western corner is that of *ningmechen*, who according to old 'Bon' religion is the guardian deity of Tawang area. He has been incorporated in the local Buddhist pantheon and is worshipped in Buddhist style, and without animal sacrifice.

The Monastery was constructed between 1643 and 1647 by Lodre Gyaltsso – known by the name Mera Lama, who was born in Poudun – South of Tawang.

After his education in various Monasteries in Tibet, Mera Lama obtained the degree of *Ge-She*. At the time the information reached him that Dukpas of Bhutan had directed their attack against his religious establishment. He went to the fifth Dalai Lama – Nagwang Lobjang Gyaltsso, and sought his advice. He placed before him a plan of constructing a new monastery. The Dalai Lama issued a mandate to all the villages in Tawang area to help Mera Lama in his project. He gave him a ball of Yarn and told him that the boundary lines of his monastery should be of the same length as the ball of yarn.

Mera Lama returned to Tsosun, the present day Tawang. One day, he went to a hill called Bramdongchung, three miles north of Tawang, where there was a cave. He left his horse outside and sat down to pray for divine light. When he came out, he did not find his horse. This was strange as the horse never strayed away from his master. He followed the hoof marks and came to place where once

stood the palace of one of the noble men and found his horse there. He at once perceived that divine help had come and that was the site for his Monastery and gave the name as Tawang – the place chosen by horse.

The people of Tawang gradually gathered round Mera Lama and were ready to help in the construction of the Monastery. The area was measured with the yarn of the ball given by Dalai Lama and each village constructed a part of the Monastery. The full name of the monastery is Tawang Galden Namgye Ihatso – Celestial paradise of the divine site chosen by the horse.

When Mera Lama reported to Dalai Lama the completion of the monastery, he gave him a painting of *Goddess Palden Lhamo*, his patron deity to be kept in the Monastery, the manuals *chaiche-bamarna* that contained rules to be followed by resident Lamas and deputed a learned and pious monk as abbot and two Monastic officials.

Sokpo Jomkar, the famed commander of the Mongol forces of Gusrikhan came to the area with a body of troops to firmly establish a Gelugpa Sect. A mural of Sokpo Jomkhar is seen adorning the eastern wall of the assembly hall.

The building, which Mera Lama used as his residence, is situated near the gate at the Southern end. After the death of Mera Lama, the dead body was cremated. The eyes tongue and heart did not get burnt, it is said, but remained lumped up together. These along with ashes are preserved in a small gilded *chorten* inside the building. A small image of Mera Lama is in the recess of the wall in the dome of the *chorten*. The walls are adorned with murals of divinities.

A three storied building stands on the western side of the court. It is the *Barkhang* or Library. The wooden blocks with the pages of scriptures cut out on them used to be preserved in the ground floor of the library. In the wall of the front verandah of the ground floor is a stone slab bearing a foot print. It was of an inmate of the monastery, whose duty had been to fetch water. He was generally referred as Chulenpa. After a long service, he declared one day that this duty of his had come to an end and so saying he put his foot on this slab which left the print.

The actual library is housed in a big square hall, which covers the entire first floor. Heavy curtains bearing the Buddhist symbols are hung over the balcony, An altar with images of divinities and chief image of Tsangkhapa, the founder of gelugpa sect and ritual articles stand on the western side of the hall. The sacred books are kept on small sockets on both sides of the altar. The Library contains printed and hand written books. The printed sets extend to 101 volumes and hand written sets have 131 volumes. Letters of the books were washed in gold.

There is a small building to the north of the Library housing four '*Manes*'. A long two storied building flanks the southern side of the court. A part of the building is used as store for provisions of the Lamas. The other part is occupied by the estate Manager. A single storied building on the eastern side of the court is used for cooling. In front of the kitchen stands a tall prayer flag in the court.

The three storied assembly hall stands on the northern side of the court and houses the temple and establishment of abbot. It is about 113 feet long in North south direction and about 80 feet across. The entrance to the temple is through a wide vestibule, the walls of which are decorated with coloured murals. The Murals on the walls to all directions are of the guardian deities. The wheel of life – *Sibi Khorlo*, illustrating the six realms in which man can be reborn, is painted on the eastern wall of the vestibule and among those on the western wall is the Buddhist universe – *Hrirap*.

The eastern, southern and western walls of the hall are adorned with murals in bright colours. The one of local interest in the eastern wall is that of Sokpo Jomkhar – the Mongol – while in the southern wall is that of *Ningmechen*, the guardian deity of Tawang area in old '*Bon*' faith. The group of eight Buddhas and thirty five confessional Buddhas are depicted on the Western wall. Two feet high *chorten* and five feet image of *Chenreji Chantong* are at the northern side of the western wall.

The altar occupies the entire southern wall of the hall. There is a big wooden case of painted portraits, about twelve feet high and thirty feet long.

The front is covered with silk curtains and white ceremonial scarfs, inside it are small images, religious scrolls and beautifully

designed silver casket. The silver casket is wrapped in silk and is said to bear the seal of Mera Lama. The remaining part of western side of the north wall and western wall are fitted with a wooden case displaying the thirty five Buddhas of confession. The western half of the southern wall is adorned with murals of twenty renowned scholars including Lobzang Drakpa known as Tsongkhapa who introduced Gelugpa reformed church and Palden Atish or Dipankar Sri-Jnana.

A two storied temple is at the back of the assembly hall. The image of 'Gonpo' – one of the defenders of the faith – is inside a closed shelf on the altar of the first floor.

The southern wall of the first floor is depicted with a mural, which explains the myth of a demon called *Hanumenda* and his followers who will destroy this world, but *maitreya* the Buddha will descend from *Tushita* – the heaven on the earth and propagate the Dharma again.

The Monastery gets agricultural levy *Khrei* – twice a year in summer and autumn from the villages. The *Khrei* is for the maintenance of the monastery and the Lamas, and has been levied from the time of Mera Lama.

The house holders bring the *Khrei* to the Monastery and deposit with the estate Manager. Each house holder supplies also a fixed quantity of firewood to the Monastery.

The admission to the Monastery is generally confined to those areas from where it receives the contributions. Families with fewer than three sons are not required to admit one as a novice but those with three sons have to give the second son to the Monastery to become a monk. If the householder has more than three sons, he might give one or more of his sons to become monks. The Monastic authorities depute one or two lamas around the area to find out the defaulters. If the second son has any physical deformity he has to be substituted by one of his brothers.

Several festivals are held in different parts of the year. The one that is performed in every third year in grand scale is called *Dungjur*. A message is sent to Dalai Lama a year ahead of its performance. He would send an article – *Fobjum* to the abbot of the monastery. It is then mixed with dough made of barley and turned into several

small balls and coloured red. The abbot takes his seat on a throne in the ground floor verandah of the library building. The devotees file past him when he bestows his blessings by touching their heads with the holy water vase.

In the Monastery, every life is sacred and so also of a dog. Lured by smell of food so many dogs crowded around that once Monastic authorities had to take some drastic measure-hounded up all the dogs, put them in a covered truck, drove hundreds of kilometers away and released them into the forest, but the dogs after a few days found their way back to the monastery!

Tsangyang Gyatso, the sixth Dalai Lama, was born at Urgyelling. Legend says that Mera Lama, the founder of Tawang Monastery, requested the fifth Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso, for a visit to Tawang, but he could not do so. Hence to redeem the promise made to the people of Tawang, he took his birth at Urgyelling in the person of Tsangyang Gyatso.

Five kilometers from Tawang along the beautiful tarred road is Urgyelling. From the main road, a feeder road, half a km long, leads to gompa. The distance from Tawang by foot path is only two kms. The site of the Gompa and the surrounding areas are idyllic. Snow capped mountains, the enchanting Se-La range, rolling valleys, groves of pines and poplar trees, the silvery water of Tawangchu cascading down in its zigzag course towards Bhutan and above all the great Monastery, towering majestically like a fortress as if to keep an eternal watch on the devotees in the wide valley below-all make the place enchanting and romantic.

South west of Urgyelling is Kitpi-once the Granery of Tawang. The present township of Tawang was known as Pungden-a name given by Mera Lama. Mere Lama foretold human settlement Springing up in the area which had been lying waste with stunted trees and grass just near the Monastery which he had built.

The name *Pung* means collection of people. The prophecy of Mera Lama came true later when the area east of the famous monastery developed into a sprawling township – the growth of which is still continuing. Mera Lama also gave a name to a place as Nymodung means deformed, signifying diseased and is an appropriate term for the people crippled by the Hansen disease.

A sacred grove of forest, *Lushangrong*, stands near the Ugyelling Gumpa. The trees are not cut, nor the branches pruned by the laity for fear of divine curse. A small water hole is located inside the grove.

Only one dwelling house belonging to Lama Dor Tsonam now stands near the Gumpa. Formerly, there were seven families but six of the families left the place. Lama Dor Tsonam is a deeply religious man, simple in habit and hospitable in nature. He had been a *Dapa* or Novice, monk in Tawang monastery and originally belonged to the village of Thongleng – 20 Kms. from Tawang. Though a *Dapa*, who takes a vow of celibacy, Lama Dor Tsonam in course of his Monastic duties used to visit Ugyelling and married Dorjee Choten – the daughter of Ngawang Jungnge of the village. After his marriage, he had to leave the Monastery and became a layman as Monastery does not admit a person who does not adhere to celibacy.

Ugyelling was established by Lama Ugyen Tsampo Terten Pema Lingpu the other name of Lama Sherbum. The Lama is believed to have discovered a *Terma* – the hidden scriptures of Lupon Rimpoche. Discoverer of *Terma* is known as Terten. The Ugyen is taken from his first name and ling is added from Lingpu. The Lama had esoteric power and could demonstrate miracles by bringing out precious things from beneath the earth. Hence Pema Lingpu was added to his name.

It was the Nyingmapas so far who had brought out the hidden ‘gems’ – the ‘*terma*’ buried in the earth. It is said that Gelugpas, even if they knew, would not have removed this *Terma*.

Lama Ugyen Tsampo was credited with subduing the evil spirits. One such spirit *SINMO* was creating havoc in the neighbourhood of Koleteng and Lama Ugyen shot an arrow from his magical bow and killed the spirit. The arrow ricocheted on the stone – the mark of which is still visible.

Originally, the gumpa constructed by Lama Ugyen Tsampo was double the present size. It had two storied structure with bigger space. Two other gompas – Sangyelling and Tsorgyelling were also situated nearby. Those belong to Nyingmapa sect. But when the Gelugpas gained the supremacy of Northern Church – the Mongols who jealously guarded the Gelugpas doctrine launched an invasion



in Bhutan and came also to Mon-yul to remove the growth of Nying-mapa, Karmapa and other sects. It was Sopkho Jomkhar – a general in the Army of Gusrikan, who came to Mon-yul and thoroughly ransacked the three Monasteries of Ugyelling, Sangyelling and Tsorgyelling. He then proceeded to ransack the Tawang Monastery. The Monastery at the time was known as Tana Mandekang and Sopkho Jonkhar thought it to be also a seat of Nyingmapas. He wanted to take all hand written copies of Kanjur and Tanjur (Kanjur is the canon embodying the words of Lord Buddha and is composed of one hundred eight volumes. The Tanjur or the commentaries consist of two hundred and twenty five volumes) to Tibet. At that time there were five hundred Monks in the monastery and they were observing the festival of *gandel Langhema*. The festival of *gandel Laghema* was held according to direction of Tsongkhapa or Je Rimphoche (Precious Jewel – the founder of Gelugpa sect. Sopkho Jomkhar got greatly scared seeing the desecration he was about to bring and prostrated himself to the Lamas and begged for mercy. He laid there every thing-guns, ammunitions and all the looted articles of the three temples and left the place in a huff to Tibet. The precious scriptures ransacked by Sopkho Jomkhar are still in the Tawang Monastery. Subsequently, Nyingmapas could rebuild the gompa at Ugyelling and Sangyelling but Tsorgyelling lay in ruins. The two gompas though reconstructed were but much reduced in size than their original.

Tsewang Lamo – the mother of Tsangyang Gyatso experienced certain miracles during her pregnancy. Once she was pounding grains in a mortar but to her surprise found that water had been accumulating. This phenomeno continued for some time. That stone mortar-*chum*, is still kept near the ground floor of the gompa. Again in her pregnancy she was on her way to cultivation field and felt very thirsty. No water could be found nearby but to her immense relief a spring gushed out with milk white water and she could quench her thirst. The name of the spring was *Oma chikang* (Oma – milk, Chikang – water) and was situated in *Singe gorbeo* area – half a kilometer north east of Ugyelling Gompa.

Tsangyang Gyatso when as a child was bed ridden with serious illness. He had a younger brother who died while crawling and hit against a stone. Just at the time of death Tsangyang shouted from

his bed 'Mera Lama Wasung Oh' – Mera Lama has gone. The impression of the strike on the stone by his younger brother is still seen in the stone which is kept in the Ugyelling Gompa. His brother was supposed to have been an incarnation of Mera Lama and thus left the world for him to propagate the religion as Dalai Lama. Another stone bearing a foot print said to be of Tsangyang is also kept in the gompa.

The year of birth of Tsangyang Gyatso was in 1683. Lobsang Gyatso – the fifth Dalai Lama predicted his rebirth in the south of Lhasa. Nyochung Cheigong, the official oracle of Lhasa, when consulted after the death of fifth Dalai Lama said that birth has taken place in Lingsum – three places with suffix ling. There was a lake in Southern Tibet – Tsongoke, where the Lamas went. In the lake an image of a beautiful area with lush green vegetation became visible when they looked into the water. The Deshi Sangye Gyatso – the regent of Tibet, then began a secret search all round the area came to know that a child in Mom-yul tallying with the description had been found at Ugyelling.

By the time Deshi's search party came to Ugyelling, Tsangyang was already a boy. By now he had developed earthly interest by constantly mixing with others of his age group. His regular haunt was in the forest nearby overlooking the sprawling Kharsanang area. His behaviour once aroused the wrath of his sister so much that she took a stick and beat him on the back. Tsangyang then rubbed the wounds on a stone, the mark of which is still seen. But despite his running away habit he had deep respect for his parents and once demonstrated to the people by crossing over a big stone by one foot and saying that whoever has respect and regards for his parents can only accomplish such feat. The task was almost impossible for the uninitiated one but Tsangyang by his act proved that only the faithful could do so as he had done.

Tsangyang's miraculous act was also shown at a place *Singe Gorbe*, where once while on move he felt very thirsty. Suddenly, a murmur of water was heard inside the stone and a stream came out. The stone '*Trupchu*' is still there but the stream apparently dried up.

A stone in the shape of lion known as *Singe* is in the area. Tsangyang used to sit on it for his play facing Rhewla Gangsum –

the present Mukto area. Because of this it is said the people of Mukto area are bestowed with property and many are rich.

When Deshi's representatives ultimately arrived at Ugyelling with the announcement of discovery- Tsewang Lama shouted for Tsangyang from her place. Hearing her call he hurriedly wrote on a stone slab with the finger tip – '*Lamo Kheno*' – Oh! Lord, see. While writing he kept his left hand on the stone as a support. The letters with the impression of left hand fingers are still seen on the stone which is a kilometer away in the North- east of Ugyelling gompa.

Tsangyang always used to say that he would not stay in Ugyelling and would leave the place very soon.

At the time of his departure he took a stick with three nodes cut out from the branch of a tree '*Chandong Sieng*' and planted in the ground on the south west of the gompa telling that when the trunks of the tree attain the same height, he would come again to visit the place. Legend says that if any of the branches collapses, then great calamity would befall the Dalai Lama. It happened so in late fifties of the present century when a storm broke out and a trunk of the tree was struck by lightning and broke. The year marked the flight of Dalai Lama from Tibet. It also coincided that two trunks were of same height when fourteenth Dalai Lama on a visit to Tawang during April 1983, came to the same spot.

Tsangyang Gyatso was fond of earthly life with sensual pleasures. He was very handsome for which people were spontaneously drawn to him. As a child he was brought up amidst nature and was let loose in gay abandon. Thus he had a poetical bent of mind and wrote verses on nature and on human desires which reflected in the association of women and to whom he became attached.

It is said that the news of the discovery of sixth Dalai Lama was withheld by the regent after the death of fifth Dalai Lama as the construction of Potala was not completed and people would be grief stricken once the news of death leaked out and thus further works in the construction would be stalled. The Deshi Sangye Gyatso was a far sighted man and took the practical step and the construction works continued vigorously even long after the death of the fifth Dalai Lama.

The sixth Dalai Lama, while on his way to Lhasa from Mon-Yul, looked back to Tsosum from Pangkang Tso and stood there in a pensive mood by putting his one foot on a stone. As the foot was covered by a boot the impression got imprinted on the stone which is still visible. The stone with the impression is known as *Lama Jebjeh* and situated about 15 kms. north of Tawang.

During his days in Potala, inspite of rigorous discipline and engagement in religious pursuits, he could not overcome the sensual pleasures and sought the company of women. But it is said that despite his amorous move, no woman succumbed as he could at will stop anything, being possessed of esoteric power. To demonstrate his power to withhold the deliverance, he was said to have urinated from a height but the flow returned back to him without touching the ground.

Such were the numerous legends circulated about Tsangyang Gyatso. Ever since his arrival at Potala he told that he would not live a longer life. Once on way to Lithang Kham area, he asked for a feather of a white bird — '*Thrung Thrung Karno*' and said he would not go further from Lithang Kham and to which place he would come again. It so happened that the seventh Dalai Lama—Keshang Gyatso was born in Lithang Kham in eighteenth century.

The death of Tsangyang Gyatso at a premature age of 24 years was shrouded in mystery. It is believed that he was poisoned to death by his adversaries in both Tibet and China who could not tolerate his adventures and seeking earthly pleasures thus deviating from the role of spiritual head of a great church. It is said that his body in Potala as it could not be traced after his death.

Keshang Gyatso, the seventh Dalai Lama, issued an order written on a scroll of silken cloth *Kasho* authorizing the maternal relations of sixth Dalai Lama to carry their luggages and animals free of tax, and freed them from payment of *Khrei* — the annual tribute of grains to Tawang Monastery. He also gave to the mother of sixth Dalai Lama one ball of gold — '*Gou.*' These are kept now with Kushang Dewa — the house owner who is the descendent of the maternal uncle of sixth Dalai Lama.

## **Brandungchung Ani Gompa — The monastery of the Nuns**

Situated in splendid isolation, twelve kilometers on North west of Tawang is the famous temple of the Nuns — the Brandungchung Ani Gompa.

It was Yonten Dolma, the daughter of Lama Dor Tsonam of Ugyelling, who arranged my visit sometimes in December.

Four of us left on a sunny morning. Yonten, her friend Tsedin, Pem Thiley — the Political Interpreter of DC's office.

We took a jeep which ran upto six kms. over the rough bouldered pitched road, then we left it to follow a bridle path leading to Gompa.

The morning sun brightly illuminated the landscape. Thin line of snow hung on the mountain side — some still dripping in Juniper, rhododendron bush. Sun rays deflected on the dripping snow produced a beautiful aura.

From a vantage point, a panorama of unparalleled beauty suddenly appeared before the eyes. There down below the mountain slope, the valley of Tawang going far across to Jang. Patches of forest surrounding the Gompas, beautiful terraced fields, the metalled road snaking its way, river zigzagged the course seen as a white ribbon.

A thin black line in several twist and turn made a continuous climb from the village of Jang — the road to Se-la pass. The massive mountain range in all white was now dazzling in bright sun against a blue sky.

The bridle path followed the contour, passed through alpine scrub forests. In dwarf bushes occur species of *rhododendron navale*, *rhododendron anthopogon*, *rhododendron thomsonii*, *festuca sp.*, *rhodoliola sp.*, *saxifraga sp.*, *soassurea sp.*, *Arenaria sp.*, *rheum sp.*

Here and there were the Tsuga trees considerably dwarfed – their elongated branches crumbled under heavy snow.

Everywhere we saw, tied to a cord were the miniature prayer flags continuously wafted by mountain breeze.

Nearer to the Gompa appeared the long ‘*Mane*’ walls-plastered with yellow clay with upper part covered with slabs of granite, carved with sacred prayers in bold colouring.

The stone path ran through a wall to some distance till we arrived at the massive door-blocking the entrance to the Gompa.

Suddenly, two huge dogs – the fierce Tibetan Mastiff jumped up held by leash away from the path. Their red eyes pouring anger they roared like the thunder, desperately trying to tear the chain to fall upon the intruders.

Pem Thiley went a step ahead, Yonten and Tsedin covered my two flanks as I nervously moved forward.

These dogs are dangerous-let loose can tear away the limbs within minutes. At night they are set free – to guard the Nunnery from the intruders.

The wooden gate was thrown open. On both sides of the narrow street were small stone and wooden apartments – the dormitory of the nuns. In shaven heads, draped in maroon coloured clothes, the nuns-many of them young, were busy with their chores while an elderly woman, the head nun – *Umdze* – came forward with ceremonial cream coloured scarf as an welcome offering to me. Yonten and Tsedin lowered their heads as she blessed them with the palm of her hand.

*Umdze* – Lobsang choten belonged to Tibet but many years passed now has been in this Gompa.

There were forty nuns – all were Monpa. Some of them were

too young, hardly ten years old now, and taken a vow of life long celibery. Except very young who were sent by their parents, the other came voluntarily.

The legend says that a venerable Lama of Tibet – Kachen Yeshe Gyetsen, was making the dough-*Torma* – but suddenly a crow came and flew away with this while he was preparing for sacred offerings. He began to search, came to a place and saw Ani meditating in a cave with the *Tormas*. The Lama found this as divine omen and gave the name as Dakma Dung Chung – the cake of the white blow pipe. Later the name changed to Brandung Chung Ani Gompa.

All the nuns are to master the Tibetan alphabet to be able to read the sacred scriptures. They follow rigorous routine in pursuits with various duties. Older nuns get up very early in the morning – they perform the ritual of burning incense, change of water, kindle the butter lamps, read the scriptures for four hours in the Gompa or else for two hours in the dormitory. The reading of sacred texts is compulsory for every one. The younger nuns stay their whole life in the Gompa. Sometimes, they are called to the village for performance of religious rites where they go and stay for sometime.

If any one wishes to break the vow and wants to become a laity again, she might be allowed with payment of a fine, but such cases are anyway rare.

All the provisions in the nunnery come from voluntary donation. The donations are not compulsory but devotees always offer these whenever they visit the Gompa.

The nunnery is under the administrative control of the Tawang Monastery. The abbot visits the Gompa on special occasions and conducts the ritual functions.

The head nun – *Umdze* – is changed every three years by the abbot of the monastery, but might continue for indefinite period if a change is not required.

*Umdze* divides the works amongst all the nuns. The discipline is rigid as all nuns are expected to follow the strict religious rules of offerings and prayers and none can while away the time.

In the cosy room of the *Umdze*, we sat for long, sipping the endless cup of butter tea. The nun must have been in her seventies, but still maintained a deep composure and serenity in the face which at once aroused our respect.

It was long past noon when we at last came out from the nunnery. It was such a wonderful experience, and I fondly hoped the serene beauty and aloofnes of the place would remain forever. But alas! the road was coming nearer and a day not too far away, the Brandungchung Ani Gompa would no longer remain a place for serene contemplation.

We followed the west-ward path towards Tawang Monastery. The valley widened with beautiful chequered fields, forest groves, Isolated hamlets of Monpa herdsman. It was a long walk no doubt but worth the visit — an ambition any one would be glad to fulfil.



## The Exciting Days

The Abbot of Tawang Monastery, the venerable Rimpoche was a Tibetan, vastly learned with all esoteric studies; he exudes a personality for which he is deeply revered.

I had an audience with the Abbot. Lobjang Dorjee – the Circle Officer, had fixed up the programme.

We were ushered into a richly draped room – all showing the paintings of exquisite beauty. On the carpet were low tables. The venerable rimpoche had also his study room here.

We sat in opposite side on low stools. Lobjang stepped forward, lowered his head to receive the blessing of the Monk.

I had some questionnaires. One that most important was about the dualistic existence.

Lobjang translated the words. The abbot knew only Tibetan.

His answer was that, we should aim for super consciousness. The awakened state of mind beyond any wrong conceptions and mental agitation and have full satisfaction and integrated wisdom.

All beings are equal in seeking happiness. The universal love which is beyond the narrow mind should be the aim of everyone.

Learning about nature of our own mind will clear all doubts. Buddhism teaches this truth – to know thyself.

The emphasis should be how to live a contented daily life so that mind remains peaceful and healthy. When our mind is clear with correct analysis and reasoning then only we can overcome delusions, restlessness, anger, ignorance, pride. Reasoning is one of the important aspects to overcome the conflict of dualistic mind.

As we took leave, the Abbot said it cannot be achieved by words. Avoid selfishness, greed and lust.

When we were on our way out, a short plumpy monk in reddish glow and intelligent expression in his face, talked something to Lobjang. As he introduced me, the monk spoke in fluent English and invited us to his small apartment – a few steps from the Kakaling.

He was Lama Yeshi, came on a short visit from Dharamsala of North India.

The Lama still in his middle age, travelled a lot around the world. He had been to Switzerland, France, USA where he came in touch with western Buddhist associations. He had so far not visited Japan – the strong citadel of Buddhist revival movement. It is the Japanese Buddhist sect – Risho Koseikai or organization for social justice and mutual co-operation, that has been making scholarly effort to give modern interpretation to Buddhist teachings. Many of the teachings of traditional Buddhism have been made intelligible to common people.

He had seen in those countries the revival of Buddhist activities. Beside sermon, lectures, books on Buddhism, social works and humanitarian activities, opening of educational centres are forming part of the programme. Even Buddhist devotional songs are tuned to the taste of the audience. In International Buddhist association, Honolulu, Hawaii, a devotional song appeared like christian hymn!

One more in meditation  
 I watched the people throng  
 Around the blessed teacher  
 as he slowly walked along  
 And in his eyes reflected  
 I saw beyond, above,  
 the face of Lord Buddha,  
 compassion, light and Love.

According to the Lama, the basic teachings of Lord Buddha would always remain the same – whether in Tibet or elsewhere. But to move with the time it would be necessary to bring the people closer to the church through various welfare activities. Already great progress has been made in education and he himself is an example of such an endeavour. Besides this the Tibetan Medicine – greatly

acclaimed the world over, taught and practiced by many young doctors – men and women and number of medical centres are now established in different parts of India and abroad. According to Buddhist classification, medical science is one of the ten subjects of human knowledge and thoroughly studied over centuries of painstaking research. Tibetan Medical science besides borrowing profusely from Chinese and Indian sources, based on important works discovered at Sanye Monastery near Lhasa. Many such works covering wide range of objects have been found in Tibet. These were the works of scholars and hidden in secret places. The well known Master of Medicine – Men-La's image was in the college of medicine near Lhasa.

Lama Yeshi's ambition was to gather more knowledge. He aspired to be a teacher beside carrying his mundane duty of religious works.

Just before my departure from Tawang, Lama Yeshi also left for his new home near Mysore South India.

During sunny days in winter, Tawang was very pleasant. We could move around long distance. Even on Se-La pass snow was clear from the road. But temporary lull might be deceptive. While coming up from Bomdila with my two daughters, Rita and Sunita, the weather suddenly changed. There was a cloud burst and entire Se-La range was immediately covered with heavy snow. Just over the Senge Dzong the thick fog caught us – reducing the visibility to near zero. In every stretch as if we saw ghost – the army vehicles stranded on the road.

It was a nightmare. The driver somehow recognised the guard line on the edge of the road, slowly drove but at Se-La we encountered heavy snow.

Dozens of army vehicles bogged down in the slush, pulled up by dozers – left deep ruts, and our jeep heaved and sighed, and made vain attempts to pull through till we sought the help of a dozer. It was miraculous indeed that we at last reached the top of the pass when later we heard other vehicles were not so lucky as snow had completely covered the road and made it impossible to move forward.

In such a height, in the midst of heavy snow it is risky with bare eyes. Army personnel and labour gangs wore snow goggles and snow boots and for them the bitter wind did not matter. We were exposed to the chilly wind and blizzard – sometimes snow flakes flew like

missiles and struck on our face and being inexperienced in mountain height suffered the worst. It was snow all the way – till we reached Tawang. Luckily for us the jeep did not stop anywhere but somewhere a bus got stranded with load of passengers in heavy snow.

The snow continued for few days – the heaviest fall recorded up to five cms. in one night when our doors all got jammed, pipes blocked. With great difficulty I managed to bring a bucket full of snow and put on the heater to melt the water!

Tawang was agog with the visit of Dalai Lama. From far away places beyond Se-la and Bomdila hundreds of people began to crowd the place.

All the villages appeared in festive look, in all the Gompas special prayers were held days before his arrival. There were wild Jubilation and cheers.

For us too, it was an exciting event. To be near the most revered man of the Buddhist world was a unique experience of life time.

The preparation for the visit had to be made with meticulous care. Officers from other areas were drafted to help the D.C. in planning and organization.

It was mid April when Dalai Lama arrived with his large entourage all the way by road from Tezpur to Tawang.

I had prepared a nice brochure titled – ‘Hallowed is the land Monyul’, which was presented to his holiness.

He stayed in Tawang for three days – conducting prayers and giving audience to hundreds of devotees.

It was Ugyelling that he visited, stood near the big tree which grew up from the stuff put by sixth Dalai Lama, where two branches now attained the same heights as if to fulfil the prophecy made three hundred years earlier.

We too had a separate audience with him. Dalai Lama came, sat just before us, erect and steady, face glistening in golden hue, sparkling eyes behind the rim of glass, emanating a great personality.

He spoke to us in slow but steady voice in English.

The peace, he said, can be attained by any one by right view, resolve, activity, endeavour. By following the basic tenets one can over come the lust, greed and hatred.

## On to Itanagar

My days in Tawang were cut short by a cryptic message in early May 1983 informing of posting in the Secretariat at Itanagar. Though the assignment would give me an opportunity to know the bureaucratic system. Yet at first I was not so much enthusiastic as I was just trying to know about the Monpas and their religion. But then being in the civil service, I had little option but to go.

A month earlier some one made a fool of me in that all fools day of first April – neatly delivering an wireless message supposed to have come through the police net, that I am transferred. Luckily we smelled a rat that why it should be in the all fools day and Rohluta later found this was an hoax!

I arrived at Itanagar and sought a meeting with the Development Commissioner who would be my boss in Planning and Development Department.

He kept me waiting while fiddling with an odd file and later told unceremoniously to join at once and get busy with the works.

The meeting was extremely formal and suffocating as nothing personal was asked even though I had come a long distance from Tawang and had never met him before. Though this behaviour hurt me considerably, yet by now I had fair ideas of those high profile bureaucrat acutely conscious of their status symbol that ostracized them from reality. Most of them belong to the region where loyalty is not imbibed but demanded. It was rather sad that their Juniors in the rung of the same service also exhibited the same attitudinal behaviour forgetting that a successful Administrator's best quality is to generate team spirit by exemplary behaviour.

As it turned out, my first worry was to find a house. I did not know that my predecessor who had retired vacated the house but it went to some one else. All government accommodations in the Capital were in pool and allotted according to seniority in the list. My first three months passed in agonising moments as I had to cramp in a small room of the Inspection Bungalow. When a quarter was given to me, another officer — a bumkin devoid of decency quietly occupied it. Later, some how I got another house where I stayed for a year. There was no messing or catering system nor the provision of helpers. It was enjoying however, to cook own food, do all the household works alone.

The works in the Secretariat was routine. There was no contact with the Public as the job was different. Files were sent for examination which was attended any way by the clerks. But the Joint Secretary — a promotee officer to Indian Administrative Service, who had been pushing files in Delhi Secretariat, found every case interesting. He made lengthy queries again and again till the file gathered dust! While I was not expected to give decision, the exasperated departmental officers came to me to get some solace. Only help I could render was to speedily authenticate the Government orders, which if I would have followed the steps of my immediate boss, returned the draft with so many ifs and buts!

The status consciousness sometimes went to ludicrous length. An officer of a department just refused to accept any letter signed by Joint Secretary, though rules said that any officer from Under Secretary onwards could authenticate any orders of the Government.

The matter went to the Chief Secretary, who being a matured person issued a stern warning to the officer to abide by the rules and stop forthwith fussing on a matter of non issue. We had a hearty laugh when we saw the glum face of the poor fellow.

Some time back there was a comic scene at Tezpur. A newly posted officer to the Frontier found a jeep had been sent for him. Accustomed in travelling by car in his earlier coveted post, he was visibly annoyed and demanded an ambassador — the brand name of the car. The poor driver could not understand ran to a shoe store, brought a pair of 'ambassador' shoe!

I had only a vague idea of red tapism but did not know the jumbling exercise. The officer of a department was superseded by

juniors because of adverse entries in his confidential files. The procedure laid down that any unfavourable remarks should be communicated to the officer as a warning. In this particular case it was not done.

Since the adverse record was in sealed cover, in every departmental promotional meeting the case was always shelved. His representation was duly entered in the file and thus ensued lengthy notes leading ultimately to a bulky file. Officers fond of table job found it a pleasure to write whatever in their thoughts raising a number of points not all relevant to the matter.

I decided to help the poor officer in his dire distress. My first observation was that the annual confidential report – the adverse comment not communicated to him which should have been a must. Secondly, the observations were totally biased – as initiating officer gave him a good performance report but the reviewing officer said just the opposite with caustic remarks.

In my note I mentioned that ACR being totally contradictory this should have been reviewed again but since it was not done even after lapse of several years, the officer cannot be subjected to penalty.

The Government later accepted the view and revoked the earlier decision. The officer got his promotion with retrospective effect.

What I had found during my days in the Secretariat, the delay must be inherent in movement of files. The decision which could be prompt, was seldom done unless bulky notes were exchanged. No one considers – that paper is not a mere paper but human being involved behind it.

After the office hours – the busy Secretariat all became empty at once as no one stayed a moment longer. For me no where to go for relaxation, I soon found an escape in the sprawling library.

Toni Ratan, the Chief Librarian, a nice fellow known to me since my days in Pasighat, gave me a seat in the exclusive reference room, where I could browse through at will any book I liked. Most evenings I thus utilised my time by reading dozens of books, taking notes for my future works. I had never read so many books earlier as I did then.

The big Library had seldom any visitor during the evening hours. The only other person who came sometime was the Chief Secretary who any way had to stay in the office for long hours.

The capital called Itanagar is divided in two parts. The original location was at a flat area interspered with small hillocks, streams. A river — Pachin flows by the side which meet Dikrong river at some distance away. The place known as Naharlagun now is a business centre and houses some of the development departments.

The selection of the site for the capital complex had been controversial. Some experts felt that the soil is unstable with loose rocks and worst still it is in seismic zone. But then at the time when surveys were made, the area was a deep impenetrable forest.

12 kms away from Naharlagun, spread over on the low hills is new capital town of Itanagar, the seat of the Government where major offices and Secretariat buildings are located and along with the residence of Lt. Governor, Ministers and Senior Officials.

The name was derived from the Nishi tribes word *Hita* which in Assamese meant brick. A legend says that a king of *jitari* dynasty, *Ramchandra* of Mayapur, built a fort here. His son *Arimatta* killed his father and later committed suicide in repentance.

Various stories were woven around the legendary patricidal king *Arimatta* but no where was there any historical or archaeological evidence which could suggest that Mayapur kingdom had extended to the area with the building up of a fort.

The origin of the fort and its builder are still shrouded in mystery. But it appeared somewhat convincing that it might have been the advance defensive structures built by Ahom rulers during 13th century A.D. to check the turbulent tribe making raids in their kingdom.

The fort though now in ruins was a fortified one enclosed by natural ridges and brick ramparts. There are two brick walls and three gates. The western rampart runs for 1.40 kms in length and has two gates in it. The eastern rampart is more than half a km long with only one gate in it. The wall cross over the ravines and depressions. The average width of the wall is 2 ft. and height 12 ft. The highest point of the fort is situated at the height of 1530 ft. to watch the wide Dikrong Valley.



The local inhabitants – Nishis say that place was once an inhabited area but completely denuded due to a severe dysentery epidemic. Several centuries since then no settlement came up for fear of dreaded disease associated with the wrath of spirit.

Another impressive land mark of Itanagar is *Gekar Sinyi* – a natural lake with large sheet of water.

Situated at 8 kms from Itanagar – the sixteen hectares oblong size lake is surrounded by deep forest on three sides. Only the southern side has a gentle gradient. The water is deep, varying from 10 to 30 ft. depth. The water must have been impounded by sudden blockade in the natural drainage. There is no inlet nor a spring flow into it.

There are abundant fish in the lake now as the fishery department has released several exotic varieties – *Labeo Rohita*, *Labeo Calbasu*, *cerhinna Mrigala*, *Labeo Dero*, *Labeo dyochillus*, *cyprinus carpio*. But for submerged tree trunks it has not been possible to use the drag net.

A narrow road now connect the lake with the capital town. From the road a foot path goes to the lake crossing the hump of a small hill. It takes nearly an hour to go round the vast sheet of water.

Till recent time Nishis avoided visiting the lake for fear of spirit. It was believed that water was deadly toxic – even Mithuns also did not survive.

Some day when development is made with roads, avenue trees, boating facilities, view points the lake would become an ideal tourist attraction.

It was July 1983. A sudden opportunity came to visit my old dear place – Yingkiong, in East Siang district, where I was posted in early sixties and always had a nostalgia for it.

I jumped into a chopper at Chabua air field in Upper Assam. The huge belly of a MI8 helicopter swallowed a dozen passengers. I was a party with the Chief Minister on destination to Yingkiong.

The pilot perhaps read my mind and followed the well known marks – Ledum, Mirem, Pasighat, Sissen, Pangi, Dosing, Riew, Komkar. The dozen of places bearing my foot prints.

On approach to Yingkiong, I looked with surprise – the tiers of terraces built up from the bank of the river Siang and reaching the heights of the hills. No place appeared vacant – all were filled up.

Heavy trucks were speeding on the metalled road. I had to be mentally prepared to see the massive transformation.

The helicopter lowered its height. Yingkiong came in full view. Gone are the thatched houses, muddy and dusty tracks. Every thing was changed as if by touch of a magic wand.

I got out of the helicopter and walked some distance. All my favourite land marks had vanished except the hills and mountains. Even Simar Korong – a stream became so small and insignificant. The rows of buildings spilled over to far distance – much beyond the Simar Korong. A hydel power station now supplies electricity in all hours. Higher Secondary School, a bank, indoor hospital, Public Works Division, and many other departments have transformed the place into a growing town.

I took a ride to a newly settled village. There I saw many familiar faces – some worn out with ages, some retaining the vigour and zest. None could expect I would be there. I called Kopi Boli who was my constant company, to my side and asked him in Assamese – whether he knew who was the officer during 1962. Kopi Boli still innocent, expressed his inability to understand a foreign language. I then switched over to his dialect – and Kopi Boli replied without a pause – well! Why, it was Bataharji. He never could spell my name correctly!

OK! OK! I smiled. Then he came closer and looked intently at my face. Suddenly he shook my hand with a vigorous jerk, Oh! yes, you were our migom – the officer. The crowd then jumped out one by one, all came to shake hands, none of them forgot. Memory went back to many many years.

As the vehicle sped across the road I saw the headman, Angkeng Tekseng, still maintaining the personality slowly climbing the hill to the road from the cultivation field. I asked the driver to stop and jumped out to hug him in a sweet embrace, so dear and near to me. He remained dazed, how the migom missing for several years could come back. I searched my pocket and whatever I had thrust to his hand and got into the vehicle and sped away.

I felt tears coming to my eyes seeing the old man still standing on the middle of the road wandering perhaps — was it a reality or a dream.

I looked around to find the place where once by house stood. Rows of buildings now covered the place with a road passing through the area. Only a lone 'Tagat' tree — the flame of the forest, was the mute witness of the by gone past.

A yougman who introduced him as son of Angkeng Tekseng turned to me and said, he was a graduate and now getting into the teaching job. I looked at him in disbelief — how it could be, he was a mere child when I was here.

Then a girl in trim dress approached, told me she was the daughter of Bojang Jopir of Karko, and now a student in higher class in the school. I again looked at her with surprise. Bojang was just married when I was here. But then it was now twenty years, an enormous space intervened, I forgot that I too was getting old.

A frail woman balancing on a stick slowly came forward and looked at me as if in intense study. She suddenly burst in awful tears — 'Son! how lucky I am despite the age. *Donyi-Polo* has been kind enough to allow me to see you again'.

Suddenly I saw years receding, slipping one by one to twenty years. The year was 1962, the month was November and date 19. Ominous rumours were circulating, we were to move. A cryptic message from the Political Officer asked me to evacuate.

There were chaos and confusion every where. The radio went dead, communications remained cut off. Rumours were buzzing like humming bees. We must evacuate before it was too late.

We planned the move. The march was on. Suddenly a woman ran towards me and pulled my shaky hands with a violent jerk and said, son! tell me — what I have done to you — why you are running away — why, why!

The tension was terrific and it was tearing the nerves. Well, why should we go, turn back, we will not go.

The decision was electrifying, the long line turned back.

It was a hearty laugh, the life again limped back to normal. Yingkiong was not deserted.

Months before that, during a middle of the night, a soft female voice whispered on the window — migom! Oh migom! are you asleep or awake?

I froze in dead fear — a ghost perhaps. Straining my ears I heard someone calling. Raising the shutter of the window, I saw a man and a woman standing. Why? well, it was serious, her only precious possession a *Doppun abi* — a costly bead was stolen. 'Migom you must do something to restore it!'

It was a raid in the village next morning. Every place was searched as I camped there for two days. Perhaps for fear of heavy punishment the thief quietly put the bead in the granary.

As the helicopter readied to take off a man ran to me, thrust a packet — something as a memento. The chopper took off, I looked through the window and saw the frail woman still standing.

Suddenly I felt my eyes moistened — a few drops of sweet tears rolled down the cheeks.

## Further to Dibang Valley

The announcement of the date of parliamentary and assembly elections in November 1984 brought some change. I was posted to Roing in Dibang Valley as Additional Deputy Commissioner to function also as returning officer for the constituency. Earlier, the Chief Secretary wanted that I should go to Ziro but I politely declined to go there again.

I had not been to Roing though it was in Dibang Valley. Several times I had flown over the place while at Anini.

To approach the place one has to go first to ferry point at Dhola in Upper Assam. Two large rivers – Lohit and Dibang are crossed by a mechanised boat which takes two hours during winter months. In summer the rivers being in spate, the time is considerably reduced but in winter, the shallow drift often bogs the boat which requires tedious maneuvering to make it float again.

A fifty kms drive from the other bank called Sadiya ghat over a beautiful tarred road lead to Roing in the foot hills. Half of this distance is in Sadiya sub division of Assam. The principal town of Sadiya is now Chapakhawa, the seat of Sub Divisional Officer.

Prior to devastating earthquake of 1950, Sadiya was a beautiful town which was then headquarters of Political Officer of Mishmi Hills. A battalion of Assam Rifles was stationed here. The roads were lined with flowering trees, Spacious bungalows with trim Lawns, Golf coarse and drive along the river bank brought back the nostalgic memories to old timers.

The river Dibang flowed in its course and did not threaten the bank even in peak season.

But all that now is history. The fury of Dibang knew no bound, when huge onrush of water released from the blocked passage after the earthquake wiped off Sadiya forever. Gone were its beautiful trees, spacious bungalows, roads in a matter of hours and river furrowed through a new course far above the town. Some where in midstream of Dibang, the town lies now buried. During winter when the water level drops, one might see an iron mast — the flag post of Assam Rifles.

The people of Chapakhawa are of mixed origin — Mishing, Deories, Ahoms who lose much of their land in river erosion every year.

Four kms from Chapakhawa is Shantipur — the entry point of Arunachal, where a police checkpost restrict the travellers without an innerline permit. Beyond this point, the metalled road pass through dozen Adi tribal villages whose affluence is reflected in nice wooden houses with tin sheet roof.

Roing is a planned town with wide roads lined with flowering trees. Most buildings belong to Government for residential and office accommodation.

A higher secondary school, hospital, industrial training centre, a well laid plaza in the centre of the town, multipurpose co- operative store, helipad made Roing a fast developing town.

Most of the villages are linked with Roing by motorable roads. The transport made easy by introduction of bus services in different routes.

There are dozen saw mills including two plywood and veneer mills.

250 Kwt. capacity micro hydel station supply electricity which however not adequate to meet the need of the town and cluster of villages. Bigger projects are now being thought of by diverting the water of Deopani which flows by the side of the town and also at Sisseri river some thirty kms on north west. There are enormous potential of hydro power generation.

The people belong to two tribes-Adi and Idu. While Adis are numerically more and far advanced in education and agriculture or

in business enterprise, the Idus are much the same like their kin in Upper Dibang Valley.

All the Adi villages have large rice field, groves of citrus and pineapples. In season the people grow enough of mustard, maize and ginger which bring them substantial cash. In all Adi villages there are either a primary and Middle school. There are Secondary Schools at Bolung and Dambuk-the enrollment every where are very heavy.

The most enterprising farmer of the area is Kuku Lego-a padam Adi, who has introduced mixed farming. He and his wife learnt farming by intuition, practiced improved technique of various operations, even indigenously devised method of pest control. To reap maximum benefit from his limited land he had fisheries, bamboo groves, Spices, Dairy and poultry units. Kuku Lego's annual income easily surpasses Rupees one lakh a year.

His double storied building showed considerable affluence, but both husband and wife, their two daughters remained as simple.

Yet Kuku Lego was not in the focus for long time. No one in the outside actually knew him. It was due to our approach some time later that his achievements were recognised and he was awarded the prestigious Silver Medal by the Government.

Though not many yet but Kuku Lego's success story is keenly being followed by some farmers amongst both Adis and the Idus.

Adis in Roing area have marched much ahead of time. There were two Indian Administrative Service Officers-Jomin Tayeng and Oniyok Tayeng, both now in Senior scale in their cadre. Jomin who was known to me since my days at Damro in East Siang District in early sixties, was a bright boy right from the beginning. After his graduation from Delhi University, he successfully competed in IAS examination in 1968 and got through in one chance. Now posted in Shillong as a Commissioner, his success story is worthy of emulation by others. Jomin's two sons-Raju an IAS officer, Bolin, an Electrical Engineer are now well placed. Jomin's wife, Gum was the first woman who passed the Matriculation examination from Roing Dambuk area.

Oniyok Tayeng is also a Commissioner in Manipur. His wife, Aman, is a nice lady, had some ambition to Join Politics. But Politics as a craft does not suit everyone and she was certainly not meant for that.

Amongst the Idus, Mukut Mithi, had his education in an outside school. Mukut a nice affable person joined Politics and later became a Minister in the Government.

Laeta Umbrey, Jatipulu, Buddi Lingi had decent manners and all of them had been successful in their business careers.

Namu Lingi – another youngman always built up ambition but could not succeed. In every election he badly suffered defeat yet Namu never minds and would try again! Though Namu's erratic manner caused some anger but somehow he did not create any problem for me – rather he extended all help.

Ita Pulu, Ature Lingi, Sokole Lingi, Angore Mena were the elder statesmen amongst the Idus – much respected for their balanced attitude.

Joton Pulu, the language officer, was a nice fellow. Always with smiling face Joton would never say 'No' to any assignment.

His wife was from upper Dri valley in Anini also a nice lady. Their four little cute daughters all appeared like dolls! Joton managed to send them to a English Medium School where they learnt beautiful nursery rhymes and recited to us with toddling feet and waiving the hands which gave us much enjoyment.

In the office, I had Sanat Das as EAC, Tayon Darang as Circle Officer – both efficient in their works. In Dambuk, Bijit Dey as Circle Officer functioned effectively, Karken Riba, as EAC Kronli also well conversant with his job. Only problem was Tabom Dabi, Circle Officer, Desali, who never did stayed there being too remote a place and camped at Roing instead.

Tayon, a short roundish fellow, was the town Magistrate. He was very prompt in his action and always maintained a principled stand. He was so impartial with his dealing that sometimes I wondered whether he would be lenient to his own relations! Tayon is an asset to the Administration and would definitely prove his worth in the career.

The other departmental officers with whom I built up strong rapport were K.J. Thomas, Assistant Engineer, Rural Works, Joton Pulu, Language Officer and Sonam Lama, Assistant Director of Industries. All of them were of same age – hardly in their middle age.



Thomas was from distant Kerala. He too like Joton Pulu was always in smiling face but never shirked away from duties. He brought lot of Improvement in Rural Works – irrigation channel, supply of drinking water or road construction. Sonam was from Tawang but now settled in Bomdila after his marriage there. He also brought much efficiency in his department by meticulous work programme, enforcing discipline amongst the staff.

Twenty five kms from Roing across the Dibang river is Dambuk – an important circle headquarter. Except in winter, the traffic to Dambuk is restricted due to high flood in the river. People used mechanised ferry boat at Paglam – 40 kms. from Dambuk, to cross over to Sadiyaghat or Dhola.

People of Dambuk village are Padam Adis who migrated from the hills in later part of nineteenth century. They have well knit organisation, a good deal of enterprise mostly in Agriculture and Education.

15 Kms from Dambuk is Bomjir – also a Padam Adi settlement. The original Bomjir village had been eroded by the river. The village had a chequered history when early British penetration to the hills met with stiff resistance here. The remains of Adi defence structures are still seen near Dambuk village. There were casualties which forced the Government to burn the village and impose a blockade in 1894 which continued till 1900.

Roing, was established in 1952. After the great earthquake when Sadiya was wiped of, the Assistant Political Officer's headquarters was shifted to Nizamghat some miles west of Roing. But when Nizamghat was also lost, the offices were shifted to Chidu – some 20 kms north west of Roing. The narrow strip however was not found suitable for a township and a search was made for more spacious land with adequate supply of water.

The choice of some Adi Interpreters fell on the source of a small stream – Mayu. The area was virgin with deep forest all around with available crisp, cool water.

The cool in Adi dialect is – reying, ultimately struck and place name was given as Roing.

Soon after this the area was developed and made into a township. The post of Additional Political Officer was shifted to

Anini in late fifties while Roing remained the headquarters of an Assistant Political Officer.

Md. Abdullah, the head assistant of DC's Office had been an eye witness to earthquake and devastating flood. Abdullah joined in Political Officer's office in 1948. A new Sub-Division was opened at Nizamghat in early 1950 and he was transferred there. The earthquake which followed soon after till then had caused little damage but people noticed an abnormal fall in the level of river water.

During May 1951, the initial flood just passed over but on 6 June, 1951 suddenly there was rumbling sound and rush of water to a dead stream which was just behind the township.

Immediate alarm was raised and evacuation started. But by then huge volume of water already entered cutting off all surface Links.

The officials shifted to higher ground and were completely marooned. Before their very eyes saw the huts moved like floats on the swirling water of the river. The rise of water was as much as ten ft. and all that was Nizamghat gone forever.

The marooned people were later rescued by small piper air craft which landed on the improvised air strip hastily constructed by them.

Later it was found that the river was blocked in the upstream, burst through, spilling our enormous water, cut a new course altogether and caused the extensive damage.

Dibang in the foot hills now flow in four channels. In each summer, the huge volume of water rush to any of these channels in an unpredictable behaviour which might one day threaten the inhabited areas of Roing and Sadiya.

There were considerable anxieties as tension built up during the election time. The job of returning officer had never been an easy one. All planning must be done with meticulous care.

To our luck, we succeeded in conducting the election in peaceful manner. Mukut Mithi was elected with a large margin of votes.

Soon after the election. I was asked to take over as Deputy Commissioner, relieving the officer who was posted out.

The officer was an interesting character, acutely conscious of his status and had a bullish mind. He would not tolerate the slightest

intrusion to his authority neither allow any one do any job without his knowledge. But at once become so much magnanimous if any one just made a polite submission!

As D.C. I was vested with the power of a session judge. There were ten long pending cases of murder and other serious crimes. None of the trials gone beyond the preliminary hearing. Apart from these, there were considerable back logs in other cases.

We distributed the works amongst ourselves. Both Sanat Das and Tayon were first class Magistrates – they began their works earnestly and speedily disposed of the cases. After the departure of Tayon, Bijit Dey took over. He too functioned effectively.

It was to our credit that out of ten cases referred to session court – judgement in six cases were pronounced and all these were upheld by the high court. Considerable progress was also made in remaining four cases which could not be completed due to my transfer. One of my Judgement ran upto fifty pages – the accused was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Court cases made interesting revelations – human emotions, sentiment, behaviour and perversion.

In one case of grotesque perversion was interesting.

All the partners of the act were outsiders. The man who was murdered by his employee ran an oil mill. He was thoroughly pervert – a homo sexual though his young wife stayed with him. He engaged his employee for his pleasure and allowed him in return to have sex with his own wife in exchange for service rendered!

A time came when the employee got fed up with the dual role and killed him.

The penal code does not show leniency whoever commits a crime like murder. the man having been dead and woman also untraced, the trial was based on circumstantial evidences and the confessional statement. I had to award the punishment as I felt he had been trapped in the sordid act.

An order was issued by the Government to divide my time in both Anini and Roing. As the district headquarters is at Anini, I should stay there for more days.

Sometime back, a twice weekly helicopter service started operations from air base via Roing to Anini. It helped the district

administration in movement of officials and files.

During my first visit to Anini, I travelled by the newly opened road upto Etalin bridge point — 180 kms from Roing. The 90 kms road upto Hunli was already constructed during early seventies. It passed through the highest point at 6500 ft. hunli top which sometimes remained snow bound in winter. A *coptistita* plantation had been opened here by the forest department. *Coptistita* market has almost dried up as foreign buyers found an alternative market. Even then since it is a medicinal plant, held hope in drug industry.

At Etalin bridge point, Laitu Miu, peon of DC's office, Anini, came to receive me. Laitu was beaming in all smiles having met me after long five years.

The morning had already far advanced when we followed the foot track to cover the 30 kms distance to Anini.

But our perception of time all went wrong. Two kms short of Matuli it was already dark. Without a torch light I stumbled again and again on the rough road. Some where in the midst of forest a big branch of a tree suddenly fell inches from Laitu. it would have killed or seriously injured him.

We ran madly to cross the stretch of forest, Laitu was sure — the dreaded '*Khinu*' was behind this.

From Yuron, we managed to send a message to the teacher of Matuli school to come with a torch light if we were delayed on the road. By then it was all tired limbs — impossible to move forward. Laitu got more anxious for me and slowly kept pace by my side.

A beam of light was seen, two figures hurridly coming towards us like good samaritan — teacher Barua of the Primary School arrived with a flux of tea. It was deliverance, indeed!

We reached Matuli and took rest in his thatched house for some time. After getting some energy back to the limbs, I decided to go ahead to reach Anini somehow.

It was again a nightmarish journey — the long suspension bridge over Dri river appeared too dangerous. In pitch dark it was definitely risky. Some how balancing on the ropes, I managed to cross over. The winding path went up the hill — a climb of a hour and half. Laitu some how lighted a bamboo torch to find the way. But to our ill luck, there was a drizzle, the torch went off.

At last just before the midnight, we managed to reach Anini. But then officials tired with the waiting retired to their quarters. The town was in ghostly silence.

Eventually when I reached my bungalow, I had hardly any energy left. It was long time since I had taken such a strenuous march and that too during night.

Nothing much changed in Anini since I left the place in April, 1980. Only a few new buildings and 24 hours supply of electricity gave some comfort.

I had enough time now which I utilized fully. There was not much work in the office – the cases were very few, the sorties were regular and a crisis situation did not develop. Most evenings were free and I preferred to retire to my house. I had already planned to write my memoirs and began to work on the draft.

I made several visits to Anini since then and made extensive tours to Mathun, Dri, Emra, Ahui and Ithun valleys in long distance foot march.

Some places I had not visited earlier – Anelih, Desali or Kronli. Middle Dibang Valley simultaneously arouse fear and awe to the travellers. Here hills are never stable, all the rivers are turbulent, land slides are common feature.

A 700 ft. long suspension bridge hung on Dibang river on the way to Anelih in Ahui valley. The bridge was dangerously tilted to a side. There were only six wire ropes which held it precariously. Some how I managed to cross balancing on the ropes – atleast the wires would not snap!

It was 19 kms march to Anelih – the headquarters of the Circle Officer, T. Makcha who was a hill Miri from Upper Subansiri District. A post graduate in history, Makcha had stumled by accident in Civil Service. He would have been best suited as a teacher in a college.

He had problem at Anelih-Slender communication link, Irregular supply, indifferent attitude of the people to developmental works. Yet Makcha did not brood in unhappiness. He brought dozens of books from the district library and remained busy in study during spare time.

Beyond Anelih — four stages ahead is high mountain range-Abroka which separates Dibang Valley from the East Siang District. In 1965, I had come upto Abroka from Tuting and saw the mysterious valleys beyond. At that time I did not know that some days I would be there.

19 kms from Hunli is Desali by a tortuous path. It crossed two long suspension bridge over two rivers but soon one reach Desali it is a lovely place just at the foot of a snow mountain. The broad valley of Desali believed to have sheltered fugitive Khamties, who after massacring the British troops in 1838 at Sadiya had escaped here. Remnants of a zigzag men made canal is seen which is about three ft wide and two kms long perhaps to drain out the water from the marsh to reclaim land for cultivation.

At Desali, all the buildings were Log cabin type with tin roof — a welcome departure from the drab thatched houses elsewhere.

13 kms from Ithun river bridge is Kronli where Karken Riba, EAC, had his head quarters. Karken too fighting against heavy odds — as Kronli is more unstable.

In April 1986, the Kronli experienced a near disaster due to heavy landslides which wiped off the road in many places. There were casualties too — one person was completely burried inside the township and many were injured due to collapse of buildings. We had to arrange special helicopter sorties for relief operations.

A tragedy occurred on 28 May 1958 near Kronli at Airipani river where 59 people were burried by land slides. In the party there were one Assistant Engineer, one Section Officer, Seven Assam Riflemen, fifty porters who were on their way to Roing and camped near the river bank. During the night a heavy down pour ripped the hill which burried them under several hundred feet of rubbles leaving behind no trace. Airipani was blocked, created a lake which later burst through and devastated areas in the down hill.

There was another grue some tragedy in 1948, when Capt. N.K. Campbell, Assistant Political Officer along with an Assam Rifles escort camped at the foot of a hill near Mainyotang in Upper Lohit valley when the entire hill broke and burried them alive.

A belief was amongst the Miju tribesmen that any one who disturb the presiding spirit in the lake by shooting duck would meet

with worst fate. Capt. Campbell it was told disregarded the warning and went for hunting. On the same night the disaster struck.

When the search party went there, it was seen that at least 200 ft rubbles and boulders fell upon them and bodies could not be recovered.

In the foot hills area – the wild elephants were a menace. With continuous shrinkage of forest – the elephants became desperate. In Dambuk Paglam road an interesting incident happened when elephants kicked and broke all the bitumen filled drums perhaps as a vengeance.

There was a sprawling forest at seven kms from Roing on way to Shantipur. In 1974, a rogue elephant suddenly confronted the jeep carrying three medical Officers. All of them were sitting in the front row when elephant struck with its long tusk. Dr. Bordoloi, who was on the side died immediately, Dr. Bora who was on another side lost his limb but Dr. Baishya who was in the centre had a miraculous escape.

A Shiva temple was constructed at Roing by some outside businessmen. The earlier DC was a patron of the temple where worship and prayers were held.

But suddenly a request was made to allow a procession of two hundred people who would bring the holy water from Lohit river from Sadiya Ghat for consecration at the temple.

Obviously such a request could not be entertained and I refused the permission.

I have never participated in such religious meet and remained totally indifferent.

It created a furore. I was on a visit to Anini – when a long letter came from the Government asking my comments as to why a traditional religious observation was not permitted. A copy of representation was also enclosed which bore the signatures of some of the Idu leaders.

I drafted an immediate reply-that reasons for with-holding permission which I considered justified as a big procession with outsiders chanting religious song all the way through tribal villages might disturb peace. Moreover this worship was not attended by

local people and I could not possibly issue innerline permit to so many persons. Though no further communication came from the Government, but I earned some displeasure in certain circles.

Adis of Roing area are now mostly Christians. After my arrival they got a fillip in their church functions, taking advantage of my neutral stance. Many of them had taken up welfare activities and funding their efforts with their own resources.

Just beyond Roing, extending to the hills upto an elevation of 7000 ft., is the Mehao wild life sanctuary. This forest has a vast reserve of immense varieties of flora and fauna in different zones – tropical, sub tropical and temperate.

Inside the sanctuary some twenty five kms from the entry point at a height of 3900 ft is a big lake which had been formed in a natural depression. Surprisingly there is no sign of fish or aquatic animals.

Once I visited the forest with Ature Lingi-our Political Assistant who had a Mithun reserve just near and Tahong Tatak, the Agricultural Field Staff. A foot track had been constructed by the forest department winding upto the lake.

Inside, it was almost dark – so thick was the growth of vegetation. We went perhaps ten kms to the point where the road was blocked by a land slide.

Though we did not encounter any animal despite the several pug marks in the soft earth, but were lucky to see so many birds including the horn bill. As the shooting was forbidden, I enjoyed the lamentation of my companions – how unfortunate they were not allowed to trigger off their guns!

Animals seen in the forest are *Sambar, barking deer, musk deer, swamp deer, Himalaya black bear, wild boar, tiger, leopard, elephant, mishmi takin, Hog deer, white browed gibbon, Assamese Macaque, rhesus macaque, capped langur, sarow, porcupine, civets, jungle cats, leopard cat, flying squirrel, giant squirrel, spotted linsang, mangoose, palm squirrel.*

Amongst the birds are *horn bill, bulbul, thrushes, drongos, babler, wagtail, magpie, Robin, gum magpie, wood pigeon, Eagles, wabler, nightingale, red ringed parakeet, green pigeon, myna, wood pecker, king fisher, pheasants.*



During rainy season the migratory birds arrive at the lakes from far distance.

Dense forest with broad leaf trees concentrated just upto the lake, beyond that a different vegetation appear interspersed with conifereous species. In the lower altitudes, the timber trees and other economic species are Hatipolia (*pterosperum acrifolum*), Karibadam (*ptery gyota alata*), Simul (*Bombax ceiba*), Tita Sopa (*Midelia champaca*), Bonsum (*Phoebe goal parensis*), Bogipoma (*Chukrassia tabularis*), Bola (*Morus lae vigeta*), Borpat (*Alianthus Grandis*), Gondho Sorol (*Cinamomum ceicidaphne*), Walnut (*Juglans regia*), Nahor (*Mesua Ferrea*), Holong (*Diptero carpus macrocarpus*), Khokan (*Dua banga sonnerioides*), Mekhal (*Phobebe cooperiance*), Jhengu (*Calamus sp*), Tako (*Livistonia Jengkinsian Siana*).

In higher elavations — there are *pinus wallichiana*, *Pinus Merkusii*, *quercus lamellosa*, *castanopsis*, *magnolia comphelli* and *rhodendron spp*.

Though there are several species of bamboos, the most important are *Dendro calamus hamiltonii*, *pseudostachyum poly morphum*, *Teinostachyum dulloa*.

The sanctuary extend upto the height of Hunli — 70 kms from Roing and has an area of 500 sq kms. From the Hunli top, I saw the vast expanse across the hill going down far below to the plains.

Mercifully, this will remain now being declared a sanctuary. With so many saw mills had come up, the other areas would not be so lucky. It is only question of time when these would vanish forever.

Three kms from Roing along the metelled road to Hunli is a beauty spot — the salley lake. The place is nice for a week end retreat where accommodatioin is available in a tourist lodge. The lake was formed after the earthquake when a stream was blocked by a huge land slide.

Surrounding the lake is now a forest plantation, a bridle path winding through it. Fishery department had released exotic varieties of fish in the lake much to the delight of the anglers.

From an observation tower on a hillock a grand view is obtained of Roing and the areas far beyond to distant Lohit and Dibang confluence.

## Hoary Past

Forty kms south east of Roing, across the river Kundil on way to Sonpura was the Tamreswari or copper temple whose remains now either burried in earth or washed away by the river after the devastating earthquake of 1950. The area is covered with reeds and acquatic grasses and offered a formidable barrier to pin point the actual location. The travellers of nineteenth century who saw the temple had left behind a most vivid description of the awesome temple where a dreaded deity – *kesaikhati* or the eater of raw human flesh was venerated.

Every year on a particular auspicious day human sacrifice took place for the satisfaction of the hungry goddess. It was told that six hundred victims had been sacrificed in six centuries till the time of Burmese invasion to Assam in early nineteenth century. The victims were only made from a particular clan who were offered certain privileges. The selected person free from any deformity or disease were fed well to attain healthy and flabby appearance which supposed to be pleasing to the appetite of the Goddess. Certain ritualistic rites associated with tantric formula were performed by which victim was ordained with divine influence in which his mind was conditioned for the sacrifice. The decapitation was done by a long sharp edged curved sword before the hungry Goddess whose thirst was satiated by the warm gushing blood.

This form of human sacrifice was also practiced by Jaintia Kings in the capital of Jaintapur in the plains of Sylhet district now in Bangaladesh, not far from Shillong.

Jaintia Kings who hailed from the hills were under Tantric influence and followed many of the ritualistic practices of their hindu subject of the plains.

The temple of Tamreswari was said to be a substantial brick

wall rising to a height of 8 ft on a foundation of sand stone. Several long pieces of polished stones supported the roof which were covered with sheets of copper laced together through copper loops fastened to the edges of different sheets. In front of the temple was a brick terrace where plates of granites formed a floor where offerings were made by the worshippers.

The walls were decorated with Motiff of figures of Hindu pantheon – the trees, birds, flowers and animals.

The sactum sanctorium – the Linga of Shiva in conjunction with Yoni accessible by descent of a few steps from the door ways where there was a folding door of stone or wood.

The site of the temple was in dense forest, frequented by wild animals and it was told unless the goddess pleased no one found the way and might fall pray to the tigers.

The mystery of the Tamreswari temple still arouses deep awe and fear in people. I could find no one volunteering to accompany me to the area though last trace of the temple long since vanished.

Thirty kms from Roing and not far from Tamreswari temple is the remnant of a fort at Bhismanagar amidst deep forest.

The fort spread over an area of four square miles was protected by an inner wall of rough stones and outer walls by gate ways of bricks with holes for shooting arrows. On the east and the western side a ditch ran along the outer wall. The Northern side was a natural defence by a high hill. The ruins of a building covering a large area of 20,000 sq ft. with brick walls was situated well inside the gates which suggest a strongly defended fortress.

This fort was believed to have been built by Chutia king, Ratnadwaj who in late Sixteenth Century had built up an extensive empire on north bank of Brahmaputra, Ratnadwaj's name also associated as founder of Sadiya.

14 kms South of Roing there are remains of a large pond '*Podum Pukuri*' or Lotus tank where brick lines are seen. The trace of road towards Bhismanagar suggests that this tank might have been linked with the fortress. There are several scattered ruins bearing motif of god or goddesses of Hindu Pantheon along with Potteries and are seen as far as Chidu – twenty kms north of Roing. All these suggest that an ancient settlement of an advanced civilisation once inhabited the area.

## The Journeys End

July 1986 brought the news of my transfer to Itanagar as Director of Agriculture. It was a surprise as even in my distant imagination I never expected such an assignment.

A few months earlier a strange incident had happened. A traveller from South India arrived at Roing. He was on a visit to holy places in North East.

He entered my chamber just as a courtesy call and told I would vacate the chair within six months and would go with a higher assignment to a place west of Roing.

So saying he went out and was never seen again.

It was a coincidence. Perhaps he said purely on a conjecture to please me. But anyway this struck to my mind since it actually happened. Something in our life defies the rational explanation.

I arrived at Itanagar on 10th July, 1986.

The Department of Agriculture had no Director after the departure of the last incumbent a few months ago. In fact, he had retired a year earlier but continued on two extensions as none was found suitable to hold the charge. The immediate Juniors in the rung – the Joint Directors quarrelled amongst themselves claiming seniority over the other. The atmosphere was further vitiated by slimy manoeuvres of a staff who looked after the establishment matters. There were cells of vested interests scheming all the time to out-manoeuvre the other.

The department had grown up over the years disproportionately with the sole aim of employment generation, ostensibly projecting

the need for scientific agriculture by technological innovation and expertise. Obviously, man power requirement not being available locally, a vast horde of degree holders came in – many of them never had worked in the hills nor had any idea of tribal life. Bristled with the problem of adjustment, they developed selfish motives and thus became centres of cliques and manoeuvres.

No wonder in such a situation government was in a fix as to how to salvage the department from total chaos.

Some one suggested that the job should be assigned to a civil service officer who might be able to enforce discipline and stream-line the activities.

The choice had ultimately fallen on me and I got the surprise order.

It was a challenging job indeed never faced before by me. All the three seniors in the Directorate were understandably perturbed and kept themselves aloof. One complained of ill health, another took a religious vow-busied himself in prayers and meditation and the third just became indifferent.

To complicate the situation, a middle level functionary in the Government instead of helping me maintained a critical posture from the very start. His house became a rendezvous of gossip-mongers and once he even actively tried to remove me by false charges! Had I not got the support of senior officers including the Chief Secretary and the departmental Minister, I would have gone back. After his departure, another bumpkin came – the worst than the earlier. His only past time was to sleep over the files and make irrelevant and caustic comments.

The story of the Frontier Administration is replete with such dubious people, who were motivated by selfish interest and had brought a lot of discredit to the government.

My immediate task was to enforce discipline. Timely attendance and impartial dealings soon had an effect. Most of the members of the staff were good – they only did not get the opportunity to work.

Fortunately, there were officers who did not belong to any groups. They immediately responded to my initiatives. Being

professional in different branch of Agriculture, they proved to me an asset. Ranadhir Kumar Homechoudhury, Tago Basar, Jombom Padu, Yeshi Tsering, Kamo Ado, Chakra Dhar Deuri Lynden Roy Jyrwa, Rajat Nandi, Rajendra Prasad Singh, Wassi Ullah Khan, Thanu Ram Chutia, Satya'rata Hom, Jawar Dutta Roy, Subash Ranjan Ghosh, Prabal Bhattacharjee, Kalathil George Mathew, Pulin Chandra Borah, Deepak Kumar Dasgupta, Daniel B. Masih, Harihar Jha, T.P. Singh and a few others had talents but get the opportunity to prove their worth. Many of them were post graduates in varied subjects – Extension, Statistics, Pathology, Agronomy, Soil Science Plant breeding and Horticulture.

After straightening the administration in the directorate, I diverted my attention to the field. A few visits to the district brought me in touch with the farmers, some of whom, I found, had made remarkable change in traditional Agriculture by their innovative ways of land utilisation and cropping programme. Men like Loinong Iring of East Siang, Kuku Lego of Dibang Valley, Dor Tsonam of Tawang had generated so much of income by sheer ingenuity and hard labour that it became apparent that given a thrust in our extension programme, we could convince more people to take up farming as a successful occupation.

Then an idea struck to my mind – why not organise an Agriculture Fair?

Soon a decision was made, a big area was selected near the helipad at Naharlagun.

With Meticulous Planning, our aim was to make the event a spectacular success. There was immediate response from the farmers who brought large number of exhibits. Each of the eleven agricultural districts vied with one another to show their best – beautifully decorated the stalls with maps, photographs, charts, exhibits and demonstration plots. Half a dozen firms from outside the state, dealing with Agricultural Machineries and seeds, displayed their products. Regional centres of Indian Council of Agriculture Research, Defence Research and Development, Fertilizer Corporation of India, various departments of the State Government organised field demonstrations.

Never before had such an event been witnessed in the state. The fair ground remained crowded with hundreds of visitors, the

rush at times was tremendous that police found it difficult to control the traffic. There was demand for extending the period but we could not oblige as the exhibits – fruits and vegetables would not stay that long.

The fair highlighted the Agricultural development in the state. There were rich diversities of products. The farmers were exposed to the media. The whole programme was projected in the departmental Journal – Arunachal Agriculture.

The sixty pages colourful journal carried articles of our field functionaries on various topics – some even could be ranked as classic scientific treatise. We encouraged our staff to write on their field experience – extension, trial or research. There were immediate response – most encouraging was the contributions from Young Arunachal boys and girls, all of whom were Agriculture Graduates, who for the first time, had found a Media to Project their views.

We introduced special columns like ‘know our progressive farmers or our Pioneers’.

The journal was edited by one of our able officers, Thanu Ram Chutia who was a post graduate in Agriculture Extension and saw to it that it not only became attractive but informative as well. Till my departure, six issues had already come out and had earned quite a name.

Thanu Ram Chutia had many qualities. He had served for sometime in Indian Council of Agriculture Research as Junior Scientist where he earned a good name as an efficient officer. But unfortunately on his return to the department, he fell into vicious cliques and side tracked – down grading his seniority on some pretext. Several of his representations went in vain. I tried to present all the facts, but found Government was reluctant to open the issue, since dozens of officers were going to be affected! This was a clear case of injustice to an honest and upright officer.

Chakra Dhar Deuri – Post Graduate in Plant Pathology, had also suffered discrimination. Though – he was better placed than Chutia, but was assigned with unimportant job and was ignored in many functions. Deuri, I found, had pragmatic views and was well conversant with his subject. When I placed him in the right job, did very well.

The frustrations built over the years — mostly related to service matter could not be solved so easily as I wished. I never saw such manipulation during my career. To accommodate own men, pretentiously with higher qualifications, direct recruitment were made in the service superseding dozens of serving officers. There were several recruitment rules for different categories of posts — all supposed to be subject matter specialists, required specific qualifications in the disciplines. Everywhere, it appeared, rules were flouted, yet how it could happen was beyond my comprehension.

Many of the recruits, to say the least, did not possess the basic qualities of extension except possessing the high academic degrees.

We removed the anomalies later by modifying the recruitment rules by bunching all different rules into a uniform pattern, fixing minimum qualification as Bachelor degree in Agriculture for first entry in the service. No provision was kept for lateral entry even in specialized posts.

We also stopped deputation of inservice officers for higher studies by random selection and instead followed the merit cum seniority as basis for selection in such courses.

All these steps had some effects in restoring confidence amongst the staff. The recruitment of outsiders even in technical posts was discontinued and I saw to it that the interest of indigenous persons was safeguarded.

An incident occurred which made me visibly annoyed. A fellow — a subject matter specialist in horticulture holding a senior post created real flap.

A team of scientists came from Shimla for discussion on Apple Crop. The programme was known and I had alerted the officer, but when they came he was to be found nowhere, I had not made a detail study on Apple, particularly of its disease aspect and immediately faced an embarrassing situation. But somehow during morning I had glanced through a study on citrus decline in Cherrapunji in Meghalaya — the cause related as the study said due to orchard management.

I kept the scientists busy for sometime as they most probably had never heard of Cherrapunji citrus ! But half an hour was enough



when I had nothing more to talk. Luckily, at the moment one of our junior horticulturists suddenly arrived. He was in the district where Apple is the main crop. He saved the situation by explaining the problem in the field.

After the departure of the Scientists, the fellow quietly came. I was so much furious that I lost my temper and said — had I been the appointing authority I would have surely thrown him out.

I had to brush up my knowledge long since forgotten. Every day I browsed through books and journals to keep myself informed. I used another stratagem — through conversations with the staff, elicited informations that became quite helpful at times. In many seminars and discussions, I did participate unaided.

The most important function of the Director was to attend meetings in places outside the state. In a year, it might be half a dozen times or even more. While I did not mind to go to Guwahati or Shillong which are nearer, but to go to Delhi was irritating. Yet it could not be avoided though I doubted very much whether our contributions in National Agriculture was that important. In fact, representatives of North Eastern States most of the time were mute spectators, seldom anything asked or anything told.

I had some funny experiences — endless talks and bulky papers which few even read. More pronounced were the persons with jugglery of words. People are basically talkative and while away the time with less of works.

Once I had an opportunity of visiting Andaman to attend zonal meeting of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research. It had been a wonderful experience to see a place of emerald green in such a lovely setting.

One of the important land marks of Port Blair is the cellular jail — a penal settlement of by-gone days but now houses a Museum and a hospital. Here the freedom fighters — mostly idealist terrorists of Bengal were severely tortured. It was told — except Vinayak Savarkar, no one could actually escape — as in one side there was Indian ocean and on the other Jarowa country — the tribe who never spare any one.

We found some resemblance of Portblair with our own place — greenery, undulating hills and isolation. Alas! How long it can keep away the hungry hordes — no one can possibly say.

Despite vast resources at command, the agriculture in North East is Languishing under the impact of retarded growth. As many expert committees periodically land even in our place. They suggest technology application, better input supply to boost up production, but the core problem seldom understood. There is always a comparison with farmers of developed states and we were asked to look to them !

The basic problem in Agricultural Development is absence of Marketing Infrastructure. Assured transport facilities, remunerative price, bulk purchase of commodities through dozens of focal points would definitely encourage the farmers to raise the Agricultural production.

There are some marketing corporations functioning under the aegis of the Central Government. The role had been precisely defined in papers, but in reality little help is rendered to the farmers. Middlemen still operate – they dictate the price term, enter into shady deals and farmers get a beating, Sometimes, unconvincing explanations are given – products are not – quality oriented, hence no buyers!

Jhum or shifting method of cultivation was a controversial matter. Some were of the opinion – that system had been responsible for low Agricultural production apart from serious menace to soil erosion. While the cause of soil erosion and flood could be traced to other factors too, like construction of net works of roads, buildings, saw mills, but Jhum alone had been thought to be responsible for wide spread damage. So a policy decision was taken at the instance of central government to abolish the Jhum altogether by luring the people to settled cultivation.

Compact areas of 25 to 100 hectares of land were identified where people abandoning Jhum would be given land, seed, planting materials, and to overcome the initial period of stress, supplies from fair price shops would be assured. It had been even worked out that after the gestation period, the horticultural crops alone would give out a substantial return. To avoid constraints, the fund was made available under a Central Sector Scheme.

But one aspect was not taken into account by the planners. Jhum is an age old system in which socio religious or socio-economic

functions of the people revolve around. It cannot be wished away by offering simplistic solutions. Beside coinciding with their religious functions in Jhum they grow variety of crops like cotton, tobacco, yams or millet – the later item being an essential ingredient for the home made brew.

Various suggestions were made during earlier days by experts who visited the area when it was known as North East Frontier Agency, that main aim being prevention of soil erosion, a concerted attempt should be made for what was termed as improved jhum with contour logging, strip cropping, forest coverage on the top and on steep inclines. It was also suggested that in abandoned jhum field, locally available legume trees like wattle – acacia sp. and creeper Kudzu (*penraria thun bergiana*), should be extensively grown.

The suggestion was practical considering the gamut of the problem.

The entire thinking was however reversed after some years and there was no more talks on improved jhum.

The situation in all the hill states of North East does not present an uniform picture. It differs from place to place, – topography and population density.

In another matter where I had my reservation was on fertilizer. We were told that crop yield would go up substantially with application of fertilizer and so efforts should be made to increase the intake.

With precipitation as high – varying from 3000 to 5000 mm the soil is acidic. In certain areas the PH content was low as 4.5. The application of nitrozenous fertilizer would be harmful in the long run. Beside soil testing facilities being meagre coupled with the farmer's ignorance, the chemical fertilizers are not going to solve any problem.

Bulk of cultivated soils are in foot hills region which are predominantly new alluvial type soil. Majority of these soils receive run off water from the catchment areas with subsequent deposit of fine sand, coarse sand and dissolved organic matter. The organic matters in these soils are very high and so also available nitrogen content.

To get a high return from such soils by fertilizer application, there will be many problems. With given set of agro climatic conditions and particular soil type, the yield of crop is dependent on crop variety, soil fertility and management practices.

I had therefore felt that it is better to restrict to natural farming with organic manures rather than to have recourse to indiscriminate use of fertilizers.

A new thrust we gave to our Agricultural Extension works to meet the objective of production and surplus in food crops, vegetables and fruits. There are small holdings where vegetables, spices, fruits could be successfully grown to bring quick result. Farmers were identified, areas located and strategies evolved for giving a package of programme. Farmers Training Programme was thus suitably oriented to include soil survey, Plant Protection measures and post harvest technology.

The department had large number of personnel specialized in various disciplines. With the progress made in field of Agriculture, there was need for research and experimentation. The variation in Agro climatic condition from region to region required adoption of proper cropping programme suitable for the location. There are places where heavy frost or snow during winter inhibits the growth of crops. But one of our officers, Jawar Datta Roy, achieved a miracle — experimented successfully growing of vegetables in deep trenches in Tawang.

Lush green vegetation in the region is an immense treasure house of so much of food materials. Leafy vegetables, berries and nuts are found plentifully which hold out a great promise. We, therefore, encouraged our staff to carry out experiments.

It was interesting to observe how with some encouragement, the staff responded enthusiastically to the programme.

We had quite a few number of energetic local young boys and girls who had come out from Agricultural Colleges and wanted to apply their knowledge in the field. Tage Tatung, Michi Butang, Koj Tassar, T.T. Goyi, Jombi Ratan, Anung Lego, Abom Doso, Thupten Chhonjin, M.C. Morang, Okang Tamuk, Anong Mengu, Ngiliyang Tama, Jumbe Lhendup, Yanung Jamoh, Olak Tagi, Rinchin Norbu

they all belong to new generation imbibed with the spirit of works. Yanung Jamoh was the first local girl, a graduate from an Agricultural University with distinction and Olak Tagi was also first amongst the local boys who had obtained his Ph. D. degree in horticulture.

My assignment as Director gave me an ample opportunity to visit the districts and to see some of the places which had never seen before. In Longding, I saw the Wangchoos still clothed in backwardness, uneasy calm in Indo-Burmese border at Pangchau, Noctes near Khonsa in their own self – indifferent to change, Tangsas of Changlang and Miao. There at Nampong, I saw the second world war vintage road, passing through a pass named 'Hell Gate' – beyond which lies a big lake – lake of no return which caused many deaths, Namdhapa wild life Sanctuary away from Miao – the largest forest in varied topography spread over from 1000 ft. to 12000 ft. with immense store of flora and fauna, a tea plantation in foot hills of Longding at Kanubari owned by a Wangcho youngman, Tinkattra, elegant Khamptis in Chowkham and Namsai who struck to me so different from others with their beautiful tended rice fields, orchards, water channels, houses and buddhist temples. Khamptis are forward looking and have made great progress in education, agriculture and business enterprise.

Beyond Chowkham was Wakro – Digaru Mishmi area with thriving orange gardens due to high calcium content in the soil bring lot of money, yet people do not tend their nurseries. How different they are from enterprising Khamptis who are now diversifying their agriculture with so many varied crops including tea.

My visit to Pasighat brought back the nostalgic memories. The area had now undergone rapid transformation – hardly resembling the past. There in Mirem village, where I had stayed for two years during Mid fifties – it took me time to identify the place where once my house had stood. But it was a pleasant surprise to see my old friends – still alive – Loinong Iring, Kokkam Pangeng, Lopium Kadu and few others.

Beyond Mirem was a vast forest where elephants and tigers used to roam about and it was a risk to move at night or in early dawn. Now all that is history. The entire forest gone – the place name has also been changed to Bilat with a Secondary School, health unit, shops, houses, even a village in the upland, shifted nearby.

Thirty Kms. stretch from Ruksin in the border of Assam to Pasighat or to Mirem – Most forest cover has gone. The elephants which freely moved, have climbed to the hills – a phenomenon never happened before.

Many Adis now occupying positions have constructed bungalow type houses. With the spread of education, a surprising number of them are in professional fields – medicine, Engineering, forest or Agriculture. Some of them occupy higher positions in the Government – Takap Ringu, Matin Dai, Toyi Dai as Commissioners, Jikom Riba, Matin Tangu, Obang Dai, Tabom Bam as Secretaries.

I found Kharilukhi, who was with me in Damro during early sixties, still vibrant with zest of life. He had since retired from Government service and settled at Pasighat. Both he and his wife – an Adi girl from Siluk village, labour very hard. They have constructed a nice cosy house near the town. Their neighbour is Pursung Lego, the village level worker, who was with me at Damro, remaining same as before – jolly and humourous. His wife has now joined politics and is holding an important post in the women's wing of the party.

There was a comic touch when I went for social calls. Every one knew I had written books and so my visit might be to discover a plot! Matin Tangu's wife Aroti told me so but I had the humour to tell that perhaps some day I might weave a story!

At Tawang, I saw the tragic scenery. No longer does the place preserve its pristine glory. As I had feared, it just happened – a road had cut through above the BrandungChung Ani Gomba. Gone are the days of splendid isolation and serene contemplation. How I wished they had remained as they were forever !

It was July 1988. I was surprised by a sudden call from the Governor. My immediate reaction was – it might be related to Agriculture.

The thought was plainly disturbing as my brief must be thorough and precise.

The Secretary did not tell me anything – only conveyed the information.

I was ushered into the spacious drawing room. The Governor R.D. Pradhan, a veteran of many services immediately greeted me with a warm handshake. It was all about my book – 'The Alluring Frontiers' which had interested him very much.

For long one hour he talked to me on my experiences in the frontiers. Only in the tail end did he ask about Agriculture.

Sometime later an announcement was made by the Government. A Gold Medal – the highest award of the state has been awarded to me for meritorious services. ♡

A comic scene followed in a tea party. When the Governor just talked to every one but spent a little more time with me, the surprised officers asked what the governor was talking to me !

One of the officers approached the Minister and said – he did so much work but sadly no honour came to him ! Another said – he never thought a book could bring a Medal – had he known it, surely he would have tried with so much experiences behind him !

It was Nari Rustomji who wrote me a letter informing how he enjoyed reading my book – the “Alluring Frontiers”. He even mentioned, had there been more officers who would take real interest in making Arunachal known to the world through writings, the things would have been so nice and different.

Nari Rustomji, retired from Indian Civil Service in 1975 after 40 years of active service in the frontiers. I had no personal contact with him though he was the Adviser of erstwhile North East Frontier Agency. Yet it was so nice of him to address me by my first name and appreciate my works although I had never sent the book to him. He had got it from some one. Sadly, not many were like him.

The Alluring Frontiers created a wave. It travelled far distant. From Germany I got a surprise letter from Prof. Dr. U. Schweinfurth of department of Geography in Heidelberg University, who said – the book provided a delightful reading.

As the date of my superannuation advanced I prepared myself for the final day. Tremendous pressures were built up to change my decision and ask for an extension. Many felt plainly disturbed at the thought of my going away. The gloom was more on the local staff whose interest I always upheld.

Yet, I had decided to go – it was time now to call it a day. I bowed out finally on 30 September 1989, after completing an evenful career of thirty eight years in the fascinating frontiers.

## Epilogue

When I look back to the time of early fifties, the frontier was still a mysterious, foreboding land. The vast area beyond the foot hills covered in dense forest, lofty hills, gurgling rivers appeared an impenetrable barrier. There lived in isolated hamlets the tribesmen who had only known the government through the interpreters and were awed by the appearance of body of Assam Rifles.

At the time there were half a dozen primary schools, dispensaries, a few kilometers of road, and only three under graduates who had their education in an outside school. Representation in the Government service were limited to the post of Interpreters, runners and none but one was in the clerical post.

The change that had taken place since then was simply astounding. There are now close to seven hundred primary schools, two hundred middle schools, hundred secondary schools, two dozen higher secondary schools, four degree colleges, an university for higher learning, a science and technological institute, scores of vocational training centres. Remote areas are now connected by motorable roads with almost regular passenger bus service, piped water supply, electricity in the villages, dozens of townships — that have ushered an era of prosperity. Forty years ago there was not even a student for secondary education, but today the scene is so vastly different. Apart from few hundred graduates in Arts or Science, there are no fewer than hundred with professional degrees in Medical, Engineering or Agriculture — quite a few amongst them are girls.

Even more remarkable is the entry in All India Services — Civil, Police or Army. With the opportunities thrown open there is



an unprecedented rush in educational institutes and it is only a question of time they might surpass the All India average in literacy figures.

All these development just in four decades must be reckoned as unique in tribal land anywhere in the contemporary world.

Yet, the exposure to the outside world, breaking the age old isolation, has brought forward bewildering situation. There is genuine concern to preserve the identity in face of cultural and economic ingress of the dominant society. The crisis is more deepened especially in educated elite exposed to outside thought. They have not been able to strike a balance in the milieu, emerging as a separate class in hitherto classless society.

One of the virtues of age old society is the self reliance. They tilled their own land, wore their own cloth, produced several artifacts of exquisite designs. They never knew famine, pestilence or distress. They had their own customary laws with dispensation of instant justice, built their society on strong communal bond, despised selfish motivation — greed, lust or lies.

But with the spurt in developmental activities, hordes of people from the outside poured in. Their thoughts, beliefs and ways of life not necessarily attuned to the tribal culture soon had a subtle impact on the society. People were made to feel their traditional belief now quite incompatible in the modern world and must imbibe the other ways of life where material prosperity can alone usher in a new era. As money became an easy tender replacing the traditional barter the individual craze for it thus became quite evident in each sphere of activities.

Sometime back in a seminar I read out a paper — ‘The crisis of identity’ — where I said, the self reliance which was the vehicle of life gave the tribes a proud bearing and none of them displayed weakness even in time of dire distress. The situation has undergone a sea change as soon as they have been exposed to the outside influence. For the first time the tribes who lived in isolation almost bound in obscurity have come in contact with more advanced people. While in earlier days, they fought for their survival against the known enemies who were at times equal or inferior to them, but now are

being confronted by more intelligent and shrewed elements superior with man power, money and materials. Some of the new comers demonstrated total lack of an understanding of tribal ethos and developed an overbearing attitude, greed and vanity. The integration of tribal society with the main stream preferred by many with an ambitious plan of cultural and economic thrust rather caused a widespread misgivings among the tribes who apprehended a subtle move of cultural and economical subjugation with the imposition of many alien habits including religious beliefs thereby compelling them to abandon many of their tradition.

The ethnic minorities are becoming restive on the question of their survival and seeking redefinition of their identity. Here lies the opportunity for the larger population bordering the tribal land to correctly grasp their ethos and forge a unity with a sympathetic understanding, equal partnership and justice.

The important factor to overcome the crisis of identity is to develop self reliance. The local arts and crafts produced by the people are an immense treasure which alone can bring substantial return to sustain the economy. To encourage the growth of handicrafts, what the Government could do is to strengthen the extension net works with elaborate marketing infrastructure. The nature is so bountiful, the frontier had great potential for development of several small scale forest or agro-based industries. But the most man-power requirement in any enterprises must come from indigenous source. There might be need to bring in outsiders but they should be motivated with the spirit of service amongst the tribal people.

There is abominable ignorance about the people of the frontier – their tradition and culture. Better projection could bring them nearer to home. Only in recent times, the universities in North East India opened studies on history and culture of several ethnic groups.

To forge a closer understanding thereby to strengthen the unity amongst the numerous ethnic groups, the school curricula also should have a compulsory reading on each tribe's habitat, culture and way of life.

There is distinct echo of sub nationalism which might appear at the moment ominous. As the anxiety writ over my face, I found solace in the words of philosopher poet which provides an answer;

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches arms toward perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its

Way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is lead forward by thee

into ever — widening thought and action —



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# ERRATA

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>		<i>To read as</i>
2	21	The garden planters	tea garden planters
2	26	I came in 1963	I came in 1968
4	12	rani splashes the wood	Rain splashes the wood
8	10	enchancing sight to the travells	enchancing sight to the travellers!
10	31	to these dedicated	to those dedicated
11	30	ther had been steady erosion	There had been steady erosion
15	9	the entire floor is made in	The entire floor is made of flattened bamboos. In the room, a fire place is made in the centre.
22	32	ammunition boxes were also carried	empty ammunition boxes were also carried.
31	19	crop showd good promise	crop showed good promise
39	24	The hij village Buliang	The hija village Buliang
91	15	he to seldom stayed	he too seldom stayed
94	26	brought teh small army unit to attention	brought the small army unit to attention
103	32	incumbent upon a man's hairs	Incumbent upon a man's heirs
109	7	always continues	always continues
112	21	once, during my racee	Once, during my recee
116	22	service was a headach	services was a headache
140	8	if they change also	if they charge also
147	26	A few Idu long houses lic hidden	A few Idu Long houses Lie hidden
162	19	Plumments in a single unbroken cascade	Plummets in a single unbroken cascade
184	14	coloured bead nacklaces are also worn	coloured bead necklaces are also worn
211	34	Leighandu, the circle officer	Leikhandu, the circle officer
212	2	Leighandu died of	Leikhandu died of
219	2	It sould be me	It should be me.
227	16	with the help of co-operated society	With the help of co-operative society
231	2	the water drop- element fire	the water drop - element water, the spire the triangular like of flame - the element fire.
236	23	Monpas have evoked	Monas have evolved

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>		<i>To read as</i>
241	25	He went to the fifth Dalai Lama-Nagwang Lobjang Gyaltso	He went to fifth Dalai lama - Ngawang Lobjang Gyaltso.
243	15	is used for cooling	is used for cooking
248	17	that a child in Mom-yul	that a child in Monyul
248	26	But despite his runing away	But despite his running away
249	4	Tsewang Lama shouted for	Tsewang Lamo shouted for
250	26.	his body in potala	his body did not find a place in potala
253	7	came to a place and saw Ani Meditating	came to a place and saw an Ani Meditating
253	16	The reading of sacred texts in compulsory	The reading of sacred texts is compulsory
255	14	sould aim for super conciousness	should aim for super conciousness.
258	8	on the heater to melt the water	on the heater to Melt for water :
272	22	spilling our enormous water	spilling out enormous water
284	8	but get the oppurtunity .	but had so far not been able to get the opportunity.

1