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# CFEL Research Newsletter



**Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL)**  
(A UGC, New Delhi Sponsored Centre)  
**Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS)**

Rajiv Gandhi University  
Rono Hills, Doimukh- 791112





March 12, 2019



### MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to learn that Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL), under the aegis of Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS) of Rajiv Gandhi University, is bringing out its 3rd edition of the CFEL Research Newsletter for the year 2018-19. The Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) is instrumental in documenting the endangered languages and rich cultural heritage of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh in particular.

The Centre is strategically located and an important Centre for the Rajiv Gandhi University and Arunachal Pradesh. Since, Arunachal Pradesh is home to many distinct languages and cultures of various ethnicities, the presence of the Centre is essential. The Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) has tremendous potential for the documentation and preservation of the indigenous languages of Arunachal Pradesh. The Centre should also focus on outreach programs to emphasis on promoting and development of the mother languages in villages, schools and colleges.

As per UNESCO (2009) reports, there are number of world's languages which are critically endangered and on the verge of extinction. According to the report, India shares the largest list with 196 endangered languages at varying degrees of endangerment. In Arunachal Pradesh, there are minor languages such as Tangam, Aka (Hruso), Meyor, etc. which are listed as either vulnerable or critically endangered. At any point of time, these languages can disappear if timely intervention is not taken. Many experts also believe that in another 100 years, half of the existing world's languages will disappear from the surface of the earth. The loss of language is not just mere loss of speech form but also affect the socio-ecological and cultural heritage of the people. In this regards, I quote lines from the book *The Last Speaker* (2010) where Johnny Hill Jr., the last speaker of Chemehuevi of Arizona says - "It's not just the language that's dying, it's the Chemehuevi people themselves". As said, thus, losing a language would mean losing one's own identity and existence.

As saying goes – Learn more languages, Earn more friends; there is nothing wrong in learning and knowing other languages and cultures. It is always an advantage to know more than one language. I quote what Mahatma Gandhi had said that "... I would not have a single Indian to forget, neglect or be ashamed of his mother tongue or to feel that he or she cannot think or express the best thought in his own vernacular" (Young India, 1921).

Language is an important asset for human society without which no human progression is plausible. It embodies the knowledge of divine wisdom, philosophy, metaphysical and biological science, and art and literature. It is through language that the whole socio-cultural development takes place including affirmation of identity, expression of socio-cultural knowledge and values, and enrichment of culture. Hence, language preservation is immensely required and every effort to save, preserve and promote endangered languages and culture should be encouraged and adopted.

I appreciate and acknowledge the tremendous efforts that the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) is putting towards the preservation and protection of the endangered languages of this beautiful State of Arunachal Pradesh. Considering the importance of the Centre, the University will take necessary steps to make it a permanent centre to carry forward the research, documentation and dissemination of the rich languages and cultural heritage of the region.

**(Saket Kushwaha)**  
Vice Chancellor  
Rajiv Gandhi University

### Coordinator's Note

It gives me an immense pleasure to release the third edition of the CFEL News Letter in March 2019. The year 2018-19 have been a challenging period for the Centre in terms of non-availability of funds from the UGC. In spite of all the hardships, our research team has been focusing on their respective research activities; and because of the fund crisis the Centre has not carried out any field study or workshops during this period. Some research fellows have also left the Centre in this period due to their personal engagements. However, with the gracious support of the Vice Chancellor, the CFEL staff are getting their salary time to time, and we are able to bring out this News Letter on time. This News Letter contains several articles on different aspects of language and culture, and also the transcription of a special lecture by eminent writer and Cultural Activist Ganesh N. Devy transcribed by Chera Devi with lots of patience and hard work. I thank all the CFEL research team for contributing articles and bringing out this edition on time. I also thank our Vice Chancellor Prof. Saket Kushwaha for his constant support and encouragement. I hope the Centre will receive the second grant soon, and we will be able to undertake our next plan - field studies on few lesser known languages, conduct workshops, seminars and outreach programmes in schools and villages in due course. I wish the year 2019-2020 be filled with innumerable activities for CFEL!

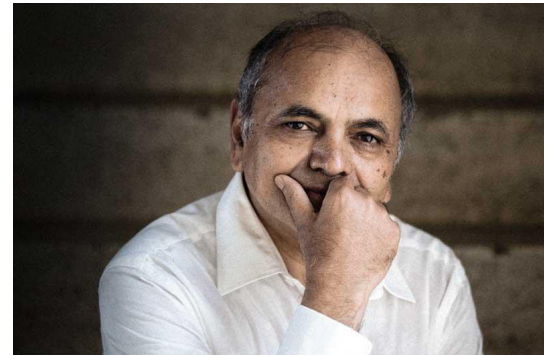
**Prof. S. Simon John**  
Coordinator, CFEL

*Special Lecture delivered on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018*

# The Question of Silence: Tribals, Languages and the Future

By

G. N. Devy



It has been a long time desire for me to come and visit this university and this institute in particular. The circumstances in life are stranger than the logical thoughts that humans construct; and so I was not able to come here. I feel delighted and very pleased you invited me; and I am grateful to you for that invitation. I hope Hindi is a language generally understood here because occasionally when I am stuck for words in 'the enemy's tongue', I might switch over to the Hindi language or some Indian language to make myself understood.

Normally in lectures scholars are expected to bring together all the knowledge that has been established in a given discipline, but this is a 'special lecture' and, therefore, I shall not report what others have known and told us. I shall probably open up before you a new field, some crazy ideas and the possibility of adventure in thought, perhaps not with success. Yet it is necessary to dream and fail in order to move forward rather than be just sleeping with minds entirely closed. Therefore, I enter this territory of thought which is risky, and challenging yet very exciting for me.

Mein janta hun ki mere sharir mein 'chitt' hai, consciousness is not an anxiety when you are under 'chitt', but let us use consciousness as a translation for chitt for the purpose of this discourse. Mein yeh bhi janta hun ki mere aakh ke bahar, mere sharir ke bahar, mere spash ke bahar yeh vishwa hai. Ab yeh vishwa and yeh chitt ko ikattha lane ke liye ek hi tarika hain, aur voh hain bhasha, zubaan, shabd. The only bridge between consciousness and the phenomenal world is language. Of course I do not know if the world really exists out there or whether it is some myth, whether it is made of my fantasy or imagination. It is impossible to give a lasting verifiable evidence for the existence of the world and yet, collectively we seemed to have agreed on the idea that the world exists or what Immanuel Kant called the 'Phenomenal world' exists. Now this existence, the visual, the cosmos of 'icos' as the Greeks would call it vishwa, icos, cosmos, these are not necessarily philosophically exact equals but for the purpose of simple communication are used as mutual substitutes and synonymous. Icos which gives birth to words like Eco or ecology and also economy, when what man has done to ecology becomes subject to transaction and exchange. The Greek 'Icos', the world or cosmos or whatever you call it out there, may be a pure fantasy or imagination on your part.

I am not sure also if my consciousness is really there. It is not really any part of the body, it is not an organ, not even the mind. I cannot go to a Psychiatrist and say "mera chitt shudh karo" "please repair my consciousness". Whether it is just a notion, I do not know; but, for the moment, I take it for granted for the sake of convenience that the consciousness exists and the world exists. Between these two there is only one bridge that humans have at their disposal, and that bridge is language. The bridge actually defines the structure, the shape of the cosmos and creates what we call the world-view and, therefore, we maintain that every language is a unique worldview, that a language is a unique way of connecting to the world.

In the last five minutes, I noticed that when I use the term chitt I really cannot think of the world in terms of consciousness, I have to use it or have to understand it only in terms of chitt. We all know the great difficulty in exact translation and what havoc translation can often play in complete transmission of meaning. For instance, the biblical dictum, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" can become in an unimaginative Russian translation, "vodka is very good but meat is bad". So without getting into the untranslatability between chitt and consciousness, I can say every language is a unique worldview. Over the several past millennia, humans have related to the existence of the world using their respective languages in thousands of different ways.

The existing language bridges between the consciousness and the world is collapsing or falling. Sadly, all over the world languages are collapsing. The bridges that humans made to connect with the vishwa are now in a precarious situation. I shall explain why this seems to have happened. What is its quantitative measure and what is its causal explanation. I shall come to that, but before that let me turn to the term 'tribal'. Like, we say we have got so many tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, twenty six or twenty eight tribes and sub-sects and sub-groups.

In the context of Africa, the notion of indigeneity has now become contestable. The term 'tribe' may be less disputable for speaking about African ethnic identities. In Australia, the term 'tribe' is not seen as a respectful term. It is avoided in discussions of ethnicity in Australia. There, 'aboriginal' is used more commonly. In India the term Adivasi is preferred by most of the central Indian communities, while in other parts the term 'tribe' is in use. I often ask my friends in Britain if there are or were any tribals there. They say, "No, we don't have any tribes here." That is the case in France, in Germany, in northern Europe. Of course, they have nomadic communities such as Gypsies and Irish travellers. Anybody who is not likely to pay land-related taxes, or is not sedentary, is normally treated as less than citizens in those countries. Yet, Europeans do not speak of any indigenous tribals. This interested me quite a lot, intrigued me, why is it that in Australia there are tribals, in America there are indigenous people, in Australia there are aborigines, in Africa there are tribals, in India there are Adivasis or Jana Jatis. Why it is then that Europe has no tribals?

Now, a popular way of looking at tribal in India has been, I do not endorse it but merely mention it, that these are communities older than the other caste based urbanised communities engaged in trade and commerce and other institutions created in the society. That a tribe is older than the non-tribe is a popular perception. If that is the case, did Europe have any population which is older than its present population? Obviously, there has to be. We are told that from Africa one branch of homo-sapiens went to Europe and another remained in Africa. One perished, the one in Europe actually turned back to Africa and somehow survived and so on. If that is the case then why it is



that Europe have no tribals? The answer to that question allows us to have a different attitude to tribes in continents outside Europe. One can propose that probably colonialism created the category called tribes. This is not to say that the communities did not exist before the colonial rule, this is not to say that they were suddenly planted here like some exotic plant species.

This imagination of social category belongs specifically to the second half of the 19th century. The history in brief is as follows: in Europe a war took place between France and what used to be Prussia, and at the end of the war Germany realised that its naval strength was inadequate and, therefore, Germany decided to build a strong navy in 1860s. But Germany does not have an easy access to the seas as it is mostly land locked. On the northern side the sea freezes during winter and therefore it was only during summer that the Germans could somehow add warships to their fleet. In order to do that the Germans required timber on a large scale. In order to satisfy the requirement of timber, the Germans set up their forest department. If you go to Germany you will notice that most trees are of the same height because productive-forest is a concept that Germany created in the 1860s. In retaliation, the British also created a forest department. But Britain has no land mass that was necessary to have extensive forests. The British created their forest department in India. Now, which land would the British use for forestation? They did not go to the places where there were trees. Till then, the British had struck treaties of various kinds, contracts, understanding, lease and contracts with various princely states in the country. But there were communities that did not have princes for signing contracts with the British. The British had listed all such communities and the areas where they dwelt were brought under the 'sovereign domain' through a single law. So, overnight, the land that belonged to these communities became the sovereign land. The people tilling there, doing agricultural work, catching birds or hunting animals or whatever they were doing, became the tenants of the state. These tenants forced into tenancy through an act because the British wanted to control their land for growing their forests in retaliation to Germany. These tenants became tribals in the description of the colonial rule.

Now, how did the term 'tribe' gain currency?

In Africa something was happening at that time. The European powers had drawn up maps of African countries (there are fifty-four nations in Africa today) mostly in straight lines. In most cases, they were not drawn after any geological or geographical survey. The maps were drawn on a drawing table in Europe. Now, you know that rivers do not necessarily flow in straight lines and mountains do not erupt in straight lines necessarily. As a result of the cartographic surgery on Africa, many communities that spoke one language, failed in two or three neighbouring countries. In one part they were in majority but in the remaining nations they became a minority. Those who were in minority came to be described as 'tribes'. The term gained a wide currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The term tribe came into common English usage in that sense in the 1860's in Africa. As a consequence, for the land holders who were turned into tenants in India, that term got applied in 1871.

The British came up with the first list of 'criminal tribes of India' who were wandering communities, not *Adivasis*, not *Jana Jatis*, and the second list came up in 1872 as the list of 'tribes of India'. This is the broad-brush history. The communities had been there in the past too all along. They were part of the traditional sociological wisdom; but somehow imposed a new perspective on Indian perception of the society. We have continued with that perception. I am not quarreling with that perception. I do not think we can wish away history. I do not think we can wish away the British rule in India or the Portuguese rule in Goa or the French rule in Pondicherry. It is history, it has happened. Only fools quarrel with history. So, let us not quarrel with history. Histories are gone, they are yesterday. We are looking at tomorrow and today.

I will now turn to the question of languages in India.

During the 19th century printing came to India and many Indian languages got into print. But not all Indian languages received the benefit of the new technology. Some four decades before the country gained independence, discussions started as to which would be the language to be used in India for common purpose of administration. And that discussion could not be fully concluded. In the Constituent Assembly discussions (1946-1949) this question cropped up during discussions in every meeting; but there was no agreement on the matter. All the discussions of the constituent assembly, where the members reached conclusion, became Articles in the Constitution. In most cases, those discussions which remained non-concluded became Schedules. Thus, the 8th Schedule of the Constitution was created for languages. Those languages that were not in print did not get into the Schedule. For instance, the Apatani language of Arunachal Pradesh did not get into the VIII schedule. During the 1950s, the linguistic reorganisation of states was initiated. The process continued till the emergence of Punjab as a linguistic state in 1964. In the process, the languages of tribals in our country got negated. Their existence came under a cloud. Was this the situation peculiar to India alone? The answer is 'no'. This had happened in Nigeria and in Indonesia as well. The result is, for the last fifty years the languages of such communities all over the world have started disappearing. Worse still, they have been disappearing at an alarmingly high rate.

I will give a measure of how many languages have gone out of the human realm, human imagination and out of full use. In India, we had in the 1961 census a listing of about 1652 mother tongues. Of course, every mother tongue claimed by people as 'tongue' is not necessarily a 'language'; but about 1100 of those claimed were assessed to be languages. At present, one cannot identify more than eight hundred languages. So, approximately three hundred languages disappeared in a matter of fifty years. If we count the frequency for language death in India, we notice that approximately every two months a language has been dying. The rate of extinction of languages has increased over the decades. In the next thirty years, another four hundred languages may disappear in the country. Is this the situation in India alone? The answer is no. All over the world there is a very serious concern and fear that out of the 6000 living languages, nearly 4000 languages shall simply fade away in the next thirty years. Of the remaining 2000 languages, approximately 1700 will function as living languages but not all of the domains of those languages will function effectively. A language is not an animal which is either dead or alive; a language functions through its domains and if a language loses its domains out of use. It is a serious challenge before the humanity because languages are seen dying everywhere, which is a very unusual situation in the history of humans.

There are several arguments explaining the rapid and unprecedented decline in the language stocks. They point to gaps in government policies, lop-sided educational processes, culturally insensitive pedagogies and homogenising market forces. All those are good arguments but they do not fully explain the phenomenon. While accepting the role of all those factors in the language decline experienced

by us, I would like to present before you two rather very unique developments that may have a direct relation with this emerging tragedy.

Firstly, when humans evolved as homo sapiens, it was at a very late stage in the making of the cosmos. The big bang is supposed to have taken place some 14 million years ago. Our solar system settled around some 6.50million years ago. The earth started somehow finding its present shape 4 billion years ago. Life emerged in its very elementary form just about two and a half billion years ago. In that history of fourteen billion years, the Homo sapiens as they are today have been only half a million years old. Sometimes we feel very proud of being humans and we like to believe, as poets say, "this world is mine." They forget that they are late arrivals in the world, that they have just arrived.

Of the half a million years, for the first two hundred thousand years, the Homo sapiens did not 'speak' at all. Let us not delude ourselves by believing that we have been speaking all along. For the first two hundred thousand years our communications was through gestures (like I am moving my hands or you are nodding your head, which is five lakh years old or smile for instance). Does smile belong to the French language or German language or Awadhi language? It is difficult to say. It is human. It is five hundred thousand years old. This was the language that we used for the first two hundred thousand years of our existence. And then for another period of a similar length, or more, we used only tones; and textures of tones decided the semantic expanse of what we want to transact between a brain and another brain. All these nasalization businesses, humming and hawing when a grandmother tells a story to her grandchild, the child says "hmmm". It is universal and it pre-dates history of language. It is only for the last 70,000 years that we have been speaking the kind of voice-based language that we recognise as language today.

If transaction of meaning with help from sound icons is in use for seventy thousand years, the kind of language we use today where the past tense, the future tense and the present tense are marked has been in use for a much shorter span, probably thirty thousand years. However, we know practically nothing about the languages beyond the last ten thousand years. It is only during the last ten thousand years that humans developed languages that are rooted in an agrarian kind of labour practice and social composition.

Now, if we look from a distance at this macro-history of language, we can say that humans have passed from the language of the theatre (gestures) to the language of music (stray notes) to the language of verbal icons. It is not unlikely, therefore, that humans may actually pass on, and pass forward, to some communication of a non-verbal kind as well if the process of biological and social evolution makes it necessary. In purely theoretical terms, that cannot be seen as impossibility in the evolutionary trajectory of humans.

If you look very carefully at the younger generation today you will find them tired of speech and certainly tired of reading. Maryanne Wolfe, a Professor of Reading, while working on verbal skills, reading skills and cognitive abilities of children, noticed that dyslexia is not an expression of cognitive deficiency but rather it is a cognitive advancement, functioning of a different kind of intelligence-competence. For coming to this conclusion, she carried out an intensive study of dyslectic children from different social groups and ethnic backgrounds; and she found that the dyslectic children are cognitively of the other children. Marian Wolf has published her findings in her book *Proust and the Squid*. It is a fascinating work. Going by her argument, one may ask, "Why does this seem to have happened?" We notice in our daily experience that the young generation is over-preoccupied with texting messages and apparently less interested in speaking for communication. It is an everyday experience to see two young children in a city texting rather than chatting in the conventional sense. Is it that they have started entering a zone of silence? And if it is so, how did humans arrive here?

I said earlier that I will put before you two considerations for the decline and death of language. The first of these I have placed before you. The second is the human brain is made slightly different than the brains of other animals. The difference is not pertaining to the tissues, or the material of which it is made. The difference is that it is a recursive brain. The human brain thinks just as other animal brains do. Human brain controls the body as brains of other animal species do. The difference between them and the human brain is that it can think about thought which other animal brains are not so potentially capable of doing. They may have such capacity in a nascent way; they may be doing it at an elementary level; but not at par with the advanced level of reclusiveness that the human brain has acquired. For instance, when I am speaking and I have just spoken half a sentence, your brain instantly starts imagining what you think is going on inside my brain. Thus, humans connect brain to brain, not only word to brain or brain to word. We intuit, engage and exercise what Phenomenology describes as 'intentionality'. This mutual entanglement over the last 70,000 years has been processed through the Broca's lobe situated in the left half of the brain. It analyses language with the help of millions of neurons. These neurons have to labour as soon as one hears a sound in order to segregate it from all other sounds one has heard till then, differentiate it from the cosmic sound that the perennial friction the earth may be producing, from other non-symbolic sounds of fans, trains, objects, and recognise whether it is human, whether it belongs to a semantic structure, whether it is conventional, what precise meaning this sound has implicit in it. All that work which the neurons have to perform in response to that sound-event is an awful amount of neurological labour. The human brain it appears is experiencing a neurological fatigue and, therefore, it is probably now shifting very rapidly towards a visual, in preference over the auditory, interpretation of the world. Since images are sent to the brain through the eye, and because they get analysed faster in the pre-frontal cortex, the place in the brain where you draw abstraction and judgments: the amount of neurological labour is less.

An analogy can be that before the industrial revolution people used to make clothes, during the industrial revolution they engaged machines to make cloth reducing the human labour required for the production. (I find handmade cloth far more beautiful). The human brain is following that kind of a shift; and as a result the brain is looking at visual communication, visual language rather than the existing languages as an easier means of communication.

The languages using sound-icons as semantic symbols have learnt to employ tenses and are constructed along an implicit temporal scale. Though it is too early to predict this with any degree of certainty, perhaps human speech communities are trying to free communication from that time scale and arrive at an interpretation of the world without reference to time, without any restrictive temporal scheme. Now, this latent desire has had a great impact on our lives in recent decades. Humans all over the world, irrespective of their religion, race, gender, class, location and age, seem to have decided, tacitly but collectively, to outsource the function of remembering. When you want to erase time and the temporal scale out of language then the first thing you have to attack is memory. It is probably therefore that all of us have in a large measure handed over that function of remembering to an external chip. That mobile telephone has an external memory



chip; it is trying to remember what your brain used to remember in the past. It is seen frequently that people do not remember their house numbers, their identity numbers, their duty hours, the mobile numbers and such other information of daily use. The external memory chip remembers of such information for them. This great memory shift leads us to surmise that humans are very rapidly discarding memory as they are moving to a different kind of language, more virtual, less oral and predominantly digital. You know that until yesterday one could be a citizen if one was in existence physically; but now, in order to be citizens, one has to be in existence physically as well as digitally. Now, if you don't have Aadhar Card you are not a citizen. This is the situation in Turkey, this is the situation in Yemen, and this is the situation in Australia, all over. In fact, the State too has joined in making citizens distanced from memory and the world, it appears, is inexorably moving towards a memory free era of communication.

How will this give us any advantage? I will give a simple example. (Pointing to a ceiling lamp), look at that lamp and imagine it is a star. Imagine it to be 400 light years away from the earth. Now, when that light reaches your eye, touches your eye balls, have you gone back by 400 years in time, as the ray has taken 400 years to reach your eyes? Or, has the star come forward in your time by 400 years? Clearly, these questions are absurd questions because in the space between our earth and those stellar bodies, our sense of space and time are just nonviable. Scientists tell us that in that space becomes time and what is time becomes space. If the future generations have to cope with the world like that, a world with many orders of space and many orders of times. Then surely, they need a language which is different from the language we have known so far. Yes, yesterday I had an excellent breakfast but today's breakfast was better and I hope tomorrow it will be even better. This past tense, present tense, future tense is an imagined differentiation of time. Does Time really exist? The most logical answer probably would be that it does not. Humans created it for the sake of facilitating their linguistic communication. It is a subjective though universally shared phenomenon.

I will now come to the conclusion of my argument.

The humans are moving ahead; and science and communication technology promise to us, probably allure us into, a new phase of existence. (I don't like it at all.) Scientists tell us that humans will soon become homo-dues, god like, deathless, and will be able to transit between stars. All of that is being promised. Limitless energy, limitless mobility has come to be the idea of progress and is getting accepted all over. In such times what we inherited through language for the last seventy thousand years, through our musical communication and theatrical communication stands the danger of being dashed off, crushed and destroyed all together. The emerging god like animal may be god-like; but it will have lost humanity.

In such times the 'tribal' is absolutely the only solution before us. We are at a turning point in the process of evolution where we humans are likely to go beyond memory and probably beyond the voice-based language. Already language is being silenced in a big way. Small languages are dying and the stateless languages are negated. Apparently, the new generations are language tired. The human brain too is trying to escape the language trap. Thus, there is attack on human civilisation all sides. In such times, tribals are important for the various reasons at this turning point. Memory is not a god's gift to us. Memory was created by humans. There is individual experience gained through the senses which an individual shares with other individuals and then it becomes a community shared experience, remembered in one generation and passed on to the next generation. That subjective memory is with every living person and is a characteristic of life of the mind. There is also the objective, social and institutional memory, institutionalised memory, not memory of an institution but memory on which institutions are based. All schools, colleges, museums and such other institutions are based on this objective memory. When that comes under attack we can look at the old traditions of tribals and their mnemonics, their memory skills that have been used to remember large chunks of information. On the border of Rajasthan and Gujarat, the Garasia tribals are able to recite full-length epics, because they have developed their own peculiar way of associating certain sounds with certain story lines or characterization, and dialogues. Earlier when I was working my first book of the literature of Adivasis and Nomads Painted Words in 1998-1999, I was into the collection of folklore. I thought a good collection and translation of adivasis songs and stories is folklore study. That way is not going to save the tribal communities. We have to realise that the tribal communities can save the rest of the world from losing its humanity if we can get into the study of how tribals remember their long traditions of what they know. They are going to be the last ones to lose the collective community memory even if the State induces them to losing memory. They will be the last ones to forget. Let us look at their mnemonics, their peculiar methods of remembering, not what they remember but how they remember, the 'how' of their oral traditions. Let us also study how tribals forget.

Our entire folklore study has been about what tribals remember and what they know. Let us also look at what tribals forget and what they choose to remember, how they remember it and how or what they choose to forget. If we were to figure out how they remember and also how they forget and bring it to the service of other fields of knowledge, we might be able to devise a method allowing humans to move forward into a new era without losing their humanity. I am personally very keen on doing this as a project because the humanity needs that. If we were to figure out a grammar of this recollection and amnesia, it can indeed be used as a sociological 'anti-biotic', it can be used as humanistic 'penicillin' for the new generations of dyslectic and autistic minds. Europe cannot generate it because Europe has no adivasis. We have our adivasis and therefore, we are a rich 'humanistic country'.

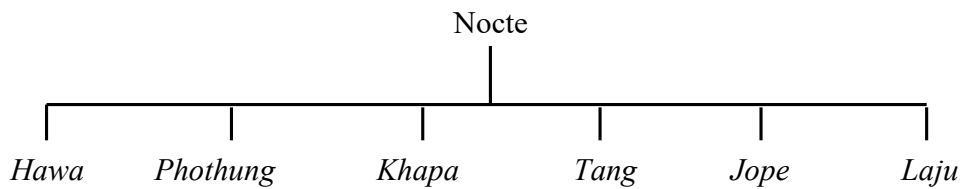
I said at the beginning of the lecture that because this is a special lecture, I shall not report what other scholars have done and that I shall use it for presenting some crazy ideas for the work that can be done. I am personally interested Professor Tamo Mibang, (Former Director, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, RGU) in doing this kind of work in Arunachal. If we can do it we shall have done our duty. If we do not do it, we shall be forgotten as a species that existed at one time and disappeared because it was not willing to understand the crisis facing it.

# Overview of the Nocte Language

**Dr. Wanglit Mongchan**

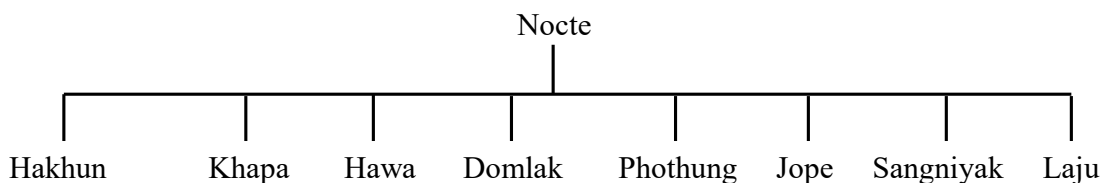
Nocte (also spelt as Nokte) is one the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Majority of the population reside in Tirap district, the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. As per 2011 census report, Nocte has 30,839 speakers. The term *Nocte* generally refers to both the people and the language. As far as Nocte language is concerned, Gupta (1971) classified Nocte into six dialects namely - Hawa-jap, Phothung-jap, Khapa-jap, Tang-jap<sup>1</sup>, Jope-jap<sup>2</sup>, and Laju-jap as shown in figure 1. Broadly, they are classified based on the dialectical variations. These dialects are supposedly mutually unintelligible.

Figure 1: *Classification of Nocte dialects* (Gupta, 1971)



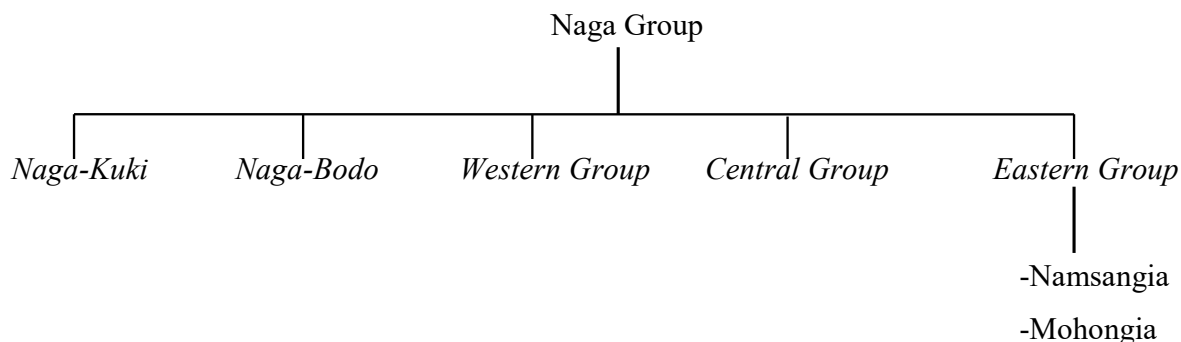
In another classification, Dutta (1978) mentioned nine dialects of Nocte such as *Hakhun*, *Khapa*, *Hawa*, *Domlak*, *Phothung*, *Jope*, *Sangniyak*, *Laju*, and *Dadom* as shown in figure 2. In this classification, Dutta excluded *Tang* spoken in few Nocte villages in Tirap District. This particular variety is generally a dialect of Wancho spoken in Wakka area. Also, technically speaking, dialects such as *Hakhun*, *Hawa*, *Sangniyak* and *Dadom* are one and the same. Except for few lexical variations, these dialects are not different from one another.

Figure 2: *Classification of Nocte dialects* (Dutta, 1978)



Genealogically, Nocte belongs to Tibeto-Burman family. Different scholars have classified Nocte under different sub-groups. For instance, Grierson and Konow (1906) have clubbed Nokte under the sub-group of eastern Naga as Namsangia and Mohongia as in figure 3.

Figure 3: *Classification of Naga Group* (Grierson-Konow, 1903-1928)



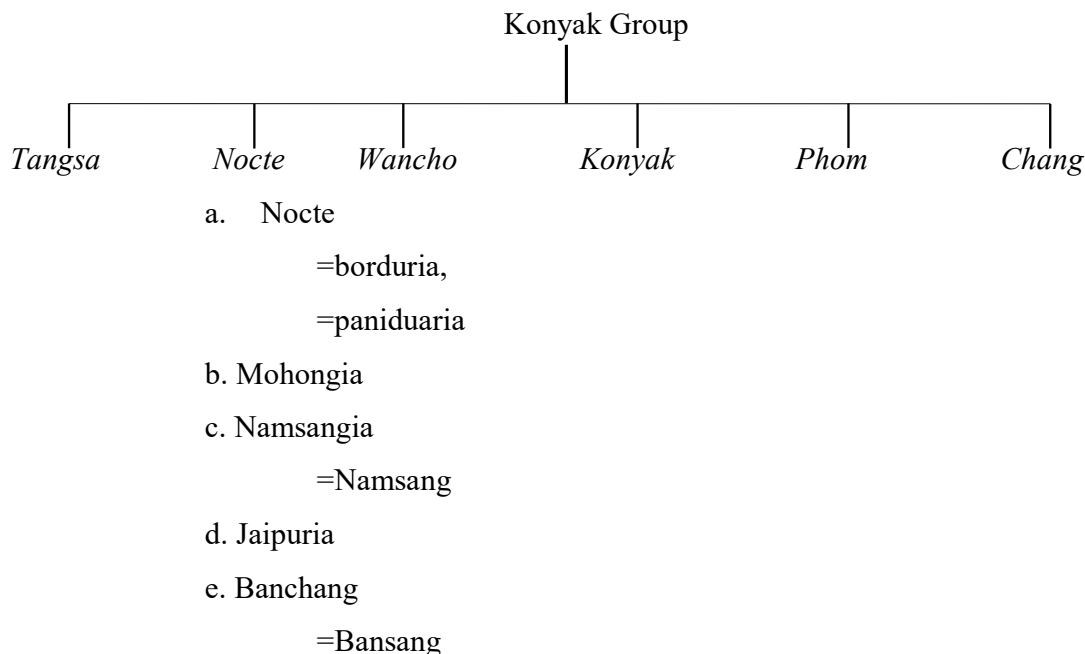
<sup>1</sup> Linguistically it is more close to Wancho (Waka) than Nokte

<sup>2</sup> Also known as *Tutcha tribe* which has already been declared as separate tribe and thus it doesn't belong to Nokte tribe anymore.



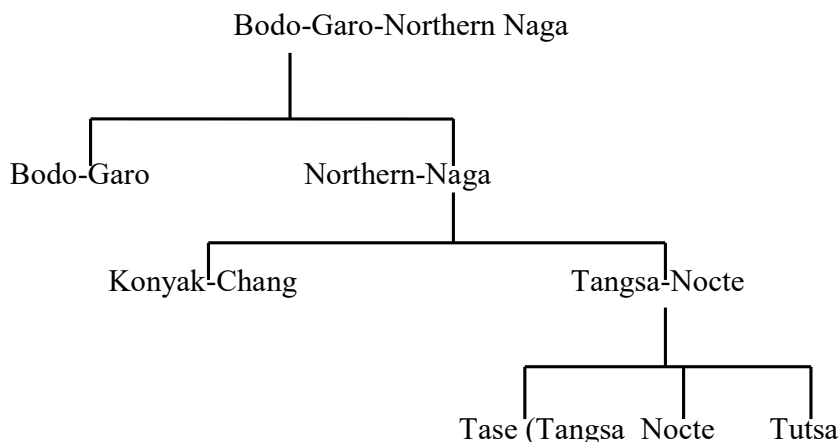
Marrison (1967) has put Nocte under Konyak group of Naga languages. Konyak branch is sub-divided into two groups represented as A1 and A2. Under A1 he included Tangsa, Nocte and Wancho, and in A2 Konyak, Phom and Chang. Nocte is further sub-divided into four dialects such as Nocte (which include Borduria and Paniduria), Mohongia, Namsangia (Namsang) and Jaipuria as shown in 4.

Figure 4: *Classification of Konyak Group* (Marrison, 1967)



Bradley (1997, 2002) has placed Nocte under the Baric sub-group: Boro-Garo-Northern Naga of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Nocte is sub-grouped under Tangsa-Nocte as shown in figure 5.

Figure 5: *Classification of Bodo-Garo-Northern Naga* (Bradley, 2002)



As far as the writing system is concerned, Nocte doesn't have script of its own. Currently, Roman script is used. Also in terms of spelling there is no consistency. In short, the language is yet to be standardized in terms of its spelling system and other conventions.

In terms of its usage, mostly it is used in home domain. Schooling is done either in English or Hindi medium schools. Hindi and Assamese are two dominant languages used for inter-communication purposes among the different dialectical groups of Nocte.

*An Introduction to the Nocte Language* (Gupta, 1971), a short grammatical sketch of Hawa variety, is the one and only available on Nocte. In *Linguistics Survey of India*, Grierson (1906) also has little mention about this

language called Namsangia. Apart from that, till date, no proper linguistic study has been done on any of the aforesaid dialects.

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## Dialogue on Intangible Cultural Heritage of Communities



Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS), Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) in collaboration with the Intangible Cultural Heritage Division (ICH) of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), organised a two days colloquium themed 'Dialogue on Intangible Cultural Heritage of Communities' on the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. The programme saw the participation of people from different tribal communities of the state. Resource persons in the categories of Shamans, weavers, bead workers, traditional chiropractors and artisans were invited from five different communities, namely, Adi, Nyishi, Galo, Nocte and Idu Mishmi. These resource persons were invited

to share indigenous knowledge system and practices with the participants. Interactive sessions were held with the resources persons, who shared the traditional belief system, views on their craft, their relevance in the present situation and future concerns of their trades and practices. Along with the discussions and debates, live demonstrations of weaving techniques, basketry, bamboo crafts and wood carving was also conducted.





## *Preliminary Notes on the Sartangs*

**Lisa Lomdak and Cheten Jomba Rockpudu**

### **Introduction**

The Sartangs were earlier referred to as the But/Boot Monpas by their neighbouring Monpa tribe and were grouped under the Dirang Monpa group. According to Dondrup (2004, 1) due to their long and close association with the Monpas of Dirang area it influenced every aspect of life of the Boots and hence the term Boot Monpas to refer to the group. At present the Sartang settlements are along the NH Bomdila-Tawang and Bomdila-Nafra Roadway of the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. Sartangs are settled in four villages namely Khoina, Jerigaon, Rahung and Salari and which are further divided into more than twenty sub villages. The villages are also divided into two administrative blocks—one under Nafra and the other in the Dirang circle. In the year 1997 they demanded for recognition of their group as Sartang. In the recent revised list of Scheduled tribes of Arunachal Pradesh under the Constitution (Scheduled tribes) Order(Third Amendment) Bill, 2019, Sartang has been recognised as Scheduled Tribe of the state. The total population of the Sartang tribe is approximately 4000 (Rockpudu, Field Study, 2013). They are surrounded by the Sajolangs(Miji) on the east, the Akas (Hrussos) on the south, Buguns (Khowas) and Sherdukpens on the West and Monpas of Dirang area on the North.

The term *Sar* is defined as the eastern region from where the sun rises and *Tang* refers to God. Tang also refers to a flatland used for the performance of rituals during offerings made to God. Sartang refers to ‘the inhabitants of the flat land where the first rays of the sun shines’. Ashu Zeng Zeng, the ancestor of Sartangs, is believed to be the first to originate in the sky and descend to earth at a place known as Siri Thangli. According to the community the term *tang* is also synonymous to Numu Khunu referring to ‘the earth and the sky’. Sartangs regard themselves to be the inhabitants of the eastern region, who worship the nature i.e. the earth and the sky. The language of the Sartangs is similar to that of the Sherdukpens. Their customs and rituals are also akin to the Sherdukpens.

### **The Sartang Society**

#### ***Clans***

There are about twenty clans in the area which comprises more than thirty sub-clans. Khoina village consists of eight clans, Jerigaon have six clans, Salari and Rahung comprise three clans each and each of the clans is further divided into different sub-clans. Khoina village has the largest number of clans followed by Jerigaon, Salari and Rahung. Out of the twenty major clans Nampo is the dominant clan of the region. In individual villages Rongradu clan is dominant in Khoina, Sunickjee in Jerigaon, Rockpu in Salari and the Nampo in Rahung.

#### ***Religion***

Along with the ancestral nature worship, the Sartangs also practise the Mahayana sect of Tibetan form of Buddhism. They refer to the visit of the Indian sage, Guru Padmasambhawa who they address as Guru Rimpoche or Guru Pema Jungne in their localities. The Sartangstraditionally follow the ancestral nature worship and believe in the divine powers of their surroundings, deities of mountains, cliffs, rivers, water falls which are referred to as — Phu, Da, Tsan, Dut and Luh. The Lessre and Chiksaba or Chiksakhen are the two main annual festivals.

#### ***Proverbs***

Some popular proverbs of the Sartang society are given below.

*Rimu awungu chhingken thangun ba-am.*

‘Stay under the shade of the big tree.’

Always stay with the helpful person who can give support at any point of time.

*Rangkhen fatha adurang bakam.*

Barking dog seldom bites

It implies that those who speak much cannot harm others.

## Preliminary Notes on Sartang Language<sup>1</sup>

The language of the Sartangs belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family and is mutually intelligible with the Sherdukpen language spoken in the Rupa area of the West Kameng district. In absence of their own scripts the Tibetan script is used during religious ceremonies. Its usage and knowledge is known only by a few persons who are mostly the Buddhist priests. According to native speakers there are four varieties of Sartang language that can be identified. However in this paper examples from only two varieties namely Rahung and Jerigaon are given.

### Kinship Terminologies

Rahung variety	Jerigaon variety	Gloss		Rahung variety	Jerigaon variety	Gloss
<i>tʃiá</i>	<i>atʃí</i>	aunt		<i>gɔ knuŋ</i>	<i>kʰrũ</i>	friend
<i>ziring</i>	<i>dʒiriŋ</i>	people		<i>dʒimĩ</i>	<i>dĩmĩ</i>	girl
<i>dʒhũ</i>	<i>dʒuhu</i>	boy		<i>asũ</i>	<i>atã</i>	grandfather
<i>adʒẽ</i>	<i>ayæ</i>	brother		<i>ayõ</i>	<i>aya</i>	grandmother
<i>arẽ/ara</i>	<i>aræ</i>	brother in law		<i>tʃidũ</i>	<i>tʃidũ</i>	grandson
<i>anĩ</i>	<i>aŋi</i>	child		<i>amũ̀̀</i>	<i>amũ</i>	mother
<i>abòò</i>	<i>abõ</i>	father		<i>anẽ</i>	<i>anumo</i>	sister(address)
	<i>afu</i>	( address) father (reference)			<i>miriŋ</i>	sister (reference)
<i>kʰèyá</i>	<i>kʰræ</i>	father in law		<i>adũ</i>	<i>adũ</i>	son
				<i>azũ</i>	<i>azũ</i>	sister-in-law

### [Body Parts

Rahung variety	Jerigaon variety	Gloss
<i>le kʰrok pu</i>	<i>le fhɪk kri</i>	Ankle
<i>èík</i>	<i>ik</i>	Arm
<i>snagũŋ</i>	<i>nagũŋ</i>	Back

<i>máù</i>	<i>ʃaŋra</i>	Beard
<i>kʰruʔ</i>	<i>kʰruk</i>	Head
<i>naphuŋ</i>	<i>nufuŋ</i>	Nose
<i>kʰaby</i>	<i>kʰabi/kʰæbi</i>	Eye
<i>tʃʰo</i>	<i>soʔ</i>	Mouth

<sup>1</sup> The following data on Sartang was first collected by the author from Sartang informant Cheten Jomba Rockpudu on August 2016 at Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh. Following analysis is a working draft. Omissions and errors if found are due to limitations of the author.



<i>kʰatɣŋ</i>	<i>kʰitɰŋ</i>	Ear
<i>le</i>	<i>læ:</i>	Tongue
<i>nitʰɰŋ</i>	<i>nitʰɰŋ/nitʰɣŋ</i>	Tooth
<i>le</i>	<i>læ</i>	Leg
<i>fəɣŋ</i>	<i>tsrĩ</i>	Stomach
<i>skiʔ</i>	<i>ahik</i>	Bone
<i>he</i>	<i>hæ</i>	Blood
<i>bik</i>	<i>bik/ byk</i>	Breath
<i>muwo</i>	<i>muwo</i>	Chest
<i>ktèɰŋ</i>	<i>ktèɰŋ</i>	Ear
<i>ik tcri</i>	<i>ik tcri</i>	Elbow
<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	Face
<i>ik amúŋ</i>	<i>ik adu</i>	Finger
<i>mkèu</i>	<i>moko</i>	Forehead
<i>gzǎŋ</i>	<i>gzǎŋ</i>	Hair
<i>ayùú</i>	<i>čak</i>	Fat

<i>krabàw</i>	<i>krabàw</i>	Kidney
<i>la fikǎm</i>	<i>læfikri</i>	Knee
<i>tʃakěy</i>	<i>seikʰok</i>	Lip
<i>atʃĩ</i>	<i>atʃĩ</i>	Liver
<i>Aniĩ</i>	<i>aniĩ</i>	Marrow
<i>Dro</i>	<i>dro</i>	Neck
<i>ik thu</i>	<i>ik tʰu</i>	Palm
<i>Tæ</i>	<i>tæ</i>	Saliva
<i>fʰeniŋ</i>	<i>fʰenyŋ</i>	Shoulder
<i>skuʔk</i>	<i>skuʔk</i>	Skin
<i>naha</i>	<i>naha</i>	Sweat
<i>là fũ/</i>	<i>la flu</i>	Thigh
<i>le brɔn</i>	<i>la čĩ</i>	Toe
<i>he tùún</i>	<i>æhĩ</i>	Vein
<i>măkhăktʰɰŋ</i>	<i>măkhăktʰɣŋ</i>	Waist

## Examples from Rahung Variety of Sartang Language

### Colour Terms

<i>atfũ</i>	Black
<i>masilu</i>	brown
<i>daha</i>	green/ blue
<i>ahék</i>	Red
<i>ază</i>	White
<i>æhe</i>	Yellow

### Demonstratives

<i>tʰro</i>	Here
<i>tʰere zro</i>	there (proximate)
<i>tʰaŋlo</i>	there (distal)
<i>alo</i>	where to
<i>analo</i>	where is the

### Postpositions

<i>kʰiŋlo</i>	Above
<i>kʰiŋgtʰælo</i>	On

<i>aliŋlo</i>	Inside
<i>ahuŋlo</i>	Outside
<i>khibiŋlo</i>	front
<i>nizeŋlo</i>	behind

### Directions

<i>sar</i>	East
<i>lo</i>	West
<i>dʒang</i>	North
<i>neʔ/nyʔ</i>	South

## Constituent Order

The Sartang language follows the SOV Constituent order.

The direct object follows the indirect object.

1. *dzon-o*                      *mari-ni*                      *jigi*                      *ci-ni*  
       (S)                      (IO)                      (DO)                      (V)  
       John-NOM              Mary-ACC              book              gave-PFV

‘John gave the book to Mary.’

It is a postpositional language. For instance in example 2 and 3 , postpositional marker *-lo* is suffixed to the nouns, *yigi* ‘class’ and *table* ‘table’.

2. *dĩmĩ -bag*                      *jigi-lo*                      *u-ni.*  
       Girl-PL                      class-POST                      go-PFV  
       ‘The girls went to class.’

3. *jigi*              *table-lo* *bε?*  
       Book              table-POST              (IPFV)  
       ‘The book is on the table.’

The adjective follows the noun.

4. *dĩmĩ*              *alɛdu*  
       girl              beautiful  
       ‘beautiful girl’
5. *kʰo*              *ačɛn.*  
       water              cold  
       ‘cold water’
6. *jan*              *adok*  
       house              big  
       ‘big house’

## Question Words

The following sentences show examples of interrogative sentences and questions words in Sartang.

7. *naha*                      *tičar*                      *ni?*  
       Your/2.SG(Hon) teacher              IPFV?  
       ‘Who is your(honorific)? teacher?’
8. *naŋ*                      *tičar*                      *ni?*  
       Your/2.SG                      teacher              IPFV  
       ‘Who is your teacher?’
9. *wæ*              *miti*              *cæ-ni?*  
       3.SG              what              buy-PFV  
       ‘What did he buy?’
10. *wæ-tʰik*                      *ni-ni*                      *hæ*              *ci-ni*  
       3.SG-people(3Pl) who-ACC (whom)              food              give  
       ‘Whom did they give food to?’
11. *wæ*              *hæ*              *cum-næ*  
       3.Sg              food              eat- FUT  
       ‘Will she/he eat food?’



12. *wæ-tʰik*                      *daŋ*                      *alo-lo*                      *cik-ni*  
 3.Sg-PL                      vegetable                      where-LOC                      pluck- PFV(?)  
 ‘where(at which place) did they pluck the vegetables?’
13. *wæ*                      *təŋkʰin*                      *adō*                      *za-ni*  
 he/She                      song                      when                      wrote  
 ‘When did he write the song?’
14. *amu -ō*                      *mititi*                      *jɛn*                      *čɛ-ni?*  
 mother-NOM                      how                      house                      make//build  
 ‘How did mother make /build the house?’
15. *amu -ō*                      *mititi*                      *hæ*                      *ræ-ni*  
 mother-NOM                      how                      food                      cook-PFV?  
 ‘How did mother cook the food?’
16. *John*                      *India-lo*                      *metæ*                      *u-ni?*  
 John                      India- LOC                      why                      go-PFV?  
 ‘Why did John go to India?’

### Negation

Negative markers occur pre-verbally as can be seen in the imperative expressions below.

17. *du-ču?*  
 NEG-eat  
 ‘don’t eat’
18. *tʰu-dɪŋ*  
 NEG-sit  
 ‘don’t sit’
19. *tʰu-u*  
 NEG-go  
 ‘don’t go’

However, the negative copula is a separate word *baʔaʔ* as given in the following pair of sentences and it occurs after the verb.

21. *John*                      *tičar*                      *adʒabe.*  
 John                      teacher                      good.  
 ‘John is a good teacher.’
22. *John*                      *tičar*                      *adʒæ*                      *baʔaʔ*  
 John                      teacher                      good                      NEG  
 John is not a good teacher.

### Clauses

Examples of clause construction.

#### Relative Clauses

23. *ya*                      *ɛhek*                      *yárukʰɛn*                      *dʒiriŋ-ji*                      *tʰuro- thugudo*                      *uri-ni.*  
 Cloth                      red                      wear-NMLZ                      son                      here                      now                      come-PFV  
 The person who wore the red clothe came now.
24. *John*                      *jan-lo*                      *baʔaʔ*  
 John                      house-LOC                      NEG  
 John is not at home.

### Reflexives

25. *John*                      *wæ-dʒi- ō*                      *wæ-dʒi-ni*                      *miluŋ-lo*                      *len.ni.*  
 John                      3.SG-self(himself) 3Sg-self-ACC                      mirror-PP                      saw.PFV  
 John looked at himself in the mirror.
24. *anetʰɪk -bag*                      *wæ-tʰɪkdʒi- čuŋgu*                      *a.i*                      *kʰokʰ -ha- bæ.*  
 child-PL (people)each other                      fight                      fight                      VREFL-PFV  
 ‘The children are fighting with each other.’

**Deixis**

The determiners which also have functions as deictic markers occur before the nouns.

25. *tʰɛ* *jigi*  
this book  
'this book' (Proximate)
26. *dʒæ* *jigi*  
that book  
'that book'
27. *tʰaŋ* *jendʒi*  
DST.(that) house  
'that house' (distal)
28. *dʒedʒa* *jandʒi*  
that house  
'that house' (close by house)
29. *kʰyikiuŋ* *jandʒi*  
up there house  
'that house up there'
30. *kʰyikiuŋ-dʒalo* *jandʒi*  
down there house  
'that house up there' (not visible)
31. *dʒedʒa* *jandʒi*  
this house  
'this house (proximate)'
32. *tʰatʰaŋ* *jandʒi*  
that house  
'that house (distal)'
33. *kʰudʒi* *jandʒi*  
That house  
'that house down there' (visible)
34. *kʰukʰu - dʒalo* *jandʒi*  
down there house  
'that house down there' (not visible)

**Case markers****Nominative**

35. *amu- ǝ* *ayum* *cu-ni*  
mother-NOM fruit eat-PFV  
'Mother ate the fruit.'

**Accusative**

36. *amu-(ǝ)* *apple-ni* *čʉ-ni.*  
mother-NOM apple-ACC eat-PFV  
'Mother ate the apple. '

**Instrumental**

37. *amu- ǝ* *haŋu-lo* *apple* *čɛk-ni*  
mother-NOM Knife-INST apple cut-PFV  
'Mother cut the apple with the knife.'
38. *go* *pen-o* *zãfo.*  
I pen-INST wrote.  
'I wrote with a pen.'

**Benefactive**

39. *amu-ǝ* *ani -bagʔne* *hæ* *ræ-ni.*  
mother-NOM child- BEN food cook-PFV  
'Mother cooked food for the child.'



Photo 1: A Sartang Shaman in front of the ritual altar during Chiksaken Festival in Jerigaon.  
(Photo Courtesy: Cheten Jomba Rockpudu)



Photo 2: Sartang Womenfolk packing food for community feast during Chiksaken Festival in Jerigaon.  
(Photo Courtesy: Cheten Jomba Rockpudu)

**Locative**

40.     *go*       *yan-lo*       *bεʔ*  
           I       home-LOC     IPFV  
           I am at home.

**Comitative**

41.     *go*       *amu*     *k<sup>h</sup>ururŋ-go*     *rahurŋ*       *u-p<sup>h</sup>o.*  
           I       mother COMT     Rahung       went  
           I went to Rahung with mother.

**Conclusion**

The study on Sartang language began recently. The preliminary data on Sartang shows great scope for research in Linguistic studies, Anthropology and more specifically on Tribal religion.

**Abbreviations**

φ	Unmarked	GEN	Genitive
1	First Person	GENR	Generic
2	Second Person	HORT	Hortative
3	Third Person	INS	Instrumental
ABL	Ablative	IPFV	Imperfective
ACC	Accusative	IRR	Irrealis
AGN	Agent	LOC	Locative
AZR	Adjectivalizer	NEG	Negation
BEN	Benefactive	NF	Non final
CLF	Classifier	NMLZ	Nominalizer/nominalization
COP	Copula	PFV	Perfective
DAT	Dative	PL	Plural
DIST.DOWN.LOC	Distal down location	PQ	Polar question
DIST.SAME LEVEL.LOC	Distal same level location	SG	Singular
DIST.UP.LOC	Distal up level location		

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# The Legend of Abotani and *Gumji Sangri*

Chera Devi

R.M. Dorson (1972) categorises folklore into four large classifications. They are Oral Literature, Material culture, Social folk custom and folk performing arts. This paper deals with the material cultural in general and with beads and brass items in particular. Material culture is physical folklore. According to Dorson, material culture is that which identifies to the techniques, skills, guidelines and principles communicated across generations and which is subject to the forces of traditions and individual variation as is verbal art. This category of folklore is visible rather than aural, it encompasses traditional tools and agricultural implements, pottery, textiles, traditional architecture, food habits, jewellery making, basketry, gold smithery. If a civilization ceases to exist, its non-material culture would cease to exist along with its downfall. However, the material culture like the tools, weapons, ornaments etc. would still exist until they are degenerated. Material culture do not die away with civilizations but through decades and generation remain as testaments to society.

Arunachal Pradesh being home to numerous tribes is a hub for researchers. Each tribe or community possesses distinct traits and identifying qualities that separates it from other tribes. One such identifying trait is material culture. All the tribal communities have a unique way of doing things, of building houses, textile designs, food habits. One particular category that separates the many tribal groups from each other is the rich tradition of inherited antiquities. These antiquities are in the form of glass beads and brass objects. For the Tani group of communities which include the tribes of Adi, Apatani, Nyishi, Galo and Tagin, the glass beads and brass materials are very significant materials of culture. They are not only symbolic of property and wealth but also a mark of their tribal identity. These objects are passed down for generations and it carries with it stories of migration and tales of the ancestors. Each group or tribe have different names for different beads and glass objects. The value of particular beads and brass objects also differs from tribe to tribe. This paper particularly studies the beads and brass materials of the Nyishis' of Kurung Kumey District. It traces the myths related to the origin beads, their social and cultural significance and the present situation of what these comes have now come to signify.

According to legends, *Abotani*, the ancestor of the Tani communities, heard strange sounds coming from the in-between world of man and spirits. They were cries being produced by an animal and upon enquiry from *Ane*, *Donyi*, the sun mother, informs *Abotani* that these were the cries of *Gyopu Sobu*, a Mithun (*Bos Frontalis*) and if Tani wished he could hunt the animal for food. Upon receiving her permission and blessings, Tani along with his hunting dog sets out to hunt. They chase the animals for days and night but fail to capture it. It crosses the *Aaung Harang Gilang*, a huge mountain and runs away to *Naji Lariang*, i.e. the plains. Upon reaching there Tani requests for a dog from the plains man and continues his chase of the Mithun but fails to catch it. Tani then places traps and snares for the animal in *Dimum Harang Gilang*, a huge mountain but again fails to catch the animal, which then runs away to *Mane Niko*, i.e. the Tibetan plateau. After Tani and a Tibetan dog chases the animal to this part of the world, the animal gets stuck in a swamp and Tani is finally able to capture it. Tani tries to cut the animal into pieces but his *dao* (machete) is too small for the large animals and each time he strikes the animals hide, his *dao* breaks. Upon seeing this, the people of *Mane Niko* advises Abotani to go back home and return with a few *Kokam* leaves (*Phrynium pubinerve*) and a few *Udung* (bamboo tubes), until his return they promise to keep watch over the animal. But, upon returning Abotani discovers that the Tibetans had killed the animal and had consumed its meat, this angers Tani and he accuses them of cheating him. The Tibetans in return pacify Tani and informs him that they had not eaten all the parts of the animal but had left for him at the spot where the animal had been killed. But in order to obtain it, Tani should once again return to his home land and this time come back with few items like deer hide, chilli, cane ropes, musk of deer, ginger, *Saram* (otter) and *Taming* flower (a plant used for making red dye) and after a period of five days has passed, a tree shall grow where the parts of the dead animal lay and Abotani shall benefit from it. Tani returns to Tibet with these items and the events occur exactly as Abotani had been told. A small tree had indeed sprung up where the remains of the dead animal lay. This strange tree would grow a new branch each night. In five days it would grow five branches, in ten days, ten branches, the strange tree was named *Gumji Sangri*. It bore all kinds of fruits in the form of different colourful beads. Smaller branches would bear smaller beads like *Sangmi*, and bigger branches would bear bigger sized beads. The branches of the *Gumji Sangri* spread out in different directions and each branch bore different kinds of beads. The branch extending towards the *Pare Bung*, which at present is the Kameng regions bore beads namely, *Doki*, *Dogyar*, *Chungri*, *Maju*. The branch extending towards the *Kumey Bung* bore *Sangri*, *Sangtar*, *Sangmi*, *Sangkia* beads and the branch extending towards the *Kurung Bung* bore fruits of *Sanglang*, *Sangte*, *Huyak Makiak*, *Garpung*, *Garlung* and *Garji* beads. All kinds of birds and animals like rats, wild pigs would come to eat the fruits of the *Gumji Sangri*. Two big birds namely *Patta Jaakuryu* and *Patta Jaamuryu* would come to feast on the fruits. The helpless Abotani asks a Tibetan Monk for help in chasing away these birds. The Monk provides Abotani with two men, *Lakung* and *Ladung*, who would keep watch over *Gumji Sangri*. On the first day that the tree bore fruits and the birds had eaten away at it, the remaining fruits that had fallen to the ground were collected by *Mane Dumde*, a Tibetan lady, and it was kept for offerings to be given to a Shaman who performed burial rites, the beads collected on the second day was offered to a Shaman who helped settle disputes in murders. The beads from the third day was used in order to settle disputes, beads from the fourth day was again offered to a well-respected Shaman who performed healing ritual and rites. The beads from the fifth day was used during marriages. After this order of offerings was done *Mane Dumde*, collected the remaining of the beads and placed it at the feet of *Nyie Loma* (high priest) but none of the beads had holes in them. Therefore, *Nyie Rongrebu* makes holes in each of the beads so that they could be strung together. *Mane Dumde* now leaves in search of threads so that the beads could be strung beautifully, she prays to the spirits to provide her with threads that are as strong as the hair of the

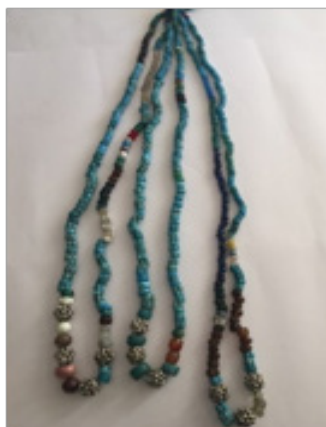
*Sia Yaru* (Yak). It just so happens that *Doriang Tachup*, a bird, flies over and drops its faeces on the ground. The faeces turns into manure and a plant grows in its place. *Mane Dumde*'s herd of Yak eats its leaves and all the animals catch a severe bout of rashes on their skin. Upon seeing this, *Mane Dumde* shaves off the hair of all the animals, she collects the shaven hair and spins threads on a *Pochak Tapo*. She then instructs Abotani to fetch the *taming* flower that he had brought with him and dyes the threads in red colour. Then she strings all the beads together and hence, it is believed that since then man and woman worn beads. However, legends and myths relating to the origin of the brass materials is vivid in the memories of the people. The different brass items have different stories of origin. Some are believed to have been born out of lakes, some are believed to have been handcrafted by powerful Shamans while other items are believed to have been obtained by Shamans from natural formation like snow-capped mountains after performing powerful rituals and by offering sacrifices.

Both glass beads and brass materials are symbols of tribal heritage and identity. While the glass beads also serves as ornamental purpose yet, it is also an item of highly placed cultural value. Apart from being worn as ornaments during festivals and everyday use, it is also believed to be an auspicious item. It is of high significance during ritual and ceremonies. For instance, during the naming of a new born child, two or four pieces of *Nikta* or *Sangmi* are tied in a strand of black thread and it is put on the neck of the child while uttering the chosen name for the baby. It is also obligatory that upon first seeing or visiting a new born child the maternal aunties and uncles have to gift the baby a pair of *Sangmi* or *Nikta* stranded in black thread. When a Shaman performs the *Yullo*, the highest form of ritual, it is obligatory on the part of the host to present two pieces of the best and purest of *Sangte* bead. The *Sangri* and *Sangmi* variety is gifted to the shaman upon performing smaller degree of rituals. In comparison to the glass beads, the brass objects are not daily wearable items. However, they are also highly valuable articles and are taken out only on certain occasions. For example, during the agricultural festivals or important rituals when they are kept on display so that the spirits of the ancestors can bless them. They are also used as high valued gifts during marriages or given as compensation in order to settle disputes.

The glass beads, silver ornaments and brass materials depicted in this paper<sup>1</sup> are from the personal collection of an individual. The price and cost of each item is estimated by the owner as according to what it must have valued seven or eight decades ago.



1. The *Huyak Makiak*



2. *Bukch*



3. *Tadok*



4. *Tasang Sangte*

1. The *Huyak Makiak* is the traditional glass bead worn by women. It can be worn every day or on special occasions like marriages or festivals. A single bead of *Huyak Makiak* was priced at that equivalent to one fowl or a day's labor in the fields.

2. The *Bukch* is also worn by women. It can be worn every day or on special occasions. The entire string is a mix of different varieties of beads like *Chillang*, *Chigum*, *Chigi*, *Gacharcharlum*. The mix of beads can be done depending on the choice and skill of the owner.

3. The *Tadok* is usually worn by men. It can be worn every day or on special occasions. It is also called *Makbutassang*, due to the fact that the bridegroom is gifted a string of *Tadok* by the father-in-law during marriage. The entire string is a mixture of *Kera*, *Bangke*, *Yilang*, *Dokta*, *Sangkia*.

#### 4. *Tasang Sangte*

The *Sangte* is believed to be the most important piece of ornament that a bride adorns on leaving her maternal home. It is considered that a bride who enters her in-laws parents' home without a *Sangte* on her is not fully deserving of the respect that a daughter in law deserves. According to tradition a bride belonging to a well to do family wears five strings of *Sangte*. Traditionally the price of a string of *Sangte* was equivalent from two to five Mithuns (*Bos Fontalis*)

<sup>1</sup>Photographs by Chera Devi.

5. *Tasang Sangtar*6. *Tasang Sanglang*7. *Kilang*8. *Koji*9. *Mabu*10. *Dumping Yang*

### 5. *Tasang Sangtar*

The *Sangtar*, like the *Sangte* is also an important piece of bridal ornament. Traditionally the price of one string of *Sangtar* was equivalent to three to four Mithuns.

### 6. *Tasang Sanglang* (red), *Keri* (Black and white), *Yu* (Green)

Traditionally these beads are worn by the men of the community. It forms an important part of the traditional costume of the men folk. Ten pieces of *Yu* were traditionally equivalent to one mithun. One *Keri* and one *Sanglang* bead was equivalent to one chicken fowl each.

### 7. *Kilang*

The *Kore Koji* variety of bangles. *Kore Koji* have intricate designs on them and the carvings are referred to as 'eyes'. Among the many traditional bangles that are given to a bride by her parents the *Kilang* is considered the chief among all the bangles. Its possession is considered auspicious. It can be worn by both men and women but it is mostly worn by the men. It is worn only during special occasions like festivals and rituals. One *Kilang* was equivalent to seven to eight Mithuns.

### 8. *Koji*

A variety of traditional bangles. Such smaller variety of bangles are only worn by the women folk. It can be given as gifts to a bride or her mother-in-law. These variety of smaller bangles can be worn every day except when there is a death in the family during which women of the house cannot wear them for a period of five months. The price of the smaller bangles ranged from a hen, pig, goat or cow depending on the size and design of the item.

### 9. *Mabu*

This bangle belongs to the *Sarsi Koji* variety. *Sarsi Koji* varieties are plain in design and have no 'eyes' on them like the *Kore Koji*. The *Mabu* is given to the groom by the bride's parents during marriage. It can also accompany the bride along with her other ornaments. Its possession is seen as a sign of wealth and prosperity. It is worn only during festivals and rituals. One *Mabu* was traditionally equivalent to five Mithuns.

### 10. *Dumping Yang*

The *Dumping Yang* is the traditional headwear of the women. It is made by stringing together pieces of dumping (a flat metal made of brass) and glass beads. No traditional dress is considered complete without a *dumping yang*. The price of each *dumping* depends on the number of holes it has, with six holes being the highest. Traditionally, five days of labour in the agricultural fields or exchange of five chicken fowls was equivalent to the price of a five holed dumping and so on and so forth.





**11. Tarum Dumping**

### **11. Tarum Dumping**

It is a variety of *Tarum Dumping*, it is an essential part of the *Bopa* (traditional headgear worn by men). It is used as a decorative item. The price of a set of *Tarum Dumping* was traditionally equal to a full grown Goat or Pig.

### **12. Tarum Dumping**

This is another variety of the *Tarum Dumping*. It is an Essential decorative item of the *Bopa*. The price of a set of this design of *Tarum* was equivalent to a kid or a piglet.

### **13. Bambu Lurum**

The *Lurum* is worn by men. It makes up a part of the traditional attire. It is worn just below the knee and serves for decorative purpose only. Traditionally a pair of original *Lurum* was equivalent to the price of a cow.

### **14. Margie**

The *Margie* is worn by men on the neck. It basically serves two purposes. Firstly, it was worn to complete the traditional attire. Secondly, it served as an armor for the neck during inter clan and inter village wars. Traditionally, a *Margie* was equivalent to the price of a mithun.

### **15. Marko Gagi**

The *Marko Gagi* is an earring for men. This particular design is called *Nampam Mabu*, literally translated to “village made”. The green stones are called *Yu*. It is generally worn by men but women too could wear them. An original *Nampam Mabu* was equivalent to a calf or a full grown cow depending on the size.



**12. Tarum Dumping**



**13. Bambu Lurum**



**14. Margie**



**15. Marko Gagi**



16. Marko Gagi

**16. Marko Gagi**

Earring for women. This particular design is called *Nyik Churum*, literally translated to “three eyed”. It is also made of *Yu* and silver and is worn usually by women but men could also wear them. An original *Nyik Churum* was equivalent to a calf or a full grown cow depending on the size.

**17. Marko Gavak**

The *Gavak* is used as a safety pin. It is made of silver and brass. The hollowed center originally was embedded with a *Yu* (a turquoise colored bead). The *Gavak* was used by the women of the Bangru community and like other items was brought from across the border. A *Gavak* was equivalent to a piglet or chicken fowl depending on the size of the handle and *Yu*.

**18. Marko Gai Hitak**

The *Gai Hitak* is an ornamental piece for the women. It functions as a waist belt and safety pin. It is made up of silver, with *Yu* stones embedded in the center piece. This item is not common and only a few household possessed the *Gai Hitak*. It is amongst the few rare items that was brought across the border. A *Gai Hitak* was equivalent to a full grown mithun.



17. Marko Gavak



18. Marko Gai Hitak

**19. Hufi Yang**

The *Hufi Yang* is a waist belt worn by only the women. It is made up of different sizes of *Hufi*. The biggest ones are called *Hulu Seku*, the medium sized are called *Hufi* and the smallest are called *Longchi*. A complete set of *Hufi Yang* was equivalent to a full grown pig. A single *Longchi* was equal to a hen, a medium sized *Hufi* equal to five hens and a single *Hulu Seku* was equal to a mithun mother and her calf.

19. Hufi Yang

**20. Hulu Seku**

The *Hulu Seku* is believed to be the chief mother of the *Hufi*. The *Hulu Seku* on the right is named *Chajap* and the left is named *Yalum*. It is believed that all *Hulu Seku*'s are obtained by the Shaman's from ice capped mountains after performing a series of difficult rites and rituals. It is also believed that the *Hulu Seku* makes strange noises and it is only by hearing the noise that shamans are able to discover their presence in the mountains. The *Hulu Seku* are generally not worn but are kept as prized possessions.



20. Hulu Seku



**21. Der Ribung**



**22. Maji Riku Nyoru**



**23. Maji Maku Talo**



**24. Maji Maku Tanya**

### **21. Der Ribung**

It is worn by the women as waist belt. It is believed that the *Der Ribung* functions as a talisman. It prevents backache and hunger. Women folk generally worn them while performing hard labor or while working in the agricultural fields. A *Der Ribung* was equivalent to the price of a full grown cow.

### **22. Maji Riku Nyoru**

According to myths, the *Maji* (bell) was born out of a lake. It is believed that the *Nyoru* possesses a spirit of its own and like human beings, it wears ornaments, dresses and carries a machete. The designs and inscriptions on the *Riku* symbolizes different elements and stories. For e.g. the vertical lines called *Riku Fabda*, on the inside are believed to be the rib cage of the spirit. A *Riku Nyoru* is one of the important material that accompanies a bride along with her other bridal possessions. An original *Riku Nyoru* was equivalent to three full grown mithuns.

### **23. Maji Maku Talo**

The *Talo* is considered to be the most important of all local materials. It is equivalent to a girl child and familial ties are formed by exchange of the *Talo*. The designs on the *Talo* is a reflection on the character of the spirit. The vertical lines on the inside, called the *Maku Lakie* are symbolic of how wise and sensible the spirit is. An original *Maku Talo* was equivalent to fifteen mithuns.

### **24. Maji Maku Tanya**

According to myths the *Maku Tanya* possesses the spirit of a young male. The star like symbol in the hollow of the bell is called *Iggpuru*, which symbolizes the mind and heart of the *Tanya*. The *Maku Tanya* is also an important bridal possession. An original *Maku Tanya* was equivalent to the price of ten full grown mithuns.





25. Charring



26. Bilang Tajilaptar



28. Bilang Langchak



29. Saa Talu



30. Peria Talu

### 25. Charring

The *Charring* is believed to have been carved by the Shamans. It is exchanged during marriages, on forming kinship ties or friendship. The smaller varieties are known as *Jungfang*. The price of a *Charring* depends on the design and symbols. Which may range from a full grown pig to that of a hen.

### 26. Bilang Tajilaptar

The *Tajilaptar* is a variety of *Bilang* (a flat cymbal like object, made of metal). It is an important element that is used during performing the *Yullo* Rituals. It is compulsory that a piece of *Tajilaptar* along with, wild rat and a dried fish is handed to the shaman when performing the *Tabak* rite. The *Bilang* along with other items protects the shaman during his journey in the underworld. An original *Tajilaptar* is priced at equivalent to that of a mithun.

### 27. Bilang Langchak

The *Bilang Langchak* is used by the women folk to center and hold sets of beads. It works as an anchor for holding the string of beads. It was equivalent to the price of a cow.

### 28. Bilang Langchak

It is another variety of *Bilang Langchak*. It is an important element that is used by the Shamans during performing of *Jiri* (indigenous bone setting). It is believed that the spirit deposits the cure in the hollow of the *Bilang Langchak* and upon touching it to the affected area the ailment is cured. It is priced equal to that of a cow.

### 29. Saa Talu

The *Saa Talu* is used as a token of gift during marriages, forming kinship ties or to settle disputes. Its exchange can be done for various purposes. The Price of *Saa Talu* depends on the variety of the *Talu*. Depending on the size and designs. It may range from that of five mithuns to one cow.

### 30. Peria Talu

The *Peria Talu* is another important material that is a part of bridal possession. Its exchange symbolizes the highest form of respect and help. Men wear it during important rituals and the women adorn it during marriage rituals. The designs and inscription inside the hollow symbolizes different meanings. The designs are *Eji Langkar Yarnam*, *Nyigmu Bugnam*, *Puru Punam*, *Rialo Dumko*, each design carries a story and meaning. The price of a *Peria Talu* ranges from five to two mithuns, depending on the size and make.

### 31. Riomae Talu



### 31. Riomae Talu

The *Riomae Talu* is also an important item that is given to a bride. It is also given to a bride as her bridal inheritance. The men wear it on their head during important rituals, it is also used as gongs during rituals.

The price of a *Riomae Talu* ranges from three to one mithun depending on the size and age.

If we talk about the present day context, the demand and value of such commodities and objects have reached exorbitant rates. Keeping in mind the demand of such items, the local markets in the twin cities of Itanagar and Naharlagun have seen a sprout of small shops that cater to the demands of the general population. Markets in Harmuti and Lakhimpur areas in the neighboring state of Assam have also started with the manufacturing and selling of such items. Few traders also visit certain areas in Nepal where much better finished products are manufactured. These newly manufactured glass beads and brass items are low priced and easily available but they are highly sorted out for various purposes. Certain communities residing in the border areas adjacent to the India Tibet border still carry out trade and exchange of these items, and those that are brought from the Tibetan areas are most sought after. Regardless of the fact that markets in the twin cities of Itanagar and Naharlagun and the neighboring markets in Assam are flooded with such items, the original and antique ones are the most sought after, for they hold cultural and sentimental value for the community. These items and antiquities have for generations and decades been an important element of culture and continue to be so. However, bead reading, i.e. the technique of being able to identify a genuine bead or brass item from a fake, has been on the decline and bead reading has become restricted to a certain generation and this has become a matter of concern among the senior members of the community.



A shopkeeper stringing beads in Harmuti Market, Assam.



A Nyishi woman scouring beads in Harmuti market



Local women selling beads in Naharlagun market

<sup>2</sup>Photographs of the Harmuti market were taken by Uma Hiri and the Naharlagun market Photograph was taken by Chera Reech.



# A Brief Sketch of Kasik Sound System

Dr. Lienjang Zeite

The Khapas/Kasiks are sub-tribe of the Nocte tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, India. They are inhabitants of three villages namely, Pulung, Noksa and Tupi in Tirap District. Nocte is one of the main tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and has various ethno-linguistic communities within its domain viz. Hawa, Phothung, Tang, Jope, Laju and Khapa/Kasik. Among these varieties, the only written document available is of Hawa-Nokte variety. The total number of Kasik native speaker is about 1,215 according to the 2011 Census. Linguistically they come under the Tibeto-Burman language group.

Based on the information and data acquired from the native Kasik speakers as well as the informants from Noksa Village, Khapa is a xenonym which has been given by people of other communities within the Nocte ethno-linguistic group. They are also referred as Khapas by other communities. The native speakers called themselves ‘Kasik’ and prefer this term/name for the reference of their identity, people and language. The native speakers specifically instructed the Centre for Endangered Languages research team to refer them as Kasiks. Henceforth, Kasik will be used in this article to refer to the native speakers and the language name.

The Kasiks are multilingual. The elders have knowledge of Hawa-Nokte and Assamese. The younger generation and educated people of the village have communicative knowledge of English as well. Assamese is used as lingua-franca among different villages of Noctes. So, many Assamese words replaces the native terms during casual conversations. At times, Assamese words are so frequently used that it is often difficult for the speakers to recollect the native words.

The domain of Kasik is confined to the respective three villages mentioned above. Since Assamese and Hindi are the common lingua-franca among different villages of the Noctes, the Kasik language is not usually spoken apart from the said villages. However, in the said three villages, all the natives speak Kasik.

This article briefly describes the segmental phonology of Kasik. The phonological system of Kasik consists of twenty-five consonants; fourteen vowels under the segmental feature while three tones; high, level and low are found under supra-segmental feature.

## Kasik Consonants

There are twenty-five consonant phonemes in Kasik. /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /c/, /ʃ/, /k/, /g/, /ʔ/, /m/, /n/, /ɲ/, /ŋ/, /r/, /s/, /ʃ/, /h/, /v/, /j/, /l/, /pʰ/, /bʰ/, /tʰ/, /cʰ/, /kʰ/. The inventory of consonant phonemes is given in the following chart:

**Table 1: Consonant Chart**

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Labio-velar	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Plosive</b>	p      b pʰ			t      d tʰ	c      ʃ cʰ	k      g kʰ	ʔ
<b>Nasal</b>	m			n	ɲ	ŋ	
<b>Trill</b>				r			
<b>Fricative</b>				s      ʃ			h
<b>Approximant</b>		v	w		j		
<b>Lateral Approximant</b>				l			

The IPA chart above representing consonantal phonemes of Kasik shows thirteen plosive consonants. Four of the plosives are aspirated consonants, all of which are voiceless consonants. All the aspirated consonants have non aspirated counterpart. Aspirated consonants exist with their non-aspirated counterparts in Kasik.

Alveolar plosives /t/, /d/ and /tʰ/ are neither fully alveolar nor dental but rather they are more of apico-laminal alveolar which sometimes make them sound like dental.

Palatal plosives /c/, /j/ and /cʰ/ are post-alveolar affricates /tʃ/, /dʒ/ and /tʃʰ/ in actual which have been represented with palatal plosives symbols.

Glottal stop /ʔ/ is quite prominently used especially as syllabic boundary (e.g. /faʔɲua/ ‘Greedy’ /moʔopʰi/ ‘Tear’) as well as word boundary (e.g. /kʰaʔ/ ‘Jaw’, /ohoʔ/ ‘Oil/fat of meat’). The glottal stop /ʔ/ does not occur in initial position but only in medial and final position.



Some of the informants often pronounced voiced plosives consonants (e.g. /b/, /d/) as voiceless plosive consonants (e.g. /p/, /t/) and vice versa but it was not taken into consideration as not all the informants articulate in this manner.

Like most of Tibeto-Burman languages, Kasik also has four nasal phonemic consonants /m/, /n/, /ɲ/ and /ɲ/. Except for palatal nasal /ɲ/, all the three nasal consonants can occur in initial, medial and final positions. Palatal nasal /ɲ/ can occur only in initial and medial position.

The phonemic status of labio-dental approximant /v/ and labio-velar approximant /w/ behave like free variation but at the same time in one or two cases it can't be interchanged especially when it comes to personal names. For example, the family name *Lowang* is sometime pronounced as *Lovang* but they prefer using labio-velar approximant /w/ when they write it down. Both the phonemes are taken into consideration for now. Few such examples exist within the language. The possibility of more conclusive explanation can be attained if further investigation is undertaken.

### ***Minimal Pairs for Consonant:***

Minimal pairs are one of the discovery procedures used in phonology to determine which sounds belong to the same class, or phoneme. Two words which differ in meaning when only one sound is changed are referred to as a 'minimal pair', e.g. pin v. bin, cot v. cut. The minimal pairs and nearest minimal pairs for demonstration of consonant contrasts in Kasik are given below:-

p - /opaʔ/ 'to place or insert a flower or thing in a bamboo wall etc'  
b - /obaʔ/ 'foolish'

k - /okuat/ 'scrap'  
k<sup>h</sup> - /ok<sup>h</sup>uat/ 'to take out or draw water etc.'

j - /jək/ (pig)  
ʃ - /ʃək/ (hand)

p - /təmpela:/ 'let it be there/ keep it there'  
p<sup>h</sup> - /təmp<sup>h</sup>ela:/ 'let it be late'

l - /ləŋena:/ 'to fetch or bring it'  
r - /rəŋena:/ 'learn'

n - /monmonla:/ 'hazy or blur to look at, example; muddy water'  
ŋ - /moŋmoŋla:/ 'tight/ to be tight'

k - /rəŋke/ 'old, dry eatables'  
g - /rəŋge/ 'please teach'

t - /tək<sup>h</sup>oŋlaʔ/ 'don't go'  
t<sup>h</sup> - /t<sup>h</sup>ək<sup>h</sup>oŋlaʔ/ 'complain and request the listener to mediate or pacify'

c - /cem/ 'order'  
c<sup>h</sup> - /c<sup>h</sup>em/ 'to squeeze'

j - /jəŋlu:/ 'long'  
w - /wəŋlu:/ 'long white bone beads'

s - /ose/ 'decide'  
ʃ - /oʃe/ 'to keep something'

t - /ta:ʔboʔ/ 'don't throw'  
d - /da:ʔboʔ/ 'already applied..soap etc'

c - /ca:ləʔ/ 'serve'

ʃ - /ʃa:ləʔ/ ‘a day’s work/ chore’

ɲ - /mɲienlaʔ/ ‘turn and look back or sidewise’

n - /mnienlaʔ/ ‘to flash the torch at each other’

n - /onok/ ‘village to village / from one village to another’

m - /omok/ ‘to forget/ trying to remember’

### Vowel Phonemes

There are fourteen vowel phonemes in Kasik, seven front vowels, three central vowels and four back vowels as shown in vowel chart below:

**Table 3: Kasik Vowel Chart**

	Front	Central	Back
<b>Close</b>	i i:	ɨ	u u:
<b>Mid Close</b>	e e:		o o:
<b>Mid Open</b>	ɛ	ə ə:	
<b>Open</b>	a a:		

### Minimal Pairs:

#### Vowels

i - /mi/ ‘needle’

i: - /mi:/ ‘man/human’

i - /obi/ ‘to pull’

ɨ - /obi/ ‘spank’

a - /ʃa/ ‘leg’

a: - /ʃa:/ ‘slave’

o - /tamo/ ‘don’t shake’

o: - /tamo:/ ‘wait’

**Table 5: Distribution of Vowels Chart**

SL.No.	Vowel	Initial	Medial	Final
1.	i	isim ‘lake’	inkaji ‘hot embers’	tɨhi ‘blood’
2.	i:	i: ‘sea’		mi: ‘human being’
3.	ɨ		p <sup>h</sup> iconɲ ‘ancestors’	osi ‘grandson’
4.	u	usaŋk <sup>h</sup> ə ‘beak’	k <sup>h</sup> ulok ‘bald’	ʃəkk <sup>h</sup> u ‘finger’
5.	u:	u:poŋ ‘chicken’		
6.	e		kəʃem ‘lazy’	ʃəp <sup>h</sup> e ‘lame’
7.	e:			kehe: ‘whip’
8.	o	ohən ‘liver’	kəhota ‘cure’	k <sup>h</sup> o ‘plate’
9.	o:		ro:jaŋ ‘always’	c <sup>h</sup> o: ‘fly’
10.	a:		luaja:ŋ ‘chief’	ra: ‘enemy’
11.	a		k <sup>h</sup> uhaja ‘braid’	ʃa ‘leg’
12.	ə	ənno ‘goose’	ʃidək ‘stepmother’	səŋsə ‘body’
13.	ə:		pə:loŋ ‘branch’	
14.	ɛ		mep <sup>h</sup> ɛ ‘late’	ʃəkrot <sup>h</sup> oʔtə ‘fortune-teller/palm reader’

In the distribution of vowels in words, they occur in the initial, medial and final, without any restrictions and that applies to even the elongated forms of the vowels.

### **Tone:**

A term used in phonology to refer to the distinctive pitch level of a syllable. In many languages, the tone carried by a word is an essential feature of the meaning of that word (lexical tone). Such languages, where word meanings or grammatical categories (such as tense) are dependent on pitch level, are known as tone languages. The best example can be seen in Chinese where *mā* is ‘Mother’, *má* is ‘Hemp’, *mǎ* ‘Horse’ and *mà* is scold.

Kasik exhibits three tones which are represented as:

/´/	Rising tone
/-/	Level Tone
/`/	Falling tone

These can be seen from the minimal pairs illustrated below:

Example:

/ʃəŋ/	‘cook’	(Rising)
/ʃəŋ/	‘knife/dao’	(level)
/ʃəŋ/	‘to happen/to be’	(Falling)
/ʃém/	‘lazy’	(Rising)
/ʃēm/	‘carpet’	(level)
/ʃèm/	‘to spread’	(Falling)
/ká/	‘field’	(Rising)
/kà/	‘to bring’	(Falling)
/ʃiàʔ/	‘crop’	(Falling)
/ʃiāʔ/	‘container/box’	(level)
/ʃiàʔ/	‘to eat’	(Falling)
/já/	‘bamboo’	(Rising)
/jà/	‘to weave basket/rope’	(Falling)
/mé/	‘grain’	(Rising)
/mè/	‘animal’	(Falling)
/tó/	‘colcassia’	(Rising)
/tò/	‘bowl’	(Falling)

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# MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE MEYOR TRIBE

Rumi Deuri

Myths and legends are part of the oral narratives, which are passed on orally from one generation to another. While a legend is believed to have its roots in historical facts and tends to mention about real people (extraordinary, superhuman) or events, they are also fictitious, however with some truth in it being exaggerated. A myth is a kind of story telling which does not relates to facts, it is often a traditional or religious story about a fictional character (gods, goddesses) or even explanations( e.g. demonic possessions).

In every society we may find different kinds of myths and legends that have been passed on orally from generations to generations. Some such legends and myths are presented below which are famous and believed to be true among the Meyor tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

Meyor is one of the lesser known communities of Arunachal Pradesh, India. They are settled in Anjaw District of Arunachal Pradesh in India. In Meyor culture they have some unique myths and legends, which exist as oral traditions. One such well-known myth is *Panchurma* (pig faced woman). Meyor people believed that the pig faced woman was originally a human being until she was possessed by a ghost and turned into a pig faced woman. The main story behind this myth depicts how the woman became pig faced. It is believed that prior to her transformation she was newly married to a person. On the wedding day the groom's family gave a feast to the whole village. Pigs were slaughtered for the reception and the blood of the pigs was stored in a container. That night, the bride woke up at around mid-night as she was feeling thirsty. As it was dark she couldn't find water but the container of pig blood. Thinking, it was water she drank it all in the dark and went to bed.

Next day, by the time she woke up, her mother-in-law was already awake and sitting by the hearth. When she sat beside her mother-in-law, she (mother-in-law) noticed the blood mark on her daughter-in-laws face. Then the mother-in-law asked her about "how she got the blood mark on her face". Then she realizes what actually had happened in the night. So out of shame she stood up and walked out of the house instead of telling what actually had happened. It is said that it was still dark at the time when the bride walked out of the house and on her way she was possessed by the evil spirit. However, it is believed that hadn't she ran away from the house she would never have been possessed. Since then her face turned into a pig like face and she started to haunt womenfolk but never dared to attack men. She is said to have lived in the jungle afterwards. She wandered in the jungle and she was often heard singing melodiously with her sweet voice. She always hid her face whenever she came across a man. It is said that she often visited the village and asked for food but never did she showed her face. Whenever she finds a female alone in the house she just kills her. She also used to visit her husband's family and ask for food and new clothes. But, never did she allow her husband to marry again. Whenever he tried to marry a girl, she kills the girl.

It was only when the British came, the pig faced women was captured. They put her in a wooden box and put the box inside a larger one with holes for oxygen. They carried her away from the village never to be heard of again.

In Meyor society, they have yet another interesting story called *Nagmani* (gem of serpent/cobra pearl, also relevant in Hindu Mythology), which is very popular among them, and is believed to have actually happened. This incident is believed to have happened more recently, to be precise it supposedly occurred during the British visit in North East India. It is said that the British caught the *Nagmani* from Kulung Valley of Anjaw District in Arunachal Pradesh. They took the *Nagmani* with them but when they were on their way back, the *Nag* (serpent) also followed them. When the British reached Sunpura Village in Namsai District, they came across a river which they had to cross riding elephants. While crossing the river, the angry *Nag* (serpent) is said to have caught the elephant by its leg so the people riding atop threw the *Nagmani* (gem) into the river and jumped from the elephant to save their lives. However, the serpent didn't stop and drowned the elephant. Since that incident, the place is called *Hatiduba* (drowned elephant). In Meyor society, this incident is believed to have happened in real.

Also, an interesting tale of a Meyor legend named Tinai Cholang is still remembered to this day. It is said that Tinai Cholang was a very bold and courageous man. He is described as short and physically not attractive. However in spite of his short height, Tinai Cholang was said to have been a great fighter, and no one could ever beat him in a fight. He had two wives and a sister whom he loved dearly. The Meyors were often attacked by the Tibetans. Many Meyor villages were raided and destroyed by the Tibetans. One day, Tinai Cholang received news from his sister seeking help. The Tibetans were planning to attack the village which was near Phirkang (referential place supposedly existing in the upper side of the Meyor settlement) where Tinai Cholang's sister was married. When Tinai Cholang heard about it he decided to join and fight against the Tibetans. When he came for help, the villagers mocked at his short stature and advised him to stay away during the war. They were unaware of his skills and bravery. When the war started, the Meyor soldiers were badly defeated. Tinai Cholang could stand

no more and came out of the hiding place with his brother-in-law. He told his brother-in-law to stay behind him and collect a stone for every person he kills. The Tibetans were armed with guns however they could not harm him. Using his machete he killed almost all the Tibetans including their Chieftain. Seeing their leader dead, the others fled the battleground and finally the war ended. The villagers now looked at him differently; everyone was praising him and wanted to present him with anything he wanted. However, he denied at first, but asked for a basket of roosters when the villagers insisted.



**Tinai Cholang's Grave**

It is said that Tinai Cholang on his death bed asked the villagers if they wanted him to be born again, if so his dead body was to be kept unburied on a raised platform made of bamboo, if not, his dead body be burnt. Or else he should be buried and he will cause his grave to swell up. So the villagers neither burnt his body nor kept his body on the bamboo platform. Instead they buried him. And still today his graveyard uniquely raised above the ground can be seen in Tinai village of Anjaw District in Arunachal Pradesh.

The factuality of these events is uncertain yet they have been an important part of the oral tradition of the Meyor community and to this day they have been and will be passed on to the generations to come.

The factuality of these events is uncertain yet they have been an important part of the oral tradition of the Meyor community and to this day they have been and will be passed on to the generations to come.

## Special Lecture

The Centre for Endangered languages, Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University organised a special lecture by Padmashree Ganesh N. Devy themed “The Question of Silence- Tribals, Languages and the Future” on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. Padmashree Ganesh Devy is the founder of Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, Baroda and Adivasi Academy, Tejgadh. The lecture was attended by the faculties, students, research scholars from various departments, media persons and some community organization representatives.



# ENDANGERED VERSES OF A FORGOTTEN COMMUNITY

Kaling Dabi

The Meyors are domiciled in the eastern most part of India along the lines of the McMahon line which separates India from China. They belong to the Anjaw District of Arunachal Pradesh and their specific settlement is Walong Area and Kibithoo Circle. The Meyors are one of the lesser known and least studied communities of Arunachal Pradesh due to its geographical alienation. According to the UNESCO Atlas 2012, Meyor language has been categorized as “critically endangered language” with speakers not exceeding 700 in total. When a language dies, the culture dies with it. So, in order to preserve the rich Meyor language, it's high time to start documenting and disseminating Meyor folksongs which are reflective of their culture and their ways of life. Also, there are only few people who can sing in the Meyor language. Only a few of the older generation of the community can sing these songs and the art is diminishing day by day. Thus, the documentation of the folksongs as well as record-maintaining the source of the data is pivotal.

## Importance of Folksongs

A song that originates and is accepted in a specific space and surrounding and orally transmitted from one generation to another is termed as a folksong. It is an agent to transfer knowledge through oral tradition. In a tribal dominated state like Arunachal Pradesh with no proper script developed till date, the need for documenting the oral literature of all the communities becomes all the more important. Folksong, as a genre is an integral part of folkloristic which studies the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of communities.

### *Kisola*

*Kisola ronchu la jaka pehnu jaka kisala  
Pehne pehsing zota  
Metola pehne pehsing zota  
Kisola pehne oji matu  
Kisola zati lumba lochung  
Meto la zeiyi lumba lochung  
Kiso la zeiyi lumba lone  
Kiso la dila chambu yechu  
Meto la dila chambu yechu  
Kiso la dila chambu yene  
Kiso la gaga chondi meto  
Kiso la gaga chondi meto  
Kiso la chapu gapu choc ho  
Meto la chapu gapu cho cho*



Singer: Solu Meyor  
Age: 68 years  
Sex: female  
Village: Walong

### Context:

This song is sung during festivals to welcome guests to the celebration.

### Free translation:

We the Zeiyi People (Meyor) welcome the guest and the officials to our small valley where Meyor people had been living for generations.

We are delighted that you have come to our village to be a part of our celebration.

Let us hope your visit to our ancestral place to be a happy and memorable experience.

### *Enge lingla*

*Enge lingla Dayi kiche poyi  
Dayi kiche poyi  
Enge lingla Dayi kiche poyi  
Dayi kiche poyi*

*Tumi sala siki mito rung yi  
Siki mito doyi  
Tumi sala siki mito rung yi*



Singer: Ghenga Tsering Meyor  
Age: 45 years  
Sex: Male  
Village: Walong



*Siki mito rungyi*  
*Meto cheche yari lala phe ye*  
*Yari lala phe ye*  
*Meto cheche yari lala phe ye*  
*Yari lala phe ye*

*Meto chung chung pomi khayi yare*  
*Pomi khaji yare*  
*Meto chung chung pomi khayi yare*  
*Pomi khaji yare*

**Context:**

This song is sung during Shangau and Losar festivals. This song is sung together by the male and female. The males sing the stanzas and the females repeat the stanzas. It can also be sung when the community is imposing a fine on an individual or a couple to settle trivial issues relating to a joking relationship amongst potential marital partners. Such occasions are usually an occasion for merry making where the imposition of a fine is taken light heartedly.

**Free translation:**

The Sky and the Earth is glittering as bright as gold.

Oh almighty! The blossoming of flowers, as beautiful as gold, is the testament of your blessing on our land and people

Your footsteps accompany the fresh bloom of new buds.

How beautiful your divine world would be when your blessing makes our land scenic?

Flowers bloom everywhere, the sky and earth as beautiful as ever!

***O lo lo osi osi***

*A lullaby*

*Ama (Mother) kui chingi doiim kau*  
*Apa (Father) kui chingi doiim kau*

*O lo lo osi osi*  
*Ama kui chingi doiim kau*  
*Abu (Elders) se kui chingi doiim kau*  
*Chiruk (Crow) kui chingi doiim kau*

*O lo lo osi osi*  
*Ama kui chingi doiim kau*  
*Apa kui chingi doiim kau*

*O lo lo osi osi*  
*Khyuk (A bird) ke chingi doiim kau*  
*Metak (fast) ke chingi doiim kau*  
*Isi (Mouse) ke chingi doiim kau*  
*Phukluk (Nightingale) kui chingi doiim kau*

**Translation:**

Sleep my little one sleep!  
 Your mom asks you to sleep,  
 Your father asks you to sleep.

Sleep my little one sleep!  
 Your mom asks you to sleep,  
 Your elder brother and sister asks you to sleep,  
 The crow asks you to sleep.

Sleep my little one sleep!  
 Birds asks you to sleep,  
 Fall asleep fast,  
 The mouse asks you to sleep,  
 The nightingale asks you to sleep.



Singer: Solu Meyor  
 Age: 68 years  
 Sex: Female  
 Village: Walong



Singer: Achung Meyor  
 Age: 70 years  
 Sex: Female  
 Village: Walong

*Sola ye*

*Sola ye*  
*Sola ye*  
*Mayala khepa yine shakala tashan jashu*  
*Sola ye*  
*Sola ye*  
*Aaruk chungke khisu*  
*Sola ye*  
*Sola ye*  
*Mayala khepa yine shakala tashan jashu*  
*Sola ye*  
*Sola ye*  
*Phuru khala tashu*  
*Sola ye*  
*Sola ye*  
*Phuru khala tashu*



Singer: Ghenga Tsering Meyor

Age: 45 years

Sex: Male

Village: Walong

**Context:**

This song is sung and performed in pairs around the *thapchock* (area near the fireplace) during the *Lhachut* festival. The idea behind the performance is a conclusive test of the value and success of something. The term *Sola ye* is the reference to the deity of the fireplace of the house. The song is a sequential instruction for the performance in a lyrical form.

**Free translation:**

Oh revered deity of fire!  
 Bless us and be the witness of our endeavour  
 We pray to guide us  
 Oh revered deity of fire!  
 Now we ask to bring the bowl filled with the divine liquor to us.  
 Oh revered deity of fire!  
 Now we take the bowl in our mouth  
 Oh revered deity of fire!  
 Now we are keeping the bowl in the ground.

## Cultural Traits and Practices of the Kasiks

Dr. Lienjang Zeite

Every community adheres to a set of norms and practices to maintain peace or signify their identities. When it comes to tribal communities, such norms have been laid down from the times of their ancestors. In some cases, new or modified practices have also been incorporated with the change of time. Little or no changes have also been observed in many tribal communities when it comes to upholding certain practices; it gets passed down to the younger generations with utmost pride and sense of preserving who they are. There are also cultural traits and practices which have been influenced by the neighbouring tribes and communities as well. This portent is usually a consequence of culture amalgamation.

The Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh is one such region where communities from different ethnic groups exist together. Each tribes and communities retain exquisite attires and unique cultural practices till today. Other cultural manifestations can be seen from the numerous festivals and rituals celebrated or performed annually.

The Kasiks are sub tribe of the Nocte tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, India. They are inhabitants of three villages namely, Pulung, Noksa and Tupi in the district of Tirap. The total number of Kasik native speaker is about

1215 according to the 2011 census. Linguistically, they come under the Tibeto-Burman language group. They are also referred as the Khapas. Based on the information and data acquired from the native Kasik speakers and informants from Noksa Village, 'Khapa' is a xenonym which has been termed by people of other Nocte and other language speakers. The native speakers called themselves 'Kasik' and prefer this term/name for the reference of their identity, people and language.

There are certain cultural norms, belief system and practices that the Kasiks hold on to. The following examples are some of the beliefs and practices which has been retained and observed even to this day.

Tucked away in small villages surrounded by forest and hills, the Kasiks still maintained the traditional way of house building even though modern options are available. Like many villages in Arunachal Pradesh, the Kasiks have retained the traditional method and materials that are acquired from the nearby forests. The villages are dotted with stilt house. The raised floorings and walls are made of spilt bamboo and palm leaves are used for the roofing. Their houses usually have two to three fire places. The women usually confine themselves to the kitchen hearth while the male members use the hearth in the middle of the house. The Chief's house and flooring pattern is different from the others. Elongated tree trunk with symmetrical dents served as the ladder to climb up the houses. Most houses have a front as well as a back veranda.

Each Kasik household has a huge elongated wooden mortar with two deep dents for pounding grains and other food items. However, the Chief's wooden mortar will have three deep dents and his is the only such mortar as villagers are forbidden from owning three dent mortars. The Kasiks are strict followers of certain cultural norms which bears strict levies if violated. There are also household materials like elevated bamboo stands for placing food which can be used by the Chief and his wife only. Others are forbidden from using them.

Wood carving is synonymous with Kasik culture. The process of wood carving is taken as a serious labour and talented carvers are appreciated and encouraged. The knowledge of woods and wood carving is a tedious process and to hone such skills and talent is considered a gift. The wood carvers focus on making household material like seats, small tables and decorative things



Photo 1: A traditional Kasik house



Photo 2: The Chief's three dents mortar



like mask and statuettes. Wood carving is both a cultural as well as an occupational practice within the Kasik society.

The Kasiks incorporated numerous plants and herbs in their daily life. Trees and plants play a huge role in their tradition and culture. Certain plants or leaves are used for specific purpose and rituals. Some plants held higher value and significance for the Kasiks. One such plant is the *Thysanolaena* or the Indian broom plant. The plant belongs to the grass family and the flower of this plant is usually used for making household brooms. *Thysanolaena* leaves come under the sacred plants in Kasik culture. The leaves are used in omen reading where the future health of a new born child or the



**Photo 4:**  
**Indigenous Lemei / Thysanolaena plant**



**Photo 5: Kasik women**  
**scrapping the Sali and making Paan**

actual cause of an ailment can be predicted.

Hence, the particular plant occupies an important part for the Kasiks. Only the Shaman or Priest possesses the sacred art of omen reading through leaves.

The fertile soil of the village is favorable for the abundant growth of areca nuts (fruit of the *Areca catechu* palm) and betel leaves (*Piper betle*). The nuts and leaves plays significant roles in the Kasik society. Both are used as a symbol of respect and auspicious occasion. A marriage proposal, negotiation or wedding is incomplete without the presence of areca nuts and betel leaves. They make *Paan* (a preparation combining the betel leaf and areca nut) out of the leaves and nuts but instead of using slaked lime (common through Southeast Asia), they use the scraped bark of a tree call *Sali*. Slaked lime is optional. The use of *Sali* gives a red tinge and added flavour to the *Paan*. They consume *Paan* for leisure as well and during marriage ceremony, heaps of diced areca nuts, shreds of betel leaves and strips of *Sali* will be place on a big bamboo weaved plate and passed around for the families and guests.



**Photo 3: Carved wooden seats**



**Photo 6: Jumin, a Kasik traditional drink**

Guests are welcomed with respect in a Kasik household. Whenever a guest is visiting for the first time, one of the first traditional approaches is to give a small serving of *Jumin* (distilled tapioca or rice beer). This is the traditional way of welcoming the guest and if the guest is not of the same culture, the host explains the importance of pouring a few drops of the *Jumin* as an offering, mark of respect and thanksgiving to the indigenous deity and their ancestors.

It is a usual practice to conduct the actual marriage ceremony after many years of living together and bearing children. The Kasiks go forward with the *Sali-Khu* or betel offering ceremony to approve or decline a marriage proposal. The couple will start to live together if the family members approve of the relationship. When the actual marriage is conducted, it involves a moderator to negotiate or be the bearer of news from both the families. It is also a tradition to drink from conically folded *Phrynium* leaves when the moderator bearing news or information regarding the marriage ceremony. In case of inter-tribe marriages, the individual belonging to other community has to adopt a family to enter into the fraternal community. But in case of widow re-marriage, the children are retained by her in-laws.

Maintaining and preserving of their cultural heritage is what makes the Kasiks retain their identity among various tribes within the Noktes. Practicing such rituals and norms also helps them to keep alive the traditions that have been laid by their ancestors. It also provides them the occasion to remind the younger generations about the names of rituals, festivals and things associated with such celebrations in their own native languages. It is an important factor in helping preserve their language and culture which is endangered.

**Photos:** Dr. Lienjang Zeite

**Location:** Noksa Village, Khonsa, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

**Sources:** Centre for Endangered Languages (Rajiv Gandhi University) Field Notes (2016-17),  
Noksa Village, Khonsa, Arunachal Pradesh, India.



**Photo 7: Jumin being served to the family**  
**members during a marriage ceremony**



# Chindang

An Indigenous Festival of the Mijis

Kombong Darang



Nafra Town

The Mijis, also known as *Sajolang* and *Damai*, are settled primarily in Nafra Circle of West Kameng District and also in some parts of East Kameng and Kurung Kumey District with a total population of around 37,000. The term Miji is derived from two distinct words, *Mai* meaning ‘fire’ and *ji* meaning ‘giver’. It actually is a term used by their cognate tribe, the Aka, and translates to the ‘Giver of Fire’. Legend has it that it was the Miji people who gave fire to the Aka community during early days. Thus, the name Miji came into existence.

According to the myth of the Miji community, the creator of the universe sent *Abo Guphen*, the first male and *Ani Degan*, the first female to live on this earth. They had eight sons namely *Sangcho*, *Dongcho*, *Khanlo*, *Khanvoi*, *Chintai*, *Mialiu*, *Khanlong* and *Changthung*. When they grew up *Changthung* left for the plains and *Khanlong* left for *Lhaso* (Tibet). The rest of the six brothers namely *Sangcho*, *Dongcho*, *Khanlo*, *Khanvoi*, *Chintai* and *Mialiu* stayed behind in the mountains. These six brothers are considered to be the ancestors of the Miji or *Sajolang* community.

Like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Miji also practice animism. They believe in the existence of a spiritual world, and that any incident in a person’s life is an act of benevolent or malevolent spirits.

Likewise, the Chindang is an animistic festival. It is one of the most important agriculture-based festivals celebrated after the harvest by offering prayers and performing different rituals. According to the Miji community, the word ‘Chindang’ means the offering in ritualistic manner to the almighty deities where offerings are made to the mountains, rivers, the Sun and the Moon to seek their blessings for the well-being of humankind and for abundant harvest. Prayers and chants are performed to resist the evil spirits from entering the villages and causing harm to the people, domestic animals and to the crops they harvest, and also from causing diseases, epidemic and natural calamities. It is also performed in order to compromise with the evil spirits, as they believe that during cultivation they might have



Chindang Ritual



hurt the sentiment of the evil spirits who they believe have the legitimate right over the forest land.

The festival is generally celebrated in the month of October but the dates differ from village to village. It is solemnized during the harvesting season when the crops have matured and the harvest is successfully shifted to the granaries. However, in order to witness the festival together, the entire community has decided to celebrate the festival in a single platform. Therefore, in 1991 the concept of a merged Chindang festival started. Since then, the Miji community celebrates the Chindang festival every year from 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> October at Nafra town where every villages of the Miji community come together to solemnized the festival.

The festival is basically a series of rituals that are performed to express gratitude to the deity of fertility '*Jumiyangni*' for a successful harvest and to drive off evil spirits from the village to ensure a prosperous year. Depending on how the rituals are performed, the Chindang festival may go on for even a week or more.

The festival begins with enlisting the service of a Shaman to invoke blessings and to drive off evil spirits from the village. The *Pung-Gyibi* (Shaman) performs the Chindang ritual. During the whole period of Chindang festival, the *Pung-Gyibi* stays in seclusion, in order to attain purity and sanctity. For this purpose, the villagers prepare a sacred, improvised shelter called *Pung-Barang* for the *Pung-Gyibi*.

An auspicious date to start the festival is conveyed by the *Pung-Gyibi* through chicken liver divination (a form of divination to predict the future by inspecting the liver of a sacrificed chicken). Once the date is decided, a social service is conducted in the first day, wherein, the males of the village undertake cleaning of the village surroundings, roads and the ritual spot. Preparation of local wine, smoked fish, *Giji Guro* (refreshments) and arrangement of Bull/Yak/sheep/pig/hen for scarifying during the rituals are carried out enthusiastically. On this day, the *Pung-Gyibi* who had started the ritual chanting for past few days at *Pung Barang* comes to actual ritual ground and commences the chanting.

The first day of the festival showcase the perfect blend of a Buddhist and animistic ritual. It is important here to note that this Buddhist ritual is only performed in Nakhu Village of West Kameng District which is 4 Km away from Nafra town. This ancient ritual is called *Zomu*, which is performed by a *Zomu* Shaman which they call *Lama*, in front of a sacred Buddhist monument called *Chorten*.

According to the old narratives of Nakhu village, it is said that they had trade relations with nearby Monpa community and that during the course of a trade, a villager brought back an object used in a Buddhist ritual called *Zomu* to Nakhu village unknowingly. After that incident, an endemic disease broke out. People were getting sick and most of the crops of the villager were found out to be rotten or damaged. After a series of divinations and rituals, the village priest narrowed down the cause to an angry spirit. Therefore, to make amends with the spirit they enlisted the service of a *Lama*, and performed the *Zomu* ritual. Since then, the ritual is performed during Chindang in Nakhu village.

Simultaneously, the same day witness the cleaning of village water sources by the womenfolk. After the cleaning of water sources, they collect mud from there and put it on each other faces which are believed to be blessings for women folk. Likewise, the male members of the community seal off the village after erecting gates as boundaries against evil spirits. In the morning, the youths of the village go to jungle and collect *Depu Demoh*, a collection of sacred leaves for the ritual. They also collect *Chaok* - the twigs of a plant considered sacred, and gravels, which are used later in the evening to drive off spirits hiding inside the houses.



Shaman Chanting



Nakhu Village



Zomu Ritual



Zomu Ritual



Womenfolk cleaning water sources



After the *Zomu* ritual, animistic ritual in the form of chanting continues till the evening.

Later in the evening, the driving away of evil spirit is observed which is locally known as *Dirin-Zih*. In this ritual, the Shaman along with young boys from the village go to each house and offers prayers and chanting to drive off evil spirits. The two participants of the ritual wear masks and are known as *Sangmi*. They are impersonators of evil spirits. It is believed that the evil spirit leaves the house following the impersonators as they think them as one of them.

After these rituals, the villagers observe a three-day period of taboo that forbids them to cross the gate. Any villager crossing it is heavily penalized by the community, and is held responsible for any eventualities.



**The Sangmis**



**Phung-Binen**

The next day is the day of the sacrifice. Before performing animal sacrifice, the Shaman again performs chicken liver divination to predict whether the year will be good for the village or not. Then they hoists Chindang flags in pine trees. A ritual called *Phung-Binen* where a group of villagers with two males dressed up as females to hide their identities goes around the village while chanting prayers to wake up the deities of the mountains and the rivers. Some of them will hold flags and some will carry machetes and shields in their hands. The groups are offered with rice or maize beer on the way. They will also go to erected gates located in the village boundary and dance around it. Then they will proceed back to the ritual ground.



**Shaman chanting before the sacrifice**

The Shaman then offers prayers to the sacrificial animal.  
*"Oh! Bull, don't feel bad about it - we are not killing you without any purpose; we are sending you to a very good place which you may like. It is such a beautiful place with grass all round. You will meet your forefathers and other relatives. There you will enjoy the grass, and while enjoying shower your choicest blessings on us"*  
 (Nath, 2012).

The sacrifice of the animal is done by shooting with bows and arrows and spears. The blood is then put on alters, Shaman's belongings and on old rocks of the festival ground. After the sacrifice has been made, the Shaman cuts out the heart of the sacrificed animal and hangs it in a corner. They believe that soul of the sacrificed animal is still alive even after the sacrifice. So the Shaman will cut the heart into eight pieces with a knife made out of bamboo the next day. This ritual is called *Shu-Lung-Khu*. They believe that the soul of the bull can only be sent away by this ritual. In the meantime, the villagers celebrate the events and relish in merrymaking for the night.

The last day witness the offering of prayers and chanting by the Shaman onto the erected gates located in the village boundary. The day also witnesses the sacrifice of a pig and a chicken.

The Chindang festival is summed up with the ritual in which the males of the village curse their seen and unforeseen bad luck, diseases and tragedies on to a piece of wood which represents the evil spirit. Then they shoot it with arrows in a symbolic gesture of killing it.

The Shaman also ties sacred threads on the wrists of the villagers as talismans against evil spirits. This ritual is called *Phang-Zhang* wherein *Phang* means 'hand' and *Zhang* means 'to tie'. This marks the end of Chindang festival and the taboo of three days will also be lifted. After Chindang, the villagers of Nakhu will get ready for the next season of harvest. They will carry forward the cycle with each passing season.

Today, as Chindang is celebrated centrally every year by the Mijis, it has become an occasion to together perpetuate their age-old sense of community and to recall and memorialize the tales, legends and unique history of the tribe under the moon and the stars.

(Note: The spelling of some local terms may vary since the author has used words as pronounced by the natives.)

**Photography by-** Kombong Darang

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**Shu-Lung-Khu**



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