

ZIRO: THEN AND NOW,

**DESIGN RESEARCH SEMINAR
AN SPL - 71**

**BY
SWATI ADDANKI
146340001**

GUIDE: PROF. NINA M SABNANI



**INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CENTRE
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY BOMBAY
2016**

Ziro: Then and Now

A design research project
under the guidance of
Prof. Nina M Sabnani

Swati Addanki
AN146340001



When the first Apatani came down the mountain, the land that is Ziro today, was a swamp. There lived a crocodilian species named the B'uru. The first Apatani and the B'uru lived in peaceful harmony, where the humans would even entrust the reptile to babysit their children while away gathering or hunting for food. On one such occasion, as the folklore goes, enemies of the Apatani came and took the children from the house of one of the Apatani men.

The B'uru try as they might could not help prevent this treachery. The man in his anger took a Tibetan bronze plate called Talloh and smashed the B'uru to its death. After chopping it to death, the man realized, the child was not consumed by the B'uru. When the search party, finally found the child, the man was ashamed as, in his haste, he slaughtered all the B'uru in the land. He was terrified of the spirit of the B'uru and ever since hid his face using white paste made out of rice. This custom is practiced even today when the Apatani plaster the Talloh plates with white-rice paste.

Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my idea in my own words and where other ideas or words have been included, I have adequately selected and referred the original source.

I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misinterpreted or fabricated or falsified any ideas / data / facts / sources in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources that have not been properly cited, or from whom proper permission has not been sought.

Swati Addanki
December 2015

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Nina Sabnani for giving me an opportunity to work under her and for her invaluable guidance, and my sincerest thanks to Paulanthony George for his help throughout the duration of the project

Swati Addanki
December 2015

Approval

The Report Committee for Animation Design, Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report on:

Ziro: Then and Now

By

Swati Addanki
146340001

Approved by

Guide : _____

CONTENTS

I. Introduction

II. Origins

III. Process

IV. People

1. Kojmama Taman
2. Punyo Tamo
3. Hibu Tagia
4. Takhe Rido
5. Takhe Tatung

IV. Way of Life

1. Governance and Law-keeping
2. Community Spaces
3. Bamboo
4. Agriculture
5. Army
6. Education and Commerce
7. Religious Practices
8. Inter-tribe Relations
9. Tattooing and Truths

IV. Conclusion

I. Introduction

This is a project undertaken to try and understand the mutual impact of people and the spaces they occupy on each other in India.

The Apatani people have traditionally practiced agriculture, it is a rare opportunity to try and understand a civilization of people who have flourished for many hundreds of years with their own principles of economy and society and are now on the verge of a paradigm shift.

The lives of the Apatani have been documented via visual ethnographic methods of sketches, photos and stories.

II. The Apatani

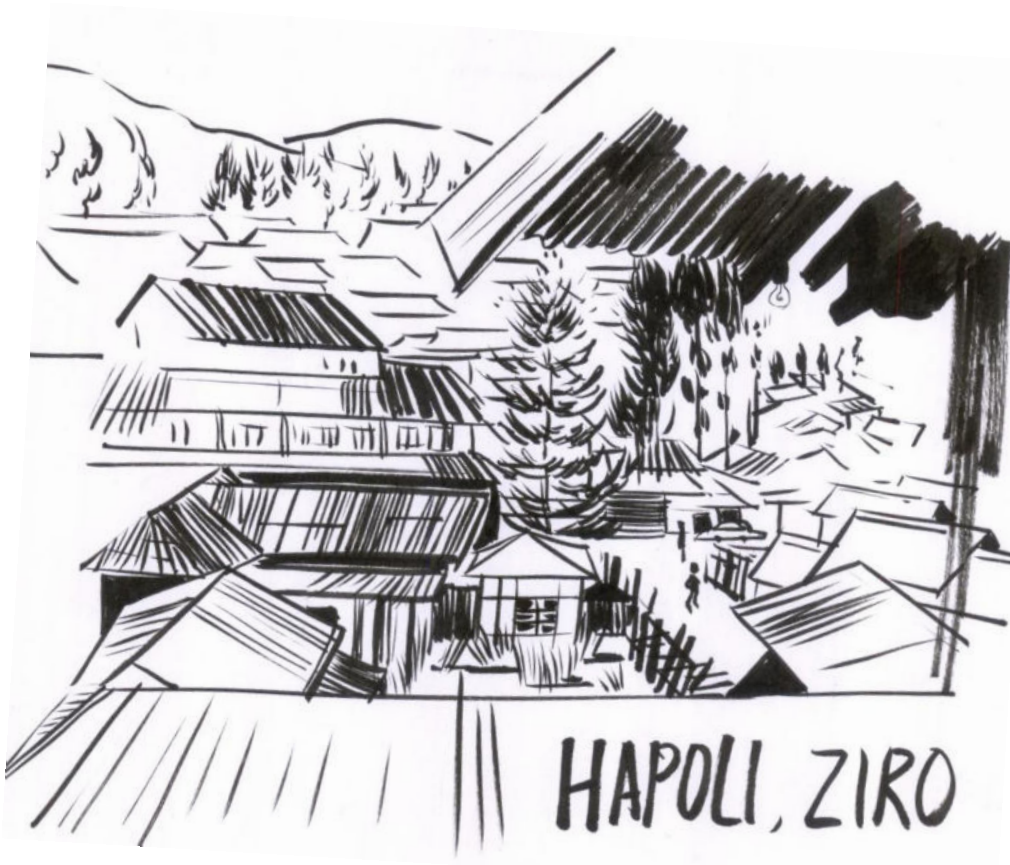
History

The Apatani, or Tanw, also known by Apa and Apa Tani, are a tribal group of people living in the Ziro valley in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh in India. The Apatanis have a tribal population of approximately 35,000, most of whom live in a valley at 5,000 feet in the Himalayas.

In this valley, only 5 miles long and two miles wide, they practice wet-rice agriculture, plant small gardens and tend large pine and hardwood plantations.

Apatanis, like their neighbours in central Arunachal Pradesh, speak a Sino-Tibetan/ Tibeto-Burman language and follow a form of animistic faith (called Donyi Polo), although recently some families have converted to Christianity.

Although sharing a common base Tani language and the Tani religion of Donyi Polo, the Apatani have been known to be distinct in their customs and practices compared to their neighboring Tani tribes.

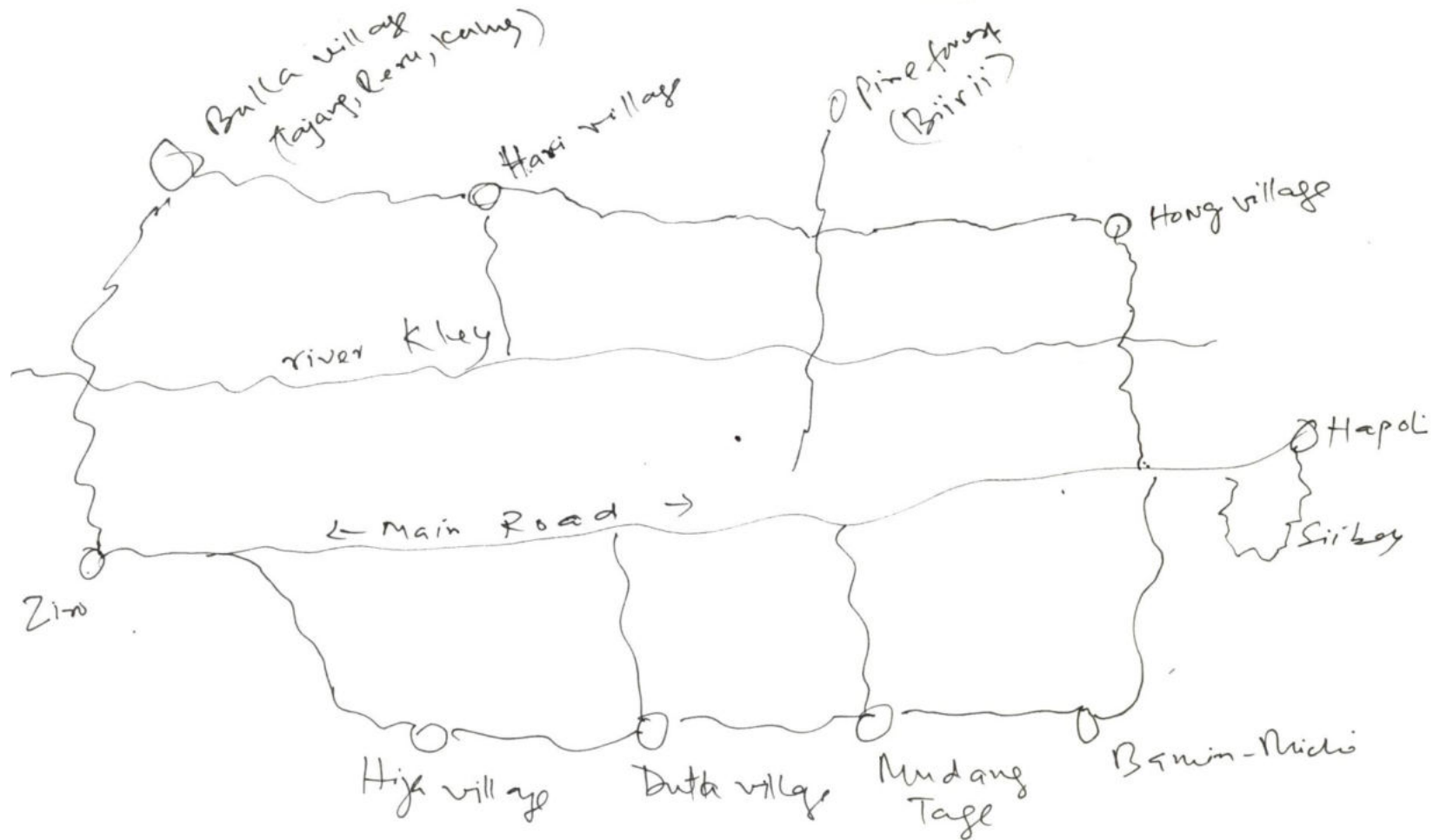


Early morning sketch of Hapoli from the guest house.

Ziro Valley

Ziro is the district headquarters of Lower Subansiri district and is one of the oldest towns in Arunachal Pradesh. Home primarily to the Apatani tribe, the Ziro valley is famous for its pine-clad hills and rice fields.

The valley is divided into two major townships, Old Ziro (the original Ziro, as the locals insist) and New Ziro or Hapoli, which is the centre for economic activities and houses the administrative offices. Smaller apatani villages dot the rest of the landscape.



Map of Ziro Valley, as drawn by Kojmama Taman, our local guide.



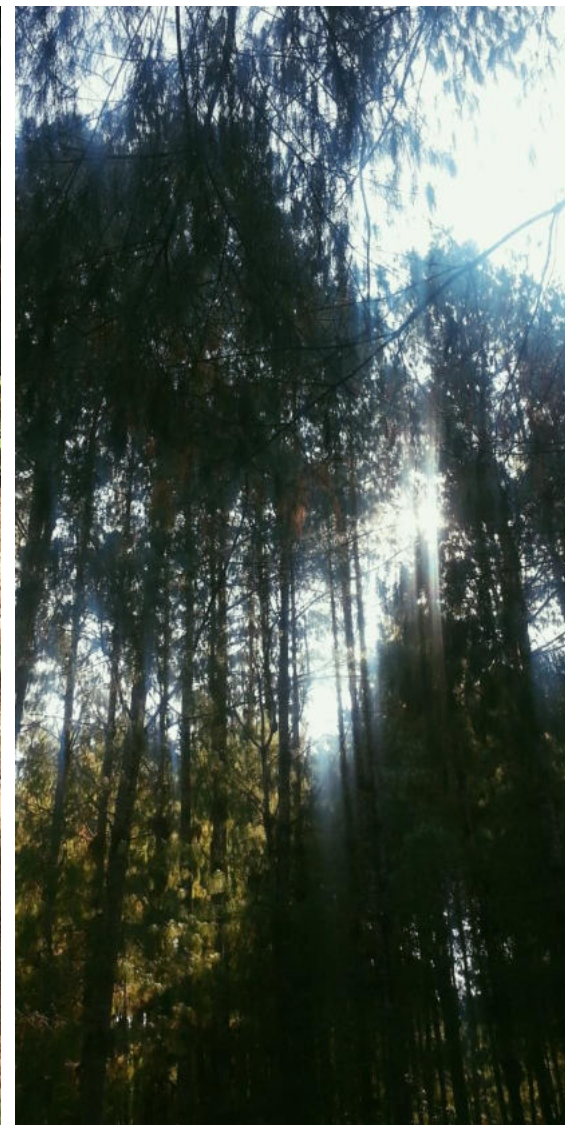
View of Ziro Valley from *Ziro putu*



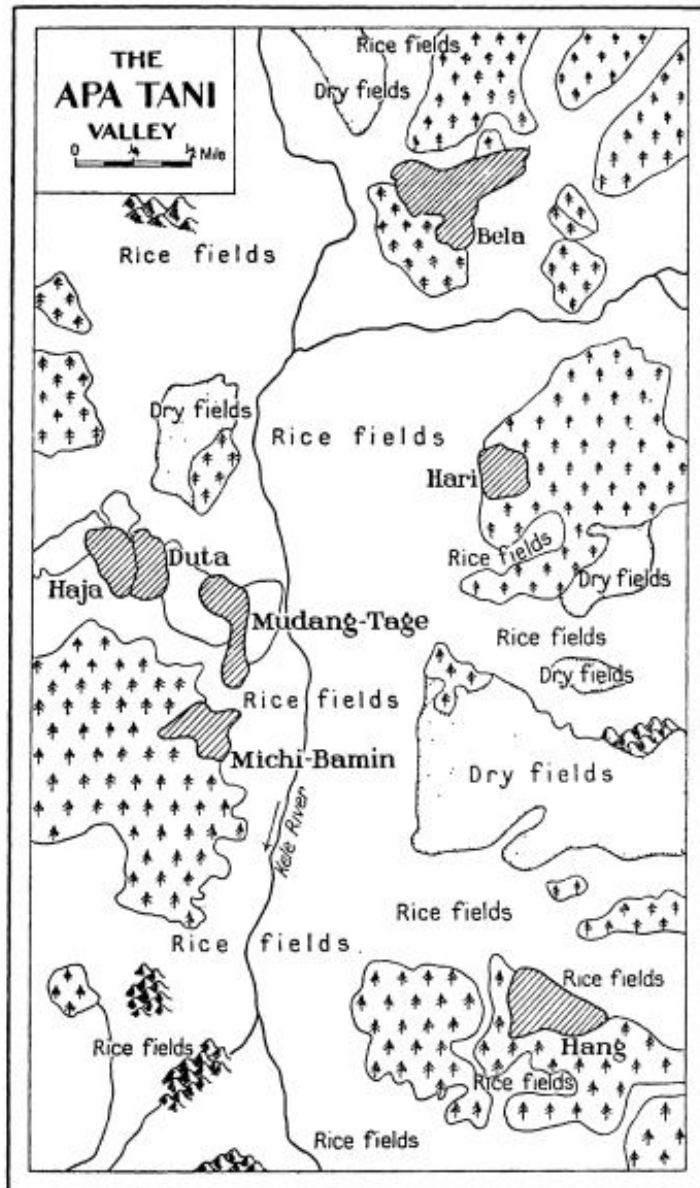
Farms in the valley; sketch of Hong village



Houses in Hong village surrounded by Miding, the rice nurseries



The Blue Pine forest in Ziro Valley



Map of Ziro Valley, as drawn by Haimendorf.

Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf

Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf (22 June 1909 – 11 June 1995) was an Austrian ethnologist and professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London. He spent forty years of his life studying tribal cultures in Northeast India. Much of what people know about the Apatani today is based on observations made by the professor in the 1940s and is documented in his 1962 book, *The Apatanis and their neighbours: A primitive civilization of the Eastern Himalayas*.

The people of Ziro, specifically Hong village, remember Haimendorf for his friendship with *Punyo Tamer* (who gained notoreity for both his vast wealth and his multiple marriages). Haimendorf and his wife Betty stayed at his house in Hong village while conducting ethnographic research on the tribe. They're remembered fondly as "Laling-Yalu" by the locals for their repeated use of the phrases "Darling!" and "Ya!".

Since their contact with the outside world through Haimendorf, The Apatani have shown an impressive rate of progress and are sometimes dubbed "Japatani" by their neighboring tribes, presumably as an allusion to the fast-paced technological evolution of Japan.

III. Process

This visual ethnographic project aims to understand the lives of the Apatani people and their day to day activities in the context of the Ziro valley that they live in, it does not aim to dispel or validate findings. As an ethnographer the findings are from a few specific sources:

Informant accounts:

The study was conducted with the help and participation of a few of the villagers from the Ziro valley. With their help, an account on religion, agriculture and in general the Apatani life has been recorded. From the beginning the aims of the research has been made clear to the villagers and hence would fall under overt ethnographic research. At times different accounts may conflict, yet as an ethnographer it is a lesson that has been well learnt to accept that the 'truth' is not often absolute but comes in varying shapes, sizes and colours.

Ongoing events:

The study was conducted during the first two weeks of December, which in the Ziro valley is a time of great cold. This month is often meant for repair and maintenance of houses, preparing for festivals in January and March. As outsiders we have tried to observe and sometimes were permitted to be a part of some of the events, like house warming, temple visit and rituals, animal sacrifices, neighbourhood celebrations.

Perception of culture bearers:

By being a spectator (fly on the wall observations) to many of the moments through out this project, we were able to understand the relevance of many of the rituals and functions of many of the day to day practices

Through many of the conversations with the villagers we come to understand how the Apatani way of life has been evolving since the first anthropologists and ethnographers had come. This bit of information gathering was the tougher one as our understanding of the world we live and theirs are often at logger heads when it came to practices like animal sacrifices, totems and the place that the elders had for nature and how it has changed amongst the younger generations.

Documentation:

The time that we spent there, involved us meeting with our guides Koj Mama Taman and often Hibu Tagia. We spent majority of the time walking through the villages or travelled by a 4 wheeler to get to villages. Through photographs, sketches on the spot, field notes and voice recordings we gathered most of our data. This was collated every evening to understand and plan for the next day. The ability to sketch made up at most places for the lack understanding the language or even appearance wise as strangers. This project would have been poorer in stories and observations had we been armed (pun intended) only with a camera.

Analysis:

As a guide we had Christopher von Fürer-Haimendorf's seminal work : The Apatani and their neighbours. This allowed us to keep a track of the changes that had been happening over the years. The map of Ziro and the names of villages bear testament to depth of change geographically and linguistically. Largely the data is qualitative.

IV. People

Introduction

This section details the people we met while navigating through Ziro Valley . Most of the data presented here is primarily through conversations and stories held with the people in the following pages

A majority of these people belong to Hong village, as a lot of our time was spent there.



1. Kojmama Taman, Dutta village/Hapoli

We found *Kojmama* through facebook initially and he agreed to guide us through Ziro. He owns a travel agency in Hapoli and also lives there. On our first day in Hapoli, he invited us to his house for breakfast (which was a sort of rice congee with fried fish and eggs) where we met his son , S'rang. He also had a pet puppy, Piper and a stray cat that would slink around the hearth.

Kojmama is the youngest of four brothers. He is an Tani from Dutta village. With his wife he has two daughters, Risso (meaning fragrance) and Riingo(meaning incomplete necklace), and one son, S'rang (pillar). His wife recollects that Risso and Riingo when young looked like twins. While Kojmama practises the Donyi Polo faith, his wife is Christian. Also, his older daughter Risso wears a rosary around her neck.

Upon talking to Kojmama, we realised he was an avid birdwatcher and photography-enthusiast. He said his interest started when he was given the boook "Birds of Arunachal" by his friend Rajesh Kumar. In it is a wide collection and classification of the many species of birds found in and around the many forests of Arunachal. This paved way for Kojmama to start taking pictures of these birds on his trips to the forest. He also manages to get back firewood, so as to make amends for the fuel burnt on these trips. He also started collecting pictures for a book project with another friend, Shivaji Choudhary but the project got stalled when Choudhary got transferred to college.

He seemed extremely invested in the cause to re-establish and preserve Apatani traditions and culture. He also frowned upon the emergence of the yearly *Ziro Festival of Music* because of its insensitivity to the surrounding environment. Along with producing tonnes of waste that is tossed around, he believes this eagerness to "*Eat, drink and make merry*" (which is how the fest is advertised) is influencing the younger Apatani kids negatively.

When asked if we could take the camera and sketchbook inside the temple , he said everything was fine,as long as we left our footwear and ego behind.



2. Hibu Tagia, Hong village

We first met *Hibu Tagia* when *Kojmama* was showing us around Hong village, he made a distinct impression because his face was partially covered with a black mask. Him and two other people were standing outside a house (which we later found out was his brother-in-law's) and looking at a leopard skin which was hung outside the hut. Many young Apatani seem to go to the forest to hunt for sport. *Tagia* said he had shot birds before but never larger animals. It is banned by law in the state.

We met again on our second visit to Hong. He was helping out in a household where a pig was being sacrificed for a housewarming. A lot of people from the village had gathered to help, primarily from the *Punyo* and *Hibu* bastis. We also met his friends, the brothers *Punyo Opo* and *Punyo Nomo*. All three were in their twenties. *Tagia* later took us to his house which was near the rice farms.

On the third day we met, he had just come back from his brother's house after an early morning pig sacrifice (these were common in the winter as people generally repaired or built houses). We sat outside, sketched and took photos while *Tagia* took a bath and sang (Bollywood songs).

He asked if *Koj-Mama* had shown us the *Yapung-Yapur* and the *Gora-Kulla*, which supposedly made man immortal. These are things *Hija* village is famous for. Sadly Hong village, according to *Tagia* had none of these fancies. Hong had an old huge pine, which was struck once by lightning. It fell, across the road into, the neighboring plot, where there's a house now. *Hibu Tagia* still hadn't found a job, he said jobs are given to people who have money to bribe, he said he was poor and couldn't afford that, so he chants, "Apply apply-no reply."



Punyo Tamo, chopping wood outside his house

3. Punyo Tamo, *Hong village*

Punyo Tamo, when we first ran into him was chopping wood behind his house in Punyo basti. His house was surrounded by blue pine and a few shorter trees bearing red fruit. On being asked if it was cherry, he said it was a type of berry which had a potent kick when ingested. People toiling on the farms all day would sometimes munch on these berries .

We met him again on our second visit in the same place as Hibu Tagia. He was slightly inebriated (on the local rice beer, "Oh"). He led us around the house and introduced us to the people in the house , offered food and drink and walked us through the process of the sacrifice.

4. Punyo Opo, Hong village

Punyo Opo was a friend of Hibu Tagia's. He was enlisted in the army and was back home on account of a family member's death. He was heavily accessorised because of his inability to dress that way in the army. He wore a bandana and decorative rosary beads around his neck. He still wore camo pants and shoes. His brother Punyo Nomo also had a piercing, over his eyebrow and had dyed his hair a light brown.

Ope lived in Itanagar and was inducted in Assam. He spoke of how houses have changed over the years, people had stopped using bamboo roofing as it was difficult to maintain and reconstruct. Most of them had switched over to aluminium sheets. He believed it would continue changing, some locals had already started building concrete houses.



Takhe Rido, in front of his bamboo farm

5. Takhe Rido, Hong village/Hapoli

Takhe Rido was a Bamboo farmer from Hong village, his farm housed between Hong village and a Donyi Polo temple. These were privately owned farms that he was paid to maintain.

Rido, as a young man worked in the army. He recalled his “foolish” youth where he had crossed-over to assam on foot with a little satchel strung across his shoulder. He was an only son in a family full of sisters , and was almost coerced into becoming a priest. He was dragged by his sisters and forcibly tattooed.

He was known as a bit of a rebel in his family, easily getting into arguments. He also approached his religion dispassionately .

He has been living in Hapoili since his house in Hong burned down. It seems there is a trend of older folk moving to the town after a certain age.



TAKHE TATUNG
wearing his father's
traditional raincoat

6. Takhe Tatung, Hong village

We met Takhe Tatung who happened to be related to Hibu Tagia's mother (brother) and who is also Takhe Rido's brother. We had run into him, when we were lost in Hong. Hibu Tagia invited us to his 'other' brother's house, where we had sticky rice, roasted pig intestine and broth of pork-meat and the liver as well over red-tea. His brother and Takhe Tatung were present. The conversation took its course from our project and then to the German explorers, the Haimendorf's. Tatung explained how he was there, the second time both of them came to check on the Apatani's progress.

Tatung said they had this habit of smoking (both of them) and saving away the burnt matchsticks. He said the times have changed; their elders were huge and hefty people, for whom just the shoulder garment was enough along with the loincloth. Tatung took us back to his house where we saw the textbook, which spoke off: Yaling-Yalu (the Haimendorfs'). He also showed us the headdress and shoulder pad used for hunting, it had eagle claws. Later we huddled like boy-scouts over his foreign note and coin collection. We promised him our copy of "The Apatani and their Neighbours."

V. Way of Life

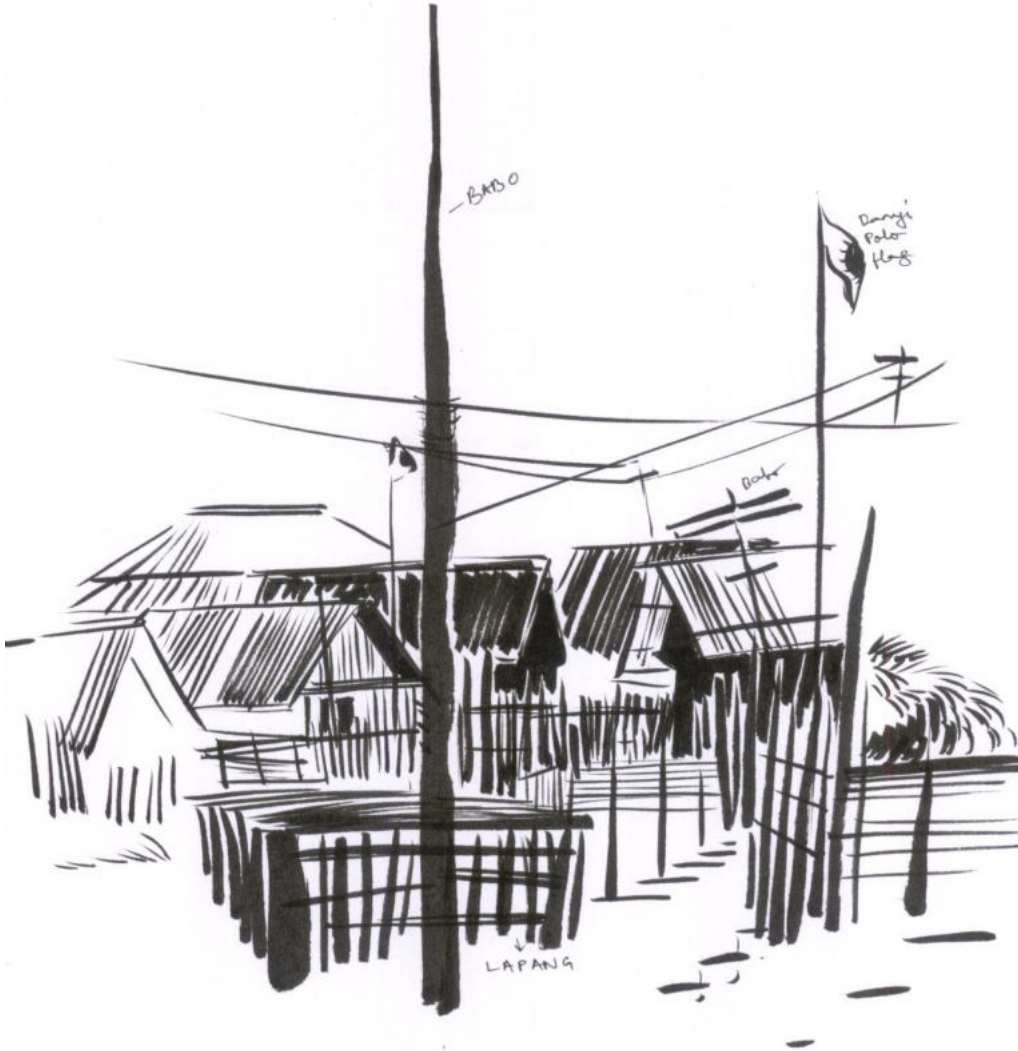
1. Governance and Law-keeping

There are no known written records of the history of the Apatani tribes, but throughout their history the Apatani have had a democratic system of running the society. The Apatani village council is called a Bulyang. It is a position that is coming back into power. Over time the Buliang became the go-to person for political clouts who wanted to get their way but they are now taking back their own rights and power to do good, without external politics. Most domestic disputes are solved internally within the concerned families.

The apatani also follow a custom of inheriting friends, these inherited friends, called Bwnw Ajin or Biinii Ajin are generally from different clans and are required to be present during family and clan occasions.



Members of two families get together to discuss a marriage



A lapang in Hibu basti, Hong village.

2. Community Spaces

Almost all villages have a number of public assembly spaces. The space is called a Lapang and is considered sacred and legal territory. Traditionally made out of pinewood, they are repaired every three years. Nowadays, the Lapang(s) have RCC bases and tin or aluminium roofs. Every clan/basti has their own lapang within a village. The ones at Hong village and Hari village are regarded as the oldest.

Every Lapang is accompanied by a Babo which is a sort of ceremonial totem pole. Made of blue pine that is generally carried by clansmen all the way from the forest (which is a tradition in its own right), it has a tall post with one or two cross members. Smaller lapangs are present outside most houses and signify the presence of a male child. The name of the eldest son of the house is often etched on it.

All houses are built with a hearth as its core element. Members of the community get together and sit around the hearth, while eating or drinking (traditional rice beer) for social gatherings.



The modern *lapang* uses concrete, metal and bamboo. On the right is a traditional *lapang*, classified a heritage monument by the Arunachal government.



People gather around the central hearth in the bamboo house



Houses in Hija village

3. Bamboo

Bamboo is an integral part of the Apatani livelihood. Most of the activities that constitute the Apatani way use bamboo as a core element. Most Apatani houses are built using bamboo. A traditional Apatani house is identified by its use of tall vertical wooden stilts, tight weave of the walls and the floors, and bamboo roofing. Different parts of the house use bamboos of different sizes and preparations. More recently, the roofs have been replaced by corrugated tin sheets for greater durability. A lot of households are also switching to concrete to prevent fires, which have been known to raze down entire neighbourhoods.

Earlier these houses hosted Japanese style sliding doors but have switched to a twin door system. Lapangs, Babos and religious wards (ibyan) are also constructed from bamboo.

Traditionally, members of the entire clan/basti get together to repair and/or build a house. This group generally constitutes exclusively males. The work is fueled by the local rice wine, Oh.

A number of bamboo farms line the exterior of villages and are privately owned. Apatani men tend to these farms. The men are known to carry a traditional blade with a bamboo sheath called an ilyo.

Bamboo is used to make a variety of tools and implements, ranging from bamboo tongs (to help stoke fires) to ear plugs. Bamboo is also used extensively in the preparation of food. Sticky rice, egg, chicken and vegetables are boiled inside bamboo stems and the bamboo shoot itself is considered a delicacy.



Takhe Rido standing in his bamboo farm; Child inside a bamboo house



Exterior of bamboo farm; Interior



Members of the *basti* get together and repair a house, *Hong village*



Woman chops and slices bamboo to make a mat; Man making a ceremonial altar in bamboo, to be used in a chicken sacrifice, *Hija Village*



Bamboo used in ceremonial altar (*tamu agyang*), for chicken sacrifice, *Hija village*



Rattan and Bamboo bag; Bamboo used to make chicken coops



Rice farms in Hong village

4. Agriculture

The Apatanis are known for their practice of wet rice cultivation through intricate irrigation through the network of fields. We noticed a cluster of nurseries overgrown with algae the moment we first entered Hong village. These Miding (rice nurseries) are known to sprout by January or February, new rice saplings in one fell swoop. The algae is cleaned up (they seem to cause no harm to the submerged saplings) and the water is drained by means of channels and culverts. The saplings are then transplanted into the main rice fields.

We also noticed a few fields were used to grow fish. This system of paddy-cum-fish culture was introduced in the 1960's with great success. This practice is unique in Arunachal Pradesh and is known to enhance ecological sustainability. It is also impressive to note that only a small river (Kley) manages to irrigate all the wet rice fields in Ziro.



Rice farms, *Hong village*



Woman farming, *Hija village*

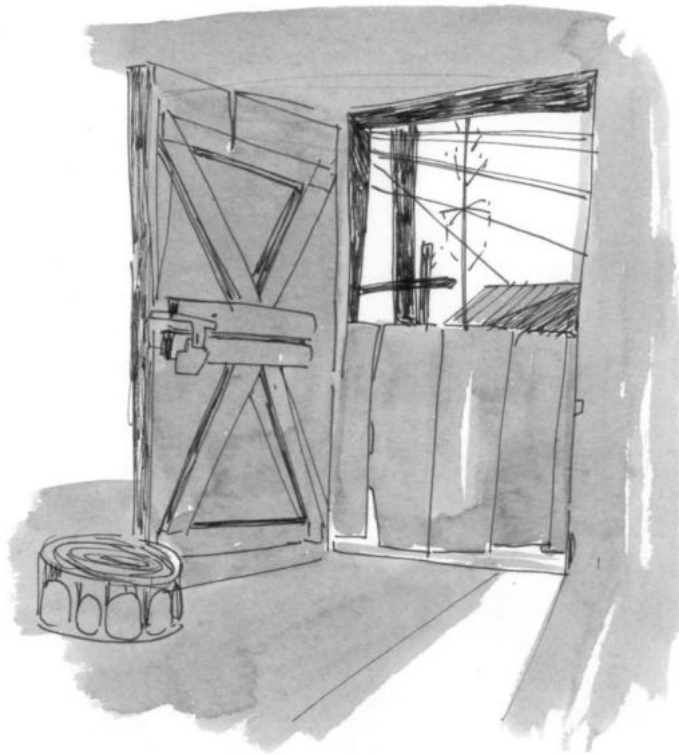


Paddy-cum-fish farm, *Dutta village*

5. Army

Ziro has a considerable army presence. While agriculture is the mainstay for most Apatani households, a lot of the men in the younger generations are seeing the army and the police as good avenues for employment. Hibu Tagia had tried applying for both but was denied on the basis of his height not meeting their requirements. The locals and the army seem to enjoy a fairly good relationship in the valley.





6. Education and Commerce

Our interest was piqued by a relative of Kojmama's who said he taught commerce in a government high school in Ziro. He said Ziro had broadly two types of students, one set who went to government institutions, who barely valued the education and the other who valued the private institutions as the parents had to dish out more. Curious fact is that in the whole of Arunachal, the education is largely CBSE, I asked him if there were any institutes that had a course or encouraged the Apatani-Nyishi tribe system. He said the CBSE system is rigid and does not cater anything to the internal matters of traditional values. Which is surprising as Maharashtra has a strong emphasis on state syllabus, which informs the younger generation about the heritage of Shivaji (setting aside the biases).

Our conversation started with his enquiry of why I was sketching or making such documentation. He later said, this place (Ziro) needs encouragement for innovators. That there is very little intellectual discussion, that revolves around the preservation and upliftment of Apatani and similar traditions. He had some interesting ideas regarding utilization of existing resources. He said that, put together Ziro might have 1000 to 10,000 hectares of groves where good strong bamboo grow. Bamboo is an ideal trellis or support structure for creepers. As he didn't have the land or the money he couldn't experiment with this.

The Apatani way is rooted in slowness and sustained growth. Modernity is slowly usurping this wisdom causing the farmers and businessmen of Ziro to search for faster results. He also said that tourism in Ziro could be carried out in a more holistic manner. Right now most of the guides they just show around the villages like Dutta, Hong and Hija. Wherever there are interesting photo-ops.

There is very little else, that somebody who wants to take away from a culture that is pretty advanced in architecture, sanitation and economy. He also said that there is a spot in Ziro from where the entire village can be seen, this can be easily accessed by an approach way and might be ideal for hang-gliding expeditions.



The Babo, an apatani ceremonial totem pole

7. Religious Practices

a. *Donyi Polo Faith*

Most Apatanis are animists. They practice an indigenous faith called Danyi-Polo (it is also practised by other Tibeto-Burman peoples, like the Adis, the Nyishis, the Hill Mirris). The name "Donyi-Polo" means "Sun-Moon", and was chosen for the religion in the process of its revitalisation and institutionalisation started in the 1970s in response to inroads made by Christianity and the possibility of absorption into Hinduism.

To help fight against the tide of christian conversions, the religion has developed a congregational system, hymns to be sung composed in the Tani ritual language of shamans, a formalised philosophy-theology and iconography of the gods and temples. In the villages themselves a religious divide can be seen in the way the houses are adorned. Practitioners of Donyi Polo noticeably have ceremonial wards and totem poles placed outside their houses. The Babo is a common site, and so are sacrificial wards, used to signify the sacrifice of certain animals like chicken (*tamu agyang*), pig or the mithun (which is reserved for larger community occasions)

Pig blood: One of the most significant socio-religious features of the Apatanis is the pig blood. Pig blood is considered very sacred and is shared within the 'tulu' (sub-clan). The sacrifice is generally made early in the morning or late afternoon, the blood is collected in freshly cut bamboo receptacles and boiled in it. Eating blood is considered sacred and only tulu of the individual sacrificing the pig can take it. Even a female member of the family who is married or engaged cannot share it. Other than the pig blood, no other sacrificial blood of an animal is considered sacred and it is freely shared with all.



Punyo Opo holding the lungs of a pig

Nowadays, many pigs are slaughtered for commercial purposes without ritual or ceremony. In such cases no sanctity is attached to the blood and therefore everybody can use the blood irrespective of caste and creed or class.



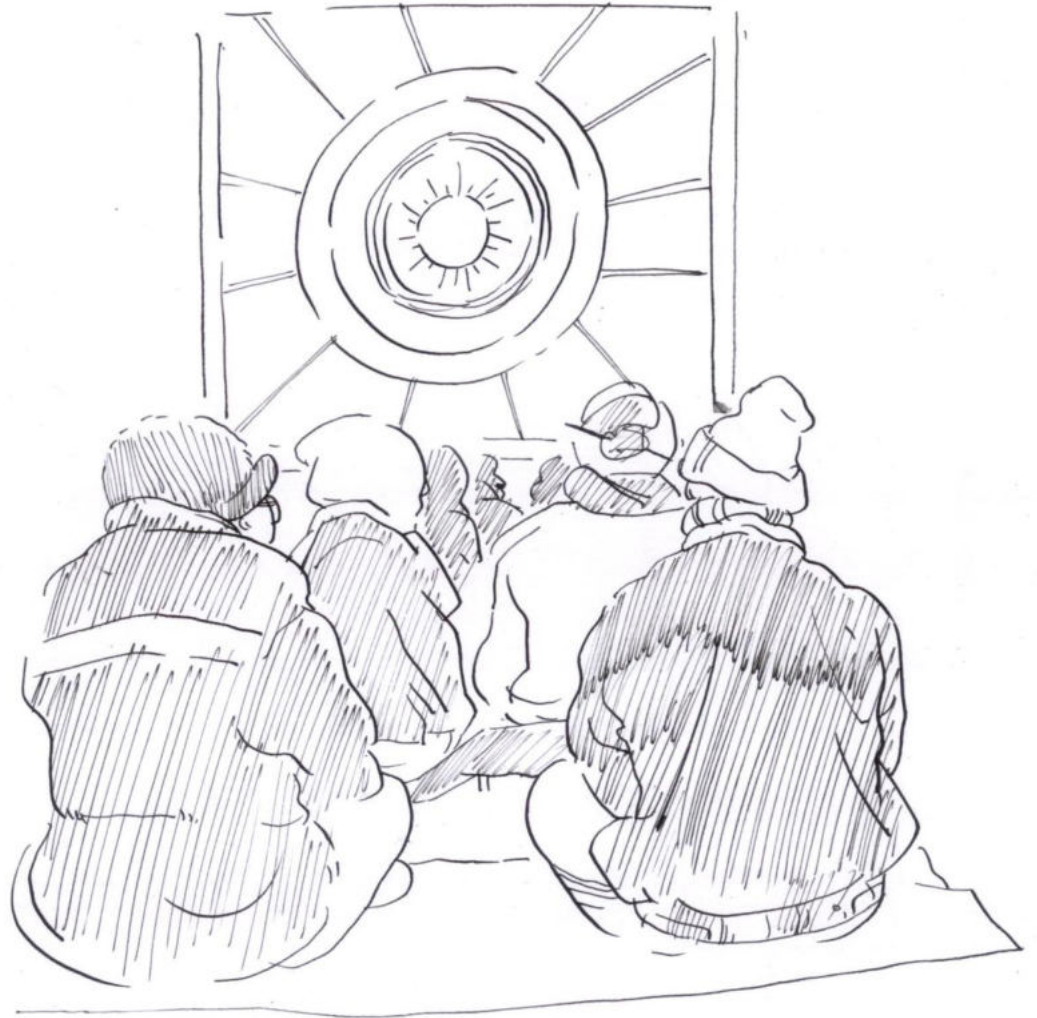
Donyi Polo Meder Nello, the Donyi-Polo temple

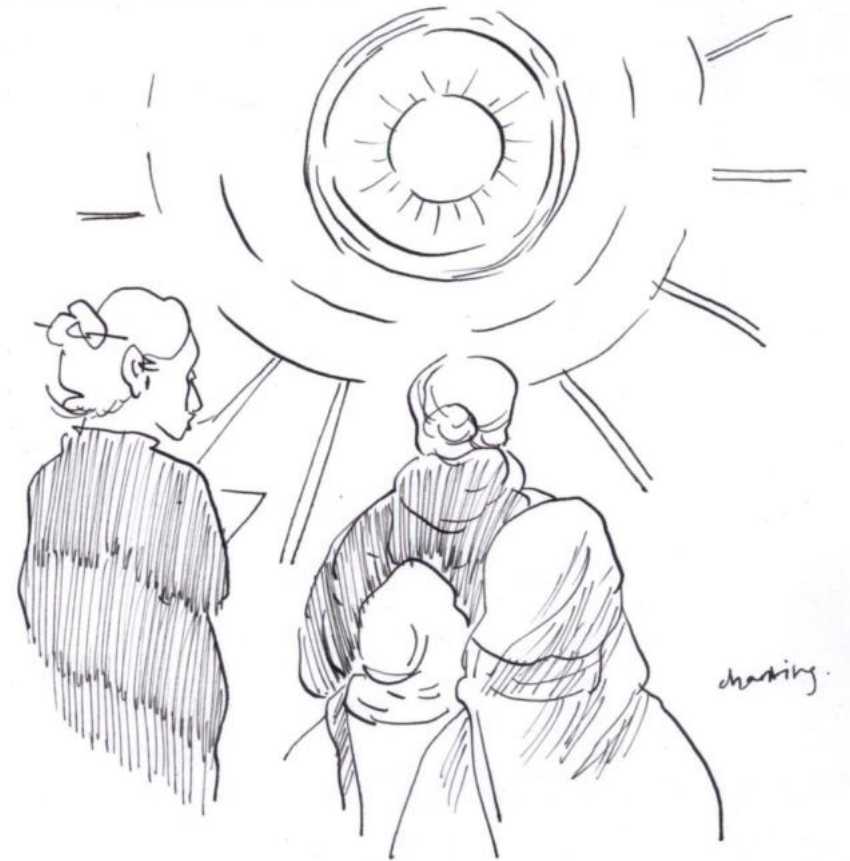


The Babo, an apatani ceremonial totem pole



The Donyi-Polo flag





Sketches inside the Donyi-Polo temple



Carolers lining up outside Hapoli, Ziro Valley

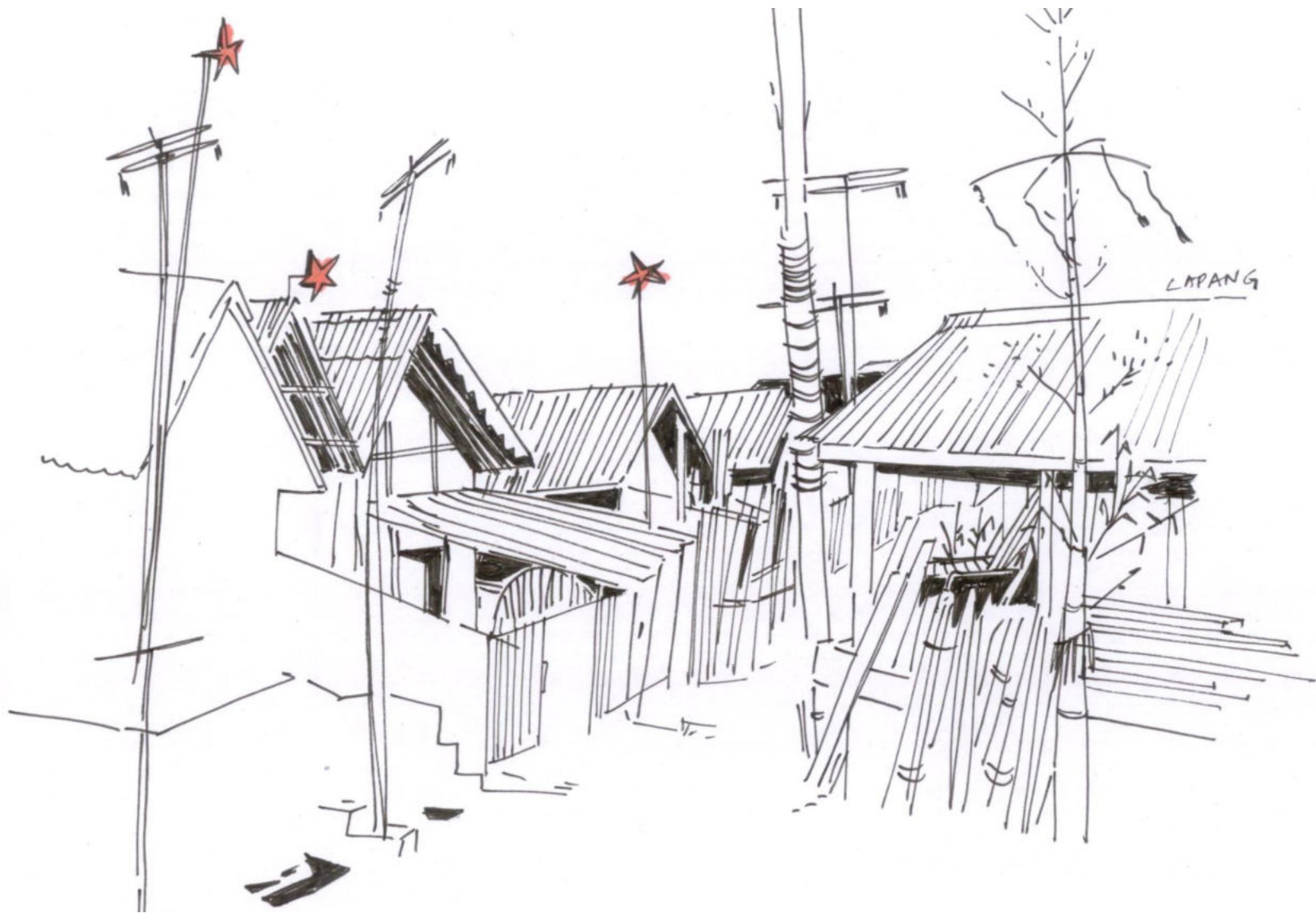
7. Religious Practices

b. Christianity

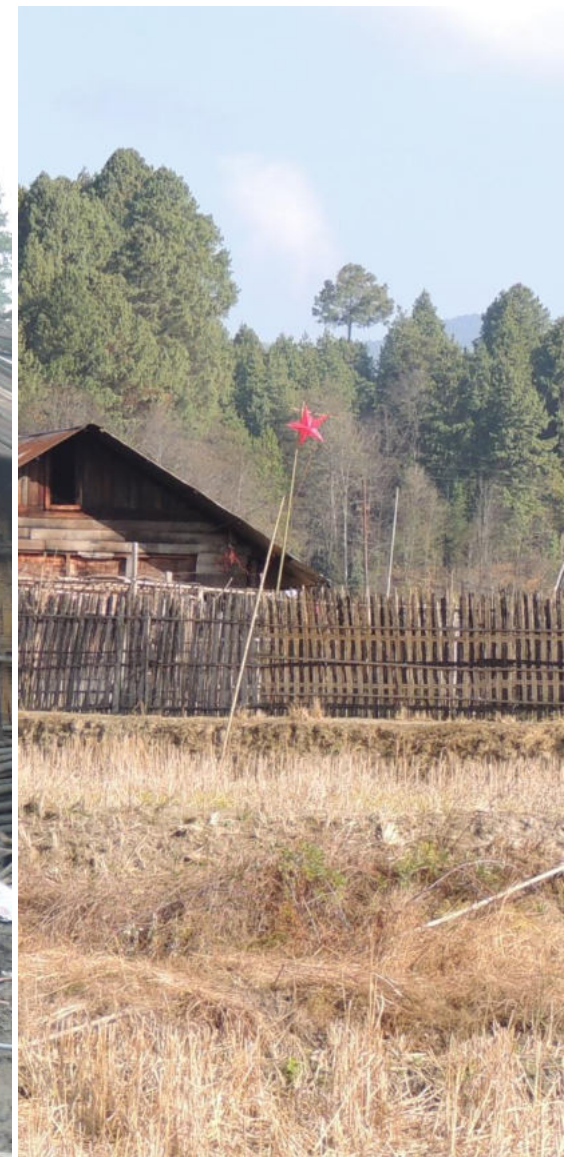
Christianity is also practiced by a number of Apatani households with the number of people being converted on the rise. There are apparent religious tensions between the animists and the Christians. Around 30% of Tanis have converted to Christianity, which is a low percentage if compared to their neighboring tribes. In the Nyishi tribe around 80% seem to have converted to Christianity.

The Donyi-Poloists resent the Christian community for their militant forms of propagation. Koj Morth said that Christianity here is at a nascent stage, where it is trying to impose on existing followers to breakaway from traditional customs and beliefs. It was sad to hear him say that the Pastors here are adamant that the believers not attend age old meetings and get together as most of the Apatani traditions are generally preceded by animal sacrifices. Things are worse during the major fest when there is amass animal sacrifice and alcohol being distributed amongst the various bastis. The Christians often clash among the Apatani during these festivals and vice-versa during Christmas as the Apatani have made it clear that they do not want Caroling to happen, there are often fights due to the lack of observation of this edict. Some of the churches are often asked to shift base to other location outside the village.

Like Donyi-Polo households, most Christian households also had a distinct signature. They either had a star over the main door of the house or a star hung up over a large bamboo, as a sort of makeshift christmas tree (or as a replacement for the traditional babo, one can presume)



Christian households in Dutta village



Christian households in *Hong village*



An apatani elder in Hija

8. Inter-tribe relations

The Apatani have had a fairly antagonistic relationship with their neighbouring tribe, the Nyishi. Recently, however summits and talks have been organised to promote better relations between the two tribes. In September 2015, a historic accord was signed. One of the major decisions that had been taken during this summit was to promote inter-tribe marriage among the Nyishi's and Apatani's. It may be mentioned that, at present the scenario of inter-tribe marriage among these two tribe is very rare. The Chief Minister also promised a financial aid of Rs 50000 for inter-tribe marriages.

The Gyotu is a social get-together of the Apatani and Nyishi tribesmen. This year, the function happened for the first time after nearly 50 years (1968). With the advent of the internet, the gap between the two tribes has decreased steadily. There were mentions of WhatsApp groups and spreading of photos and live videos taken online to increase the camaraderie and mark the momentous occasion.

However, there was still noticeable discord between the two tribes.



Apatani elders in Hija, dressed in government garb.



Nyishi tribesman



Apatani folk welcome the Nyishi



The Gytu function, where Apatani and Nyishi break bread



Two apatani men wearing a Nyishi shawl and sword that has been gifted to them.



Apatani woman sporting the ceremonial tattoos in Hija village

9. Tattooing and Truths

The Apatanis practiced facial tattooing and modification until the 1970s. The females had two sets of tattoos: one running from the forehead to the tip of the nose, and another set on the chin. The males had a less elaborate tattoo on the chin in the shape of a "T". The females were the only ones practicing facial modification with the use of nose plugs, called *yapiñ hullo* in the local language.

A famous theory exists explaining the elaborate use of tattoos and facial modification. It states that the apatani women were once considered the most beautiful in the valley and fell victim to numerous kidnappings by the neighbouring Nyishi tribe. The tattoos were seen as a way to make themselves look less beautiful. On talking to the Apatanis however, this theory seems less and less likely. The use of tattoos and facial modification can be traced back to before the Tanis settled in the valley (from China or Burma). The absence of a traditional script makes tracing their history a little difficult.

Since the 1970's, the Apatanis have stopped the practice of facial modification. Some attribute it to increasing communal violence. Stopping the practice was seen as a way to increase communal harmony, to blend in with the rest of the tribes so one couldn't distinguish them based on facial appearance. Some think the practice became dated and irrelevant in an age where more and more locals would move to cities to practice different trades.



Kojmama's mother, *Dutta* village. Apatani elder, *Hija* village



Apatani elder at gyotu ceremony



Apatani women



Apatani woman reacting to the sketch I drew of her

VI. Conclusion

Much of the information available on the Apatani tribe today is fairly outdated and is based on observations made by ethnographers in the early 40's, when the Apatanis had just started having contact with the outer world. Since then, the tribe has seen a rapid rate of progress. Balancing their traditional customs and practices with the ways of the modern world seems like a difficult task, however. Most young Apatanis no longer practice agriculture and a lot of them are high-level government employees, corporate managers, entrepreneurs, doctors and engineers.

The landscape of the valley is slowly evolving. More and more buildings dot the landscape, and concrete and metal is slowly replacing the traditional bamboo. Most people seem to have adapted to this new way of life, and seeing the Apatani, all dressed up in traditional garb, their faces tattooed, yet working in a small grocer's shop is a strange sight indeed.

Despite all this, the Apatanis still seem grounded in their traditional values. The people working all over the country still return for important festivals, notable among which are Myoko in March and Murung in January every year.