

# **WRITING LOCAL HISTORY OF APATANIS**

## **Contesting For The Native's Voices**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social  
Sciences**



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2016

## DECLARATION

I, Rimi Tadu, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled 'Writing Local History of Apatanis: Contesting for Native's Voices' is the outcome of my own study undertaken under the guidance of Professor Kalpana Kannabiran, Professor and Director of Council for Social Development of Regional Centre, Hyderabad. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate of this Institute or of any other institute or university. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used by me in the preparation of this dissertation.

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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Writing Local History of Apatanis: Contesting for the Native's Voices" is the record of the original work done by Rimi Tadu under my guidance and supervision. The results of the research presented in this dissertation/thesis have not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate of this Institute or any other institute or university.

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## SYNOPSIS

Kure Chambyo or Kure Conflict of 1949, was the first and the last collective resistance put forth by the Tani community of Arunachal Pradesh ever since the first time an outsider showed up in their valley in 1889. The attack on the political and military outpost in Kure in the southwest of their valley was easily repulsed by well armed Assam Rifle army. It left one injured soldier and three Taniis dead on the spot and some more who succumbed to their injuries later. What followed is the years of repression by Indian military and administrators in nexus with few local agents appointed by the administrators. The event was neither commemorated nor is it re-told in public life. The archival study conducted during this research reveals that while the field level officials had mis-represented the event in official documents, further the file available in National Archival of India in New Delhi showed the missing alternative pages of the report. There is no available report or any account of the event or the copy of the same report in any of the regional or state Archives- in Dispur and Itanagar. The ethnographers like Critoph Von Furer Haimendorf and Ursula Graham Bower who followed the Tani since 1940s and wrote extensively about the Tani, maintained a complete silence on the event. The only published academic work by Stuart Blackburn which talks about the event, locates the event in a wrong time and blames the colonial administrators for the uprising. He also does not talk of the oppression that followed as an aftermath of the event. Whereas, the fact is, that the event culminated very much in independent India and left several painful memories.

However, the most challenging aspect of writing the local history of the event was in gathering the voices and narratives. Not only that there are very few people with first hand experience of the Kure Chambyo survived today, but also that many of them were not willing to speak about it. Those who spoke and shared have changed their perspective over time - or at least that is what they tried to impress upon this researcher- in the context of intense socialization and allegiance building process by the state. It is only through more deeper and longer engagement with their memory recollection and re-telling exercise that one is able to see the layers of meaning those narratives were trying to generate. Many spoke through their silences and many through their retracting and disclaiming strategies. The common thread connecting the narratives was that of sense of pain, fear, shame and dispassion. This thesis looked at

these layers of meanings and narratives which were constantly co-created by various internal (socio-cultural) and external (power political) factors. This thesis argues that there are multiple authors who are influencing the speaking of the narratives of Kure Chambyo, and thus, these needs to be stated out or brought forth.

As a result of this complex reality of past that is being narrated by people located in present, the study concludes that the templates of past, their experience, remembering and telling is ever shifting. The oral is as complex as the written. This thesis also concludes by asserting for a newer methodological framework that is required to write the history of a community which relies extensively upon an oral repository of their memories. Through an analysis of the oral stories and the oral histories, this thesis identified specific elements of oral tradition practices such as the use of tropes, mnemonics, art and lived experiences- through which Taniis sustains their memory, history and knowledge of their identity. However, the events which are more recent such as the Kure Chambyo event, which are not commemorated, needs more empowering and people centric methodology.

**Chapter 1.** Chapter one introduces the main premise and problems in historiography in India at present. Drawing from literatures the chapter point out towards a growing trend in history writing for more grounded and anti-hegemonic and anti-homogenizing history writing; and yet the absence of agency and perspective given to the people in defining their past and experience to people at margins and people whose history has been denied to them. Thus, the chapter lays the context for this dissertation in writing the local history of an event called Kure Chambyo of the Tanii community of Arunachap Pradesh, as the first and the last resistance or uprising put by the community against an outside authority in order to protect their autonomy. Thus, finally, the need for writing more local based and people centric history is stressed upon.

**Chapter 2.** Methodological concerns and possible framework of doing history, apart from the traditional and dominant understanding of doing historical research, among the community with no written accounts and whose past has been mis-represented and suppressed in official account is discussed in the chapter. Various decisions based on reflexive engagements with the cultural and political field and vulnerabilities of narratives and memories, led the researcher to be intuitive and responsive to the speakers. As a result a mixed and complex methodological framework was adopted.



**Chapter 3.** The chapter lay down the socio-cultural and political context of the community. It is within this context that the outsiders were experienced- the rupture of their geographical, social and cosmological autonomy. The chapter also discussed the customs, norms and practices of oral traditions which the subsequent chapters will show has a very specific and unique influences on the way Taniis imagine, experience, remembers, process and articulate their narratives.

**Chapter 4.** The chapter discusses a very intrusive national integration policies adopted by the state (British and Indian) for Arunachal Pradesh. The socialization and assimilation, creation of alliance and loyalty, and disconnecting the people from their defiant past were the main concerns of the policy makers. These policies pervasively succeeded in transforming and changing the narrative of pasts first and then the way it is remembered now.

**Chapter 5.** The chapter in its first section discusses and compare the legitimacy and vulnerabilities of using oral stories and official documents- as source of history writing. The second section brings all the official documents available on the Kure Chambyo event recorded as ‘Apatani Trouble’ in official record. The purpose of this chapter is first to document the event from written official accounts for the first time, and secondly to highlight how it has mis-represented the event, the reports created by field officials, lying to higher authorities in Delhi, and how there is an attempt of suppressing the document. Thus re-asserting the critical question on legitimacy of these official documents for writing history.

**Chapter 6.** The chapter accounts the oral histories of four selected individuals who had the first hand account of the event. Three men and one women tells their stories as they saw it, experienced it and now see it while narrating the event and their life. The chapter discuss the templates of these stories and the moments of their narrations as an event of their creation. The chapter also draws analysis of various elements in these oral histories.

**Chapter 7.** Drawing from various interviews and oral stories, this chapter looks at various technologies- tropes, mnemonics, lived experiences and the art of oration- of orality and oral traditions that preserves history of the community. Secondly, a more

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Even at the risk of being termed old fashioned I would like to thank almighty God first for this journey. Only I know how many times I completely surrendered to Him and on His instruments and everytime He blessed me.

It is to state the obvious that this thesis could have not been completed without my guide Professor Kalpana Kannabiran. I am thankful to her patience with me. She allowed the most necessary space that any scholar who wants to find her own roots and voice would need. My disappearances and self-ruminating threads of mails, jumping through time-scapes, she allowed it all only to pull the string or interjecting ideas whenever I drifted too afar. With her as my guide, there was a looming confidence within me that I can do this project. I learned a lot from her not only as a scholar but also as an individual- integrity, hardwork, disciplene, commitment and language skills. I also thank my Doctoral Advisory Committee member Asst. Prof. Bhangya Bukhya and Asst. Prof. Ajailiu Niumai for going through my drafts and listening intently to my presentations and always brining the critical and academic consiousness to this PhD project. I benefitted much from their inputs, suggestions and discussions.

I thank my precious family for everything that I needed apart from this academic exercise. For money, food, shelter, support, care, friendship, challenges, protection, prayers, and for this constant awareness of being loved and wanted. None of us were aware of what to expect or how to deal with it- to have a PhD scholar in the family - my 'absence' and 'presence', mood swings, late coming, talking to strangers, relatives and friends reporting to them of seeing me in their village, etc.. Jiro for being so beautiful, like soul balm. I thank all my friends- Subeno, Bhanu, Nandini, Akash, Uma, Eli, Guddi, Sanjay, Alex, Lydia, Boss Ramesh, Vaishali, Jafar, Kriti, Mamung, Titksha, Yaquta, Aoren, Muryang, Tumya, Imna, Akhono, Yamang, Victor, Joseph, Dominic, a beautiful family in Hyderabad- Laling and Seaya and daughters- for care and meals, and all wonderful people who contributed to this project and my life in more than many ways. The friends and well wishers at Council for Social Development, Hyderabad, in Library, Kitchen, Garden, Gate, Admin or Lounge, the

warmth and care they provided are invaluable.

I would like to extend my gratitude Council for Social Development Hyderabad, ICSSR, Delhi and Henry Martyn Institute for providing me with all the generous financial support in form of fellowship and stipend. Council for Social Development, Hyderabad, TISS Hyderabad and TISS Mumbai for the institutional support. All the staffs and friends I met in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, National Archive of India, Delhi, State Archive Dispur, Assam, State Archive Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh and Deputy Commissioner's Record Room, Ziro. I am grateful for all kind assistance in various libraries- Hyderabad Central University, Osmania University, North East Hill University, Rajive Gandhi University, Guwahati University, ICHR- NERS, North East Social Research Centre, Guwahati and various online sources.

The integral part of this study are the people who came forward and shared their stories. My informants and people who introduced me to them. As I am writing this page I am aware of many of my informant who passed away. Listening to their voices in my recorded interviews was a painful exercise and yet this assurance that their stories and voices will now continue to live. They have left a legacy for their younger generation. I am indebted to all my informants for their generosity and kindness for accepting my request to share to give their time and share their stories and speak their vulnerabilities.

This thesis would have not completed without the innumerable amount to generosity and kindness that I experienced during the entire period. I have grown and learned much as a person. I am humbled with gratitude to no end.

## Glossary of local words and terms used:

1. **Bulliang:** *Bulliang* is an inheritance based formal head men of the clan. He is ritual and political leader of the clan. In plural sense a group of Bulliangs gathered for a particular occasion are called as *Supung Bullian*. Here *Supung* means the society/community. Unlike in other communities with chieftainship system, Bulliang's authority is based on his ritual significance, public support and his personal influence. He is guided and advised by a council of village elders.
2. **Posa:** *Posa* is an amount to revenue paid by the Ahom rulers to the hill communities who owned the lands in foothills. This price was paid in order to avoid forceful extraction of rent by the hill tribes from the subjects of those rulers. During British colonial period the British administrators adopted this policy of peace transaction, however, not before terming it as 'blackmain money'.
3. **Lapang:** *Lapang* is a traditional wooden platform constructed in the middle of the village. This platform is used for important ritual performance, gathering place for men. Women are not allowed to climb on the Lapang.
4. **Jiro:** Jiro is the actual pronunciation of Ziro, as used by the locals.
5. **Tanii:** Tanii is used to identify the community as they identify themselves, instead of Apatani which is used in official records and by the outsiders to identify the community.
6. **Native:** The term 'native' is used here to represent an insider, as in the local or native person of the place or the community, not in colonial or pejorative sense.
7. **Gaonburas:** Gaonburas are the local agents appointed by the colonial British government in early days- mostly used as messengers or go-between, to deal with the tribal communities in the hills. Their role and authority, of course, was diversified by in-practice and utilization. Post independence, the Indian government adopted the system of Gaonburas.
8. **Head Gaonburas:** Head of the Gaonburas in the village.

9. **Nyibu**: Traditional village priest of the community.
10. **Kotokis**: Kotokis are another political agent appointed by the British government to deal with the tribal communities. However, unlike Gaonburas, Kotokis were officially appointed with paid salaries. This position however, no more exists in the administrative structure in the hills areas.
11. **Kure Outpost**: Kure Outpost was a political and military outpost of the British administrators with the its Sub-division headquarter base camp at Kimin. It was proposed by Captain Davy and was made functional and established by Captain Timothy Betts, the Political Officer of the Subansiri area in 1946. After his departure in 1947 post independence of India, the Indian administrators took over the outpost. This outpost was the transit point for all political and military activity of the government in the further interior areas which was still unknown and not visited by the officials.
12. **Maji**: *Maji* is a Tibetan origin and design prayer bell made of brass metal and iron. Due to their transaction and ritualistic value there are highly priced. Depending on their origin legends and their look, they are priced for exchange.
13. **Talo**: Talo is also considered as Tibetan origin and design brass or iron plate. Used as a gong during festival, like *Majis*, it constitutes as material bell. Depending on their associated legends and looks, they are priced.
14. **Khoter**: Bamboo or wooden sticks used as to signify values of items or persons, and accounting for them at the time of negotiation or conflict resolutions.
15. **Gondu**: As a perfect noun *Gondu* is a person who is considered as an expert in oral traditions and knowledge, and hence also gifted with wisdom and skills to make negotiations or work as an advocate during any case or conflict to represent the case. Otherwise, *Gondu* is also used as to signify the conflict resolution negotiation process where different parties sits and negotiate in presence of observers.
16. **Yalu**: Conflict.
17. **Yachu**: A strong malevolent spirit associated with violence, conflict and disharmony. One is therefore, called to be careful with oral traditions

narrations as it might involuntarily invoke *Yachu* or else one might be speaking under the influence of *Yachu*.

18. **Chambyo:** *Chamyo* means a conflict which involves a group of people. Often it signifies a combative conflict.
19. **Political Officer:** Political Officers were the administrative head of the designated region or district in Hill areas by the British government. The Political Officers were vested with political, judicial and military power. The position was adopted by the Indian government but later renamed it as the Deputy Commissioner of the district minus military control.
20. **Assistant Political Officer:** Assistant Political Officer were appointed to assist the Political Officer, and act in-charge in latter's absence. Post-independence, the position was renamed as Assistant Deputy Commissioner.
21. **Political Interpreter or Jemadar:** Political Interpreter and Political Jemadar are terms used interchangeably. It is an officially appointed person to assist the government officials or administrators in the Hill areas. During British period, they were appointed among the loyal citizens in the plains who had knowledge of language and regions in the Hills. Political Interpreters played important role in the activities and decisions of administrators.
22. **Dapo:** An agreement made and sanctified with certain rituals performed along with between two individuals or groups.

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# **CHAPTER 1:**

## **INTRODUCTION: PEOPLING THE HISTORY**

### **1.1. Introduction**

History writing has gone through tremendous transformation. As more interdisciplinary and non-traditional approaches of doing history are emerging, the newer set of enquiries, subjects and methods are also emerging. As sharper and more critical studies which are not only re-looking at the past but also studying the historians and contexts of history productions.

Born under the colonial British rule, the modern history writing in India inherited the structural power relations inherent in colonial epistemology (Guha 1997; Thapar 1992; Said 2003; Scott 2003). Anthropology, the other discipline introduced by the British administrator to study the locals, was deployed to study the 'others' to the dominant locals- the adivasis and the tribes (Bhukya 2008 & 2012 & Xaxa 1999 & 2001). Thus, the voices of people who were powerless, subjugated, subalterns, people in peripheries, were filtered out by default in historical writings.

Further, in post-independence era, history writing became a significant exercise for nation building. In this quest for undoing the colonial history and writing their own history the historiography homogenized and produced grand narratives that subsumed 'the people' and the people at the margin. The history of India being traced through its rulers, dominant civilizations and spoke about the dominant struggles, caste, class, gender and leaders. The post-colonial historians saw this homogenising history as dominant nationalising history writing at par with oppressive colonial historiography (Amin 1997; Guha 1981 & 1997; Thapar 1992; Said 2003; Scott 2003, Skaria 1999,). Favouring fragmented history and more people



centric approaches to history writing, these new generation historians like subaltern group of historians, social historians, local historians, feminist historians, dalit and adivasi or tribal historians, urges for historical writings from more grounded locations, lived realities and to challenge or re-write the dominant histories (Amin 1997; Bhukya 2008 & 2012; Guha 1997; Hardiman 2006; Ludden 1984; Sarkar 1997; Scott 2003, Skaria 1999, and others).

This chapter has three objectives. First, a critical review of historiography in India in general and the northeast in particular, to show how nationalist and dominant historiographies had subsumed the people as a passive and homogenous mass and rendered them voiceless and unworthy of historicity. It argues for peopling the history by writing more people-centric history. Such histories might be difficult histories, even questioning the legitimacy of the nation-state of India, but they are part of lived reality of people part of this country and sheds crucial lights on the history of the country. Second part critically looks at the role played by anthropology and colonial anthropologists in writing the history and knowledge production in the northeast India, a home to more than 300 ethnic communities. In this, a particular event of Kure Chambyo of Tanii<sup>1</sup> community of Arunachal Pradesh in the Northeast India, is presented as the site of history writing as the Tanii experience the outside interventions and annexation into their once autonomous and ‘hidden land’. This event left many difficult memories, and more importantly over the period, very different interpretations and narratives have emerged as people now look back to reflect upon it. The third section of the chapter discusses the hypothesis that this study is proposing, the objectives and the guiding questions of the study. It will also introduce the different chapters of the dissertation.

## **1.2. Towards the Peopling of History: People’s history beyond the**

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Tani’i is the name used by the community to identify themselves while ‘Apatani’ is a misnomer used officially. In this document, both the terms will be used interchangeably as per the requirement of the texts. For more details see chapter three.

## **Subaltern Histories in India**

In the nationalist and dominant history narratives people are often moved into oblivion or merely presented as passive followers of their leaders and events (Thapar 1992; Guha 1981), unless they deviated from their conventional role as passive followers. The Chauri-Chaura incident, for instance is regularly featured in most of the freedom struggle narratives to make a distinction for bad behaviour who are then utterly condemned and disowned by the national leaders. Such narratives are given space in national history for purposes of disciplining, as a lesson on what is the expected and ideal role of the people/mass as followers and what not- as deviant, unruly subjects who create 'law and order' problems (Amin 1997; Guha 1997&1981; Hardiman 2006). Shahid Amin, in his distinguished revisit to the event through people's memory and narratives, shows how people acted in a good faith where they believed they did it for the freedom struggle and for their leader, Gandhi. Their actions emerged from unique characteristics of their context and background which was completely ignored while they were demonized as blood thirsty murderers. He spoke with participants decades later who were in their old age and shared memories of their struggles for the freedom fighter's pension- indeed for their recognition as freedom fighters.

***1.2.1. Can Subalterns Speak?*** Subaltern study group historians, especially under the leadership of Ranajit Guha, challenged such dominant narratives which further marginalized or invisibilized the historical reality of marginalized people or the subalterns. It talked about the multi-located freedom movement struggles of India, especially at the grassroots levels which are usually beyond the consciousness of the 'elite historians' (Guha 1986 &1998; Chandra 1969). Thus, common people's story which existed in oblivion and in inarticulate memories of history were woven together from multiple sources, articulated and reasserted as local history and social history.

However, subaltern history group are often critiqued for the missing voices of actual subalterns, as most of the subaltern historians themselves are not an insider or the subalterns. This means that the critical voices of the subalterns are still missing from the narratives. The voice that one hears in these histories is, thus, an echo of the subalterns, a refraction which passes through a certain prism of interpretation - sometimes amplified and sometimes structured into certain academic spectrums that subalterns themselves might not be conscious/aware of. Gayatri Spivak's debate on the subject in 'Can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak 1988) is highly illuminating. It exposed the thin line of difference when the subaltern speaks and when somebody else speak on their behalf as they come from different levels of consciousness. Thus, there is an ontological gap or difference in their socio-cultural and historical habitus from where each speaks and understands. For that matter, even one group of subalterns may not speak the same language as another.

Nevertheless, the subaltern historians have paved the way for more people centric history writing. By opening the debate for multiple interpretations to past and history in India, they have exposed the pattern of dominant and mainstream history writing that had callously disregarded and discounted the experiences and the versions of history of people in margins.

**1.2.2. People Centric History** While it is important to make distinction between the subaltern's voice and the voice that speaks on behalf of subalterns, it is also important to make a distinction that apart from this difference between the subaltern and the dominant power discourse, there are numerous groups of people or sections who might not easily fall into these categories despite their marginalized state of being. Such examples could be the numerous indigenous communities of the Northeastern region. These communities are not subalterns on their own but might become one when brought in contact with the dominant mainstream. They have their own indigenous knowledge systems and socio-cultural language pool to interpret and translate their own history. Within the region they might be the

dominant groups themselves. Although, power and dominance framework of subaltern studies, certainly helps in engendering and unpacking the hegemonic power relations in history writing, it tends to essentialise the entire reality of a section of people in society by reducing the entire scope of history writing into merely discourses on power relations. Therefore it is important to consider different historical categorization of people. Like about the histories of people in peripheries or the communities who were not part of the mainstream consciousness; Who do not keep written history records; Whose histories are threatening to mainstream and dominant historical narratives, especially the narratives of nation-state; What about the people whose histories were conspicuously not written and suppressed? Can their histories can be retraced through these erasures?

The people centric history is thus a process towards the ‘peopling’ of history. Bringing in the different and diverse interpretations to past based on diverse experiences and locations of those experience among people, by not treating people as a passive receiver of historical turns, by not clubbing or allowing the abstraction of people as a mass, by understanding their unique contexts and characters. How people lived their daily life? How their norms and traditions affected their life and perspective? How they made their decisions and choices? And how these cumulative behaviour, actions and thinking effected the turns and events of history? These are the questions which can help in peopling the history and free the history from its bondage to personalities and their politics, military and economy. It requires several reflexive involution as well as inclusive evolution of historiography. Newer methods and sources needs to be identified and used.

### **1.3. Historiography in Arunachal Pradesh**

Historically, due to its unique geographical location, the plains of Brahmaputra had an important role in the historical evolution of the entire region. It became the corridor for various civilisations and kingdoms to migrate in, settle down and re-

write the history of the area several times. Be it the accounts of various kingdoms who founded its kingdom in these plains and formed alliances or fought battles with hill people, for instance the Ahom chronicles called Buranjis which describes the state of affairs in plains and their policy interactions with the hill tribes; the struggles of imperialistic monopoly of colonial British rulers who left colonial records that began to penetrate deeper into the hills and started creating their account of hill people since 18<sup>th</sup> century or the post independence era when Indian government was establishing itself in the region and took over the hills. In all the cases, the power centres in Assam were the focal point from where narratives and interpretations were drawn. As a result the contour of historiography of the region, including the hill states bordering Assam, were determined by the exigencies of history scholarship in Assam. Thus, one of the main challenges for present-day historians, who are trying to write histories of various ethnic communities in the region, lies in liberating the historical narratives of various hill ethnic communities by dominant historiographies in the region.

Post-Independence of India, the entire region was brought under the union of India in a rapid succession often by means of force. Thus, constructing loyalty, integration and sense of nationalism towards the nation-state of India was crucial task of the policy makers. This was especially true for state of Arunachal Pradesh, then known as North East Frontier Agency, where several socialising and nationalising policy experiments were carried out (Tadu 2015). Thus, there was a recurrent and dominant official narrative theme to history writing in and about the state that continue to perpetuate the ‘internal colonialism’ that treats Hindu nationalism as integration to nation-state of India (Heredia 2003). These official narratives unproblematically authorize the dominance by the outsider over the once autonomous indigenous people as the history, as if they do not have history that is before or beyond the Indian history and as if they are ahistorical.

A review of historical literature in the region with focus on Arunachal Pradesh, reveals a pattern and it can be organised under a number of broad themes, discussed

below. Their characteristics, problems due to disciplinary biases, gaps and ways forward are discussed accordingly.

**1.3.1. *The Subject of History*:** Most of the historical research in Arunachal Pradesh seem to be obsessed with ‘discovering’ the linkages that establish the existence of the Indian (Hindu) past in the state (see in Ashraf 1990; Banerjee 2008; Bhattacharya 1965, 1975 & 1977, Raikar & Chatterjee 1980; Pandey (Ed.) 1997; Sharma 1984), the pre-mongoloid past of the region. Dutta (2008) divides the literature sources about the history of Arunachal into three periods: first, those from the ancient and medieval periods, which includes Hindu texts, the accounts of foreign travellers, records from Muslim historians, and the Buranji chronicles and other religious sectarian texts in Assam. These sources mention groups of people known as the Nishads, Kiratas, etc., which he construes as the tribal communities of this state, and hence, also confirms their existence since ancient times. Secondly, the colonial period: include official records, files, and documents meticulously prepared by British officials as well as reports prepared by travellers and anthropologists. The accounts thus provided the details about the state of tribal communities- their locations, socio-political life, economic state, their temperament and, more importantly, their relations with neighbouring countries. Thirdly, the post-colonial and post-Chinese aggression period: there are series of historical publications on Arunachal written both by in-service or retired officials, a few academicians and a few Arunachalees. They account for the development of the state as Indian territory, and its ancient connections with Hindu culture. Several books and articles focused on the contested McMahon line and strategic foreign policies adopted by India to deal with China. In 1950s, under the aegis of Verrier Elwin, then Advisor of Tribal Affairs, the Research and Publication department was established. These were the only early efforts at writing about the local communities which were based on oral accounts. Whereas the most historical research and writings were based on studying as archaeological sources: the monuments and archaeological vestiges like the Malinithan, the Tameshwari temple, Ita Fort, sites in Rukmininagar and Bhishmaknagar, the Buddhist

monuments and other similar structures.

The problem with this dependence on archaeological remains and literatures to write the history of the state is that these sites do not represent the people or the communities who inhabit the region. The archaeological sites, except for the Buddhist structures, are all located in and around the foothills and represents the various dynasties and civilisations in the plains of Assam. Only a few archaeological sites, such as Parsi-Parlo, showed evidence of Neolithic inhabitation is located in the interior area. The ancient Hindu texts, the Puranas, which are often quoted to identify the region as ‘Prabhuparvat’, need more rigorous study before their inclusion as historical fact. The subject focus on establishing ‘Indian links’ would thus dislocate the natives. It is only when local scholars come forward and bring the focus on oral traditions as source of their history and past that the history of people with no writing scripts can be written.

***1.3.2. Representation and appropriation in writings:*** As discussed above, most of the existing academic texts in India dealing with Arunachal Pradesh would unproblematically identify this hill state through the Hindu religious texts (see in Ashraf 1990; Raikar & Chatterjee 1980; Pandey (Ed.) 1997; Sharma 1984 and others). Such presentations are incorporated even in official narratives and documents such as state or district gazetteers. The Provisional Census of India 2011, published by Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, describes Arunachal Pradesh as:

Arunachal Pradesh finds mention in the literature of “Kalika Purana” and the Mahabharata. This place is the Prabhu Mountain of the “Puranas”. It was here that sage Parashuram atoned for his sin, sage Vyasa meditated, King Bhismaka founded his kingdom and Lord Krishna married his consort Rukmini... (Pg. 45).

The official endorsement of historical claims based on such religious mythologies is problematic on various grounds. It does not represent the people who actually inhabit the land, who are historically, socially and ethnically distinct from main

Hindu civilization. The people identified as the Kirata or Asuras in Mahabharata and Upanishadas, are demonized by their description and treated as savages or as an object of patronage. The scholars had unproblematically extrapolated these identities to all Northeastern or various trans-Himalayan communities. Such historicisation is problematic on two grounds- first it appropriate these evidently distinct communities into the Hindu-nation folds; secondly it displaces people from their history and rights as the indigenous owner of the land by claiming their land as part of Hindu nation.

Often, mainstream scholars impatiently describes the region in broad strokes and superficially interpreted and juxtaposed to fit in the larger narratives. The problem of such presentations lies in when the people and their histories are decontextualized. For instance, the resistance put up by the hill communities against the interferences and colonial interventions by the British rulers are interpreted and appropriated along with the prevalent freedom movements narratives in the country and in Assam.

**1.3.3. *Scholarship*:** Until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, historians, both the outsider and non-tribal historians as well as the early historians from the region itself, were not able to overcome the deep-rooted impact of colonial scholarship established by the European administrators-cum-historians/ ethnographers in the region. The new generation historians from the region, such as Manorama Sharma, Amalendu Guha and Sajal Nag, are therefore critical of unproblematic reading of the eminent classical historians such as S. K. Bhuyan, H. J. Barpujari, Maheshwar Neog, J. B. Bhattacharjee, R. M. Lahiri, etc. for their non-critical accounts of colonial history and biases against tribal resistance to colonial rule (See Guha 1977; Nag 2011; Sharma 1998). Following the traditions initiated by colonial historians of the region, such as Edward Gait, Alexander Mackenzie, Robert N Reid, and Francis Hamilton, who accepted colonialism as a fact of life and hence its expansion as a moral obligation of the white man, these historians mostly studied the anglo-Assamese and anglo-tribal ‘relationship’ as their subject interest.



For instance, H. K. Barpujari, the eminent and classical historian who translated volumes of Ahom chronicles called Buranji and argued for the recognition of such texts as important source of history, had uncritically endorsed certain beliefs and biases in his writings. In words of Manorama Sharma:

When one reads the word ‘Problem’ in the titles of the first two works ‘Problems of the Hill Tribes of North East India, Volume I and Volume II’, one naturally expects that it would deal with the various problems the hill tribes of the North East faced when colonial rule began to penetrate into those areas. But on reading the book one finds that it is a record of the problems the British government faced while dealing with the hill tribes of the North East frontier. (Sharma opcit.:33)

Even the names such as Sailo, Lyngdoh, Paite are spelled as ‘Sylo’, ‘Lyngdow’, and ‘Poito’, as corrupted by British writers (Sharma opcit: 33). The new generation historians very emphatically press for de-colonialising and critical re-appraisal of colonial records and the histories that are generated out of these records and such literatures. They suggests that newer methods, sources and parameters needs to be adopted such as studying the oral histories, oral texts and traditions, and going beyond the British or even Ahom historiography. However, unfortunately even the new generation historians could not concede to the fact that colonization of the region is still continuing. The structural appropriation of land, people and their history, the absolute constitutional governance and the imposition of national history and infiltration of dominant culture through various medias of socialization under the Indian state is continuing in more hegemonic ways. In fact they seem to unconsciously imitate the arguments by colonial historians in defence of colonialism and see dissent as a problem. For instance, after so much intellectual thrashing of traditional and colonial historians in the region for not problematizing the colonisation of the region, ironically in his concluding remarks Sajal Nag criticises the historians from the regions for their ‘regionalist tendency’, which he fears ‘resulted in unnecessary pride and prejudices which are detrimental to national interests’ (Nag 2011: 245).

However, as more and more tribal people, both laymen and scholars, are becoming conscious of the diminishing pool of local and traditional knowledge, efforts are being made to document their oral traditions.

In recent times, several writing by Arunachalees themselves have emerged (see Mibang 1993; Nyori 1993&1995; Osik 1995; Riddi 2002; Tada 2003, etc.), written from the insider's perspective by using their respective traditional knowledge pool, such as oral traditions, as the source of writing their histories. These studies generally found official documents inadequate and the existing historical literatures irrelevant in terms of providing meaningful information about their tribes.

However, still most of these works remain mere description and documentation work. We are yet to see this effort grow into more methodological explorations, analytical and theoretical engagements. There is so much scope and need for more political and critical studies as well. Unfortunately, due to the state's long historical socialisation and hegemonic national integration programmes, even locals scholars fall for the same non-critical analytical framework, often resulting in re-production of similar historical accounts and narratives about their own people in the fashion that outsiders have presented them. This further blurs the possible debate on locations of emic and etic perspectives in history writing.

**1.3.4. *The Narrative:*** In case of Northeast in general, very often what is presented as the history of the Northeast actually turns out to be the history of Assam. Such confusion, or rather conflation, happens when one is trying to understand the history of the region from the perspective of state formation or when one is trying to study the history of the hill region in relation to dominant or established history which use traditional historical sources such as available texts and artefacts of the past. The trends of history writing in Assam produced a distinct knowledge system of a type that is usually created to serve those in power, and hence uses a language and terms that subsume and disempower the people in hill areas. The first

comprehensive historical documentation took place under the aegis of Britishers, by Edward Gait, who is acknowledged as the ‘Father of Modern Assamese History’. Barpujari School of historians started the reclamation of the history of the region from the colonial writings (Nag 2011:231). This school popularised the genre of history dealing with hill tribes and colonial establishments in hills. However, their narratives, as discussed earlier, were still highly dependent on records produced during the colonial period and often uncritically carried its biases along as discussed earlier. The historical writings created out of such official documents will obviously depict a picture from the perspective of the British administrators (see for instance Choudhury 1982; Sikdar 1982; Barpujari 1970; Reid 1942 & Mackenzie 1884) where the hill people are depicted as the aggressor and the British subjects living in the foothills as the victim. It would not concede that those foothills areas belong to hill communities or discuss the losses in terms of land, resources and revenues that the hill people had to incur in their foothill regions due to British occupation of the areas.

In Arunachal most of the historical narratives follow the similar contours of a civilising mission and uncritically record the administrative development of the state as the history of Arunachal. Various publications, such as Barpujari (1970), Bhattacharjee (2000), Choudhury (1982), Chatterjee (1991), Dubey (1975), Dutta and Tripathy (2008), Luthra (1961 & 71), Mackenzie(1884), Phukan (2002), Reid (1942), Riddi (2002), Rustomji (1955), Sikdar (1982), etc. look at the political and economic interactions between the plain and the hill people. These narratives describes the hill people as uncivilised, barbaric and war-like hill tribes who would raid and plunder the villages in the foothills, which while forced the Ahom rulers to stay at the bay but compelled the Britishers to extend to hills to protect their imperialistic interests at the foothills. The history narratives of post-independence developments are written mere like chronological ordering of events and progresses of the administrative developments and policies in the state. Exceptions are in the likes of strategic foreign policy relation historical writings by Nari Rustomji (1955). In post-independence historiography terms like ‘interference’ and ‘annexation’

which were used for British administrative activities and expansion in the region were translated into 'governance' and 'administration', and 'resistance' put up by the people against the Britishers are now feared as possible 'defiance', 'separatism' or 'insurgency' (Tadu 2015).

However, the greater problem of these narratives is that it does not seem to recognize the need for historical narratives of the people, which could be independent and autonomous of any state governance system. Their historiography would be of a non-statist past, and thus the coming of a state system could be seen as an aggression and destruction of their autonomy and socio-political system. It is very possible that their histories could challenge the dominant history narrative and even delegitimize the existing nation-state.

**1.3.5. Methodology:** As discussed already, the methodology adopted in history research plays a crucial role. The methodology is closely tied to the ideological and theoretical framework of the research. Several historians have demonstrated an ideological blindness by completely depending on only certain sources, such as colonial records, religious texts and state-erected monuments. It was a theoretical blindness of several historians in the region in general and Arunachal in particular to think that only certain kinds of narratives exist. It was not possible for them therefore to dislodge the state-centric narrative and structural relationships that such a kind of scholarship creates. Neither could they understand why people-centric local histories are necessary, and what the outlines and content of local history actually could be, apart from mere documentation of oral histories. The research questions and objective that were drafted were already biased, and embedded in certain ideologies and interests. A newer methodology should be rigorously built, and embedded in theoretical and methodological frameworks that would empower the people's voices and their history. This is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

#### **1.4. Memory as a Space for Contestation and Politics**

Another important trend on history writing from the ground or people-centric approach looks at memory as an important source for writing or re-writing the past. In India, memory - or rather commemoration and post-commemoration - has been an important subject in politics. Stephen Legg (2011) finds that despite its prevalence, it was only in the post-colonial period, especially after the subaltern study turn that the memory has been critically looked at again. He identified two main trends among the Indian writers trying to theorise the 'violence of memory': the first one looks at memories of violent acts, and the second one looks at the violence these memories can do to those who recollect them. Methodologically these studies are carried out through 'anamnesis' projects, critically rereading the archives, and by seeking out the stories and experiences of the subalterns to bring new interpretations (Legg 2011:290).

A good number of local history research projects in India have been done on memory and their narratives for writing newer and alternative histories. One reason could be that smaller, marginalised and so far considered insignificant groups of people or communities do not keep written records and hardly get recorded adequately in official documents. The researchers are left with no option but to ask people about their experience through their memories.

However, memories are a contested ground because of the layers of complexity involved. Narrating memories is an act of remembering things that are then cognitively articulated. The articulation is an act and interplay of communication and interpretation. Various factors ideologies, one's mental state such as trauma and denial, and social and political obligations of speaking or not speaking, factor into these interpretations. Therefore, memory will always remain an intangible and temporal reality that is derived or extracted out of recollections that are accessible only to the narrator. Another layer of complication comes when one talks about a collective memory, which is generally based on the collective and common

experience of different individuals of the same event or cultures. It is created after several rounds of collective ‘proof readings’ and some kind of formalisation or authorisation that creates a particular narrative format for it.

Excavating a very dominant narrative of Chauri-Chaura, ‘Event, Metaphor and Memory’ by Shahid Amin, an influential work in subaltern studies, critically re-examines the event as it took place and as it was experienced by villagers who were invisibilised by nationalist and moralistic dominant narratives. This work, for the first time, gives agency to the people who were actually involved in the case and how they define their experience of the event, the criminalisation and then – after a long time - their recognition as freedom fighters, and their struggles for freedom fighter’s pension (also discussed earlier). The author preferred to juxtapose the local narratives and national narrative to draw a distinct and comparative analogy, to show the distance between the reality and the popular belief. However, the author only managed to repeat - and hence reiterate - an already established narrative style as practised among subaltern historians, that is speaking for the subalterns rather than giving actual voice and space to speak for themselves. It invokes again the question, ‘Can Subalterns Speak?’ as was once hotly debated (see Chakraborty 1988, for a fuller debate).

Another strand of localised social history writing based on memory analysis features in Emma Tarlo’s ‘Unsettling Memories’, which digs deeply and emotionally into memory sites laid in the areas which were once refugee settlements, and even still are treated as such. Unlike Shahid Amin’s work, Emma Tarlo’s attains its life and meaning by dwelling on the social and emotional reproduction of the Emergency period. She uses physical locations to discuss social positions. She also enmeshes the memories of people’s experiences of trauma with the wide range of narratives, printed literature and documents created both by the state and their opponents (even under state suppression). Her work is distinct from other scholarship on narratives of the Emergency period: instead of lumping

together the stereotyped categories of ‘intellectuals as the emotional sufferer, the bureaucrat as the active participant and the poor as the passive victims’, she delves deeper and presents occasions where people have consciously reinvented their situation of oppression to gain profit from people who were more marginalised and vulnerable than themselves. The same theme re-emerges in another article of hers - ‘From victim to agent: Memories of emergency from a resettlement colony in Delhi’ - where she discusses how the victim becomes ‘the perpetrator of further victimhood’, in a very “strange” way that people would even stop seeing or articulating oneself as victim. From victim to co-victim and to co-perpetrator.’ She calls it as ‘unnatural response’ coming from participants under compulsion. What she calls as ‘correctional narratives’ shows how people now remember and interpret what they did during the period as if to set their scores straight. While they acknowledged their wrong doings, they are also realizing what the state was doing was wrong.

However once again, even in this writing, the people become merely actors, or criminals (when they do not speak for themselves), while the author becomes the proprietor of their voices and speak for them. Thus the actors becomes the ‘active victim’, ‘non-passive poor’ or people who ‘subverted the system’ by turning apparently oppressive policies to their advantage’, with ‘unnatural responses’ (pp. 27-29). However, by defining the different sections of people acting and participating in the entire process in their different capabilities, it places the responsibility of oppression onto the people and draws attention away from the oppressive system itself. Such narrations have a numbing effect on the oppression narratives and actual experiences by distributing the responsibility to people. Oppression becomes more ‘social’, a kind of human condition, a norm, legitimised by common practice. For instance, the widespread practice of corruption becomes an acceptable subject by bringing people as its active participant. It is now difficult to identify or touch upon corruption’s cause and practice.

Also, such presentation or representation of people's lives completely ignores the pre-existing power system in the society, and hence very easily misunderstands social oppressors and the oppressed as simply people i.e. people perpetrating violence against other people. Not as men forcing or sexually exploiting women; not as upper caste and economically better-off people with houses and jobs, manipulating the lower caste and poverty stricken sections of population. The policies were blanket and homogenising but it was used and manipulated differently by different sections of people. So does it affect their narratives as well? Or are we basing our story only on what they did, rather than what they are saying or trying to say? Or what they were thinking and believed? Apart from highlighting the state's role in generating certain narratives and equally in opposing narratives generated from civil society groups and individuals, she did not discuss the other power relations and social structures operating in determining/ targeting or selecting the victims, or how they affect experiences, memories and narratives,- as in the very title of her book, the 'unsettling memories'.

Another important series of works on the state's interventions in the creation of memory and history by commemorating the past through museums, monuments and official recognition especially in the case of the Northeastern state of Manipur is written by Jangkhomang Guite. His articles 'Remembering the Second World War: memory, politics and deception' (2015), 'Commemorating the death of 1891 in Manipur' (2015) and 'Monuments, memory and forgetting in postcolonial North East India' (2011) trace the colonial and then post-colonial politics of 'creating' history by establishing national, and also ethno-communal, narratives. The war memorials, monuments and recognitions of martyrs of the 1891 Anglo-Manipuri war and the Second World War were established. The set of martyrs (mostly colonial officials) and memorial monuments acknowledged and celebrated during the colonial period were de-recognized in the post-colonial era, or left to decay gradually due to neglect. In their place, new names of war heroes were celebrated: those who, instead of fighting alongside the British army, fought against it. He points out how the meaning of "martyrs" changed along with the change in regime,



and how the state is insistent in creating and commemorating these figures to create nationalist memories. This process also led to a competition of sorts among different ethnic groups to find their place in the list, and also leveraged the already dominant community to become more powerful. The aspiration of getting their respective community and local heroes recognised led to their assumption of and co-option into nationalist identities.

Jangkhomang Guite, being an insider, could very successfully extract and separate out the complex narratives of claims and counter claims played out in the memory and commemoration of monuments, events and places. As a historical writer his sources are all the colonial and post-colonial official and personal documents, and he put them together to form an enriching narrative. However, this work still is more or less a local history certainly, but it is overtly dependent on officially created records and documents, and analyses the official commemoration in monuments and museums. As a result, this history ends up being a state history, written out of state memory rather than the people's history. His criticism of only the British colonial administration for their selective commemoration of war heroes, rather than being able to see that the Indian government followed a similar pattern, makes his history nationalist history. In an attempt to undo what the colonists had done, the post-colonial state were indifferent to the possibilities of multiple narratives and histories of people who were minorities or marginalised. These are conscious attempts of the state and the dominant group to leave a certain kind of impression on common and public memories of the past. However, he fails to underscore the state's appropriation of the history by authorisation. Through official sanctions and establishment of monuments, museums and publications, the state becomes the authorising agency of what becomes a historical fact and what does not. So what is reproduced as public 'history' is actually the history of the state, an official version, and it should be recognised that it is - or can be - different from non-state history, and also that depending upon which state comes to power, the version of history can change.

The irony that becomes too obvious is that Guite's criticism of history writing seems to stop when the British colonial period ends. Afterwards, he seems to have unquestioningly accepted the legitimacy and authenticity of the state and nationalism being a sufficient moral motivation to define and delimit the scope of history. An author who is so critical of British colonial history writing and such oppressive and self-serving processes of historicising ironically does not see similar processes continuing when the state is interested in acknowledging and writing only a particular nationalistic history which privileges a section of dominant people. It spills out differently into the socio-political life and memory of the people. Talking about the case of Ram Janmabhumi, Sumit Sarkar in his 'Writing Social History (1997: 4) writes that such 'manufactured common sense' overpowers the logical and historically factual arguments of secular historians. What is more disturbing, however, is the fact that such 'common sense' histories are manufactured, not overnight but very systematically over a long period of time and with the support of a dominant power base and legitimising ruling group. It is the callous and poor quality educational textbooks that produce and re-produce such 'common sense' history and the structure of dominance.

Whether the state narrative or the dominant narrative, both undermine and often suppress the existence of alternative, diverse, subjugated and counter-narratives. These histories often belong to regions, small communities, subalterns or people subjugated even within the communities. They mostly come from people's own memories that are as diverse as their experiences. They can be subjective, and their individual interpretations can be multiple as well as layered, and hence their narratives also are diverse.

An important trend in local history writing was documented by Martin Gaenzle in the Himalayan region. Martin Gaenzle was the editor of 'Representing local histories in Himalayas' for the European Bulletin of Himalayan Research (EBHR),

originated from the panel “Representing local history in the Himalayas”, which was convened by Gisèle Krauskopff and Martin Gaenzle during the 17th European Conference on Modern South Asia Studies in Heidelberg (September 10 - 11, 2002). Documenting this history-writing trend, in 2004 he wrote:

Professional writers of history in the Himalayan region have been predominantly concerned with larger social units, dealing with issues such as the formation of states, colonial rule and, above all, nation-building. This applies both to traditional chronologists, who are in charge of an official, often “dynastic”, history, and to academic historians who are interested in the genesis of the modern political order. Yet, the memory of the past is not the privilege of professional (or semi-professional) historians, and there is a broad field of more localized “indigenous” genres of history-making that exists alongside the dominant discourse, complementing, ignoring, (creatively) misunderstanding, and –often–countering the latter. Many ethnic groups, for example, defying the homogenizing attempts of national history-writing, have recourse to traditional representations of their own past, often rewriting previous accounts and trying out new forms of depicting historical events. (p.7)

However, rather than petitioning for the mere insertion of local history into the larger history accounts, they are ‘making present again’ (Gaenzle 2003: 8): they present a contestation, against the presentations of the past by dominant histories. There is always a local take on the national trends, and local implications for national processes. These local history writings are an attempt at writing histories of diverse ethnic communities in Himalayan regions stretching from Kashmir-Ladakh to the North Eastern region. Their focus is on alternative interpretations of dominant histories through the perspective of the people ‘forgotten’ by history, and also on writing a history about people who had never been written about before. And they present the very unique voice of the speakers of the community.

What makes these histories distinct is their ontological experiences of being the communities in the region. The past here is an ethnographic phenomenon, thus it is not merely recorded but is re-constructed within its unique socio-cultural context and reality. Thus, history written in this way is also a cultural representation

(Gaenzsle 2003) requiring an ethnic imagination of the past as they try to produce the history. Jenkins (1993) makes the distinction between the ‘past’ as an experience of what had happened already and the ‘history’ as re-production of the past by writing it down. This means gathering experiences and information from people’s memories. However, in an oral and cultural society, people’s memories are embodied in diverse sources. This means the native or local expressions and information are gathered for the representation of their narratives, either in form of different genres of oral traditions such as legends, myths and folk stories, or life stories. Martin Gaenzsle points out that other than the oral sources and forms, historical narratives are embodied in forms such as art forms, dances, architecture, rituals, geographical landmarks, etc.. Their histories (historical memories) are preserved by being enacted in daily cultural life.

### **1.5. Anthropology in Northeast India: “*Handmaid of colonialism*”**

Anthropology, often called the handmaid of colonialism, has had far-reaching structural impacts on the lives of indigenous communities studied. Unlike historians, colonial administrators-cum-anthropologists in the region had an additional mission of ‘befriending’ their subject communities in order to bring them into the colonial fold (see Graham 1953). Often they were found to be standing on the wrong side of colonial interest in the face of the exploitation they witnessed that tribal communities were undergoing. According to Kathleen Gough (1968), anthropologists of the colonial period were torn between three loyalties. One was towards their imperial sponsors who financed their study; the second, towards the people and society they were studying, who were in conflict with colonisers; and third, towards their colleagues, academia and science in terms of their commitment to objectivity. Nevertheless, most anthropologists accepted colonialism as a norm, and even necessary. Therefore, despite their stands they did not question the legitimacy of the western imperialism or colonialism (Lewis 1973) in the numerous colonies where they were working.

As an instrument in the hands of colonizers, anthropology had created unique structural relationships. Not only the information it generated about the communities were used against it in colonizing them systematically, but also it created a power relation through the control over the knowledge production system. According to Talal Asad (1975), as a discipline of the ruling power, the ones who were creating that knowledge had the ‘pre-hand’ in deciding, objectifying and theorising the ‘knowledge’ in the fashion of western rationality. It preconditioned the practices of anthropology, the way it theorises, perceives alien societies and objectifies them whilst claiming political neutrality (Asad 1975:17). Therefore today the integrity of anthropologists is critically questioned for the far-reaching impact of their work – beyond what they could comfortably accede to.

Unfortunately, the stereotypes and the ‘mental constructs’ (Lewis 1973) created by the discipline feed very well into pre-existing biases and power relations. Thus, the colonial stereotypes about the tribal communities were uncritically adopted wholesale by the ruling elites who took charge over knowledge production post-independence in India, as it suited the status quo. It re-affirmed their superiority whilst confirming the tribals as uncivilised, underdeveloped and impoverished - hence, not ready to govern themselves. According to Ajay Skaria (1998) “nationalist primitivism” in the postcolonial era is more dangerous, in the sense that through various developmental policies there are constant systematic attempts to undermine the way of life of these communities. Thus, anthropology as a discipline needs a more self-reflexivity and critical conscience in reading and producing the knowledge.

Instances of racism are an everyday experience for many Northeasterners living in mainland India (McDeui-Ra 2011; Sonpimple 2012). Such practices of discrimination and violence stem from the colonial presentation and representations coupled with power imbalances between the mainland and peripheries and pre-existing socio-cultural problems. The lack of representation and mis-presentation

about the ethnic and marginalized communities are the culprits of the situation.

Secondly, the problem of representation arises mostly from hegemonic nationalist history writing driven by the ‘one nation, one history’ approach. Such history invariably filters out any ‘other’ history. In other words it denies the existence of innumerable divergent, independent and even secessionist histories that exist at the local level.

Undocumented, the experiences of people exist only in their personal or collective memories. And these memories are systematically marginalised and destroyed when they are not written about and only one dominant narrative is promoted. Therefore, there is an urgent need to write about people-centric, un-official/informal history. Writing people’s history would lead to narratives of more divergent realities, locations and alternative interpretations of the pasts.

## **1.6. The Kure Chambyo: The Rupture in the Past-Future Memories and Narratives**

*1.6.1. The Kure Attack or the Kure Chambyo.* The Kure Chambyo event of Taniis provides a site of multi-layered memories and narratives. The event took place in 1949 when a large number of Tanii men attempted an attack on the Political and Military outpost established by the British government, which was then taken over by Indian government after independence. This attack, led by thousand of armed Tanii men had the moral and political sanction of the community and became one of the most important event in the recent Tanii history which brought radical turns into the life in the Tanii valley. Modern and well-armed soldiers of the Assam Rifles Regiment easily repulsed the attack. However, the attack was followed by years of retaliatory activities carried in the Tanii valley resulting in annexation and oppressive punishment terms. The entire event resulted in death of some Tanii men and burning down of an entire village.

For most of the Taniis, who were nestled in their remote and prosperous valley for centuries, this was their first contact with outsiders and this was the first time their valley had been under siege. Many older men and women recalled the period as a ‘living hell’ and thought that ‘there will be no tomorrow’ for their people. Even today the names of dead people are commemorated through the narrative of the event. For several years following the event the entire community lived in a state of fear and distrust, and under oppression.

**1.6.4. Shifted Perspective.** However, during my pilot fieldwork when I was trying to gather initial information, exploring sources and build initial rapport, there was some kind of inhibition and uneasiness when people were asked to share their experiences during the event. My informants were village elders, both men and women. During the time there were only two persons who admitted of taking part in the attack. While one was very vocal about his experience and defended the cause for the attack, the other one spoke as if in a matter-of-fact, non-sentimental truth-telling exercise showing disinterest in dwelling further in the story, if not with little wariness. However, the rest of the people with whom I had interacted seemed to be trying to distance themselves from the event. It was always about ‘some people’, ‘others’, ‘those’ or ‘they’ who participated in the attack, but they did not, nor anyone in their close family had any part in it. But at the same time they agreed that ‘most people’ or ‘everybody’ took part in it. So while the attack at Kure post and taking part in the attack are part of common social memory, it is being disowned in the individual memories. At the same time there was perceptible tendency to name and blame people who they considered were the ringleaders of the attack and the tendency to attach the attack with ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ attitude of the old people.

Many of these narratives had a tone of mockery towards the people who participated in the attack as stupid people who believed that they could stand against the trained and organized military force with their primitive and simple

weapons. Would the narratives and their values have been different if the attack had been a success and they had managed to repulse the outsiders from their land? Further under the military regime in post-event years it became dangerous to admit one's participation in the attack. Speaking in retrospective, the speakers felt the failure of the attack was inevitable and it happened because of ignorance and misunderstanding about the intentions of the government, that they are witnessing now, due to lack of education. It is important to note that the consciousness of one being uneducated, illiterate and 'primitive' came to people only after their exposure and socialization to a different socio-political system introduced by the outsider, the government of India. Gradually people's attitude towards the government, and so towards the event, shifted in the post-establishment period. Over time those memories conflict, and the resurgent memories especially became endangered.

This leads to an assumption that a change in the political situation produces different attitudes and perspectives in people, and thus it changes the narratives and their remembering as well. Therefore, one of the hypothesis this research project is proposing is that the narratives and perspectives on the event of Kure Chambyo had shifted at present. However, memory is different and distinct from the act of remembering, which is a channelized process of recalling from the vast store of memories. So how does such a change in attitude or perspective changes the narratives and their remembering? How do common narratives inform us in understanding individual narratives?

Yet another aspect that came out during my field work was the influence of the cultural context on the narratives of the event. Despite the tremendous modernisation processes that Tanii society went through and changes in various social aspects, such as an increasing number of Christian members, modern education, Hindi becoming the common language, changing food habits, economy and agricultural patterns, etc., the community largely is traditional and maintains most of their customary practices and traditional beliefs. This is more true for



people of the older generation. They carry experience of the pre-modern past and have witnessed the tremendous transformations in the community and their surroundings.

Traditionally, the village elders and older generations are considered as the source and holders of traditional wisdom and knowledge, the *Popi Sarmi*. Their memories extend to and belong to a very different past and context. People held different attitude and worldview. Even the dialect that most of the village elders speak, known as *Miji Agung* (*Miji* dialect) or *Akha Agung* (elders' dialect), is significantly different from the colloquial or common language used by the people. Ethnic narratives and narratives of ethnic communities are constantly intertwined with their cultural experiences and the conventions of oral traditions. This is more so for elderly members of the community who are more ingrained with traditional beliefs, and whose narratives embody their oral traditions. They are semantically different and use of signifiers and metaphors to express their ideas, visions, emotions and memories. As a researcher it was a constant challenge for me to ensure that I was able to understand the meaning, depth and nuance of the spoken words. I had to constantly check if I was at the same page with my speakers.

It was only in the works of Stuart Blackburn (2003) that for the first time the role of early visitors to the valley and the resistance put up by the natives was critically documented and examined. Thus, the method of writing such histories ideally should be people-centric in its approach, ethnic and indigenous in narration and critical in analysis. It means there should be a framework through which people's voices are brought out and represented in the way they are narrated.

## **1.7. Local History**

For any discipline or discourse of enquiry self-identification and its relations with larger field area is crucial. However, in the case of local history, despite its long existence, the uncertainty about its identity, position and purpose persisted throughout. The name 'local' history is also of not much help in the way it is defined, practiced and in terms of scope. Also there has been a proliferation of terms and areas such as microhistory, history from below, urban history, regional history, subaltern history, etc. How 'local' is local history? Does being 'local' mean dissociation with the larger history? Also, does it mean the total or whole history of a local history? (Beckett, 2007) Traditional historians often call local historians 'amateur' historians and describe them as the 'little old lady in tennis shoes' (Kammen 2003). They raise more disciplinary and fundamental questions on dictums and concepts such as 'time', causality, progression, etc., which will require a larger frame of analysis and study. The sense of low self-esteem among local historians is evident. Terry Barnhard (in foreword written in *On Doing Local History* by Carol Kammen 2003) notes that local historians often begin on an apologetic note and self-consciously repeatedly try to point out its significance by counting its contributions towards the professional craft of history. The local history writing was a flourishing practice in sixteenth century onwards in England and France and later in North America and ever since its earliest emergence its definitions and focus has been shifting over the time and across world regions in different contexts. In Britain, the tradition of local history writing began with 'interests in nobility, castles, coinage, parishes, lineages' and which were much influenced by myths, beliefs and ideas of patriotism (Kammen, 2003). These projects of recording and commemoration of small towns or province were much like heritage preservation projects and often dubbed as 'the province of enthusiast' (Samuel, 1976:191). In North America, especially during the colonial period and mid-nineteenth century onwards the local history writings always carried political intent- the creation of national myths. To enthuse the sense of patriotism, nationalism and pride, the feats and struggles of the first settlers and pioneers were celebrated and glorified through these local histories. Carol Kammen (2003:16) writes that 'where history in Europe concentrated on the

church and the manor, the priest and the lord, local history in the United States extolled the successful businessman, the upstanding farmer' resounding Thomas Jefferson's yeoman farmer who were the backbone of republican society. These local historians were also called as 'Patrician historians' (Kammen, 2003:12), they were nascent educated and professional class who were writing in leisure about their hometowns. These projects were often self funded. They worked through archival records and old documents and museums and even studied the architectures and antiquarian certain traditions of the people to re-create the narratives of the past. It was these historians who had set the tone of local history writings since this early period. It took ages till very recently to shake off such practices and understanding. The period also saw the growth in commercial publications- journals, newspapers and books, they became the main takers of local history. However, commercialization, prejudices and elitism reduced its scope; and local history began to decline.

But late nineteenth and early twentieth century onwards there was re-emergence and re-evolution in local history writing practice. Newer waves of migration to the land, new technologies, alienating developmental transformation and the period post World War I, brought several social permutations, transformation and changes in the context where local historians were working. In Malcolm Cowley's words such transformations were 'eradicating our local and regional peculiarities' (cited from Kammen, 2003: 27) . The local historians once again had to bring back that sense of connection with the roots. They started writing about the early settlers and pioneers so that they can be commemorated and celebrated. However, at the same time several critiques were questioning the local historians for dwelling only on pasts and doing antiquarian works; while rarely looking and ignoring at their own times where several social and technological transformations were evidently taking place.

Apart from this some serious academic turn to local history work came with its growing contacts with academics. Emergence of 'Urban Histories' with their focus on studies of urbanization phenomenon and understanding of the pasts of

various social groups who are composing the urban societies and changes that are taking place. The associations with economic history in 1920s and social histories in 1960s, diversified the questions local historians were asking.

More radical questions were being asked by new generation local historians who realized that local histories can no more be concerned only with documenting the past and creating history islands. Edward Royle, argued that local history can move beyond the simplistic belief that the past can be known without yielding to the intellectual despair of postmodernist relativism' (cited from Beckett, 2007). For instance the landscape in local histories were no more merely being understood as passive economic or geographic space or delimiting boundary but rather it is being studied as cultural space (see Tiller, K (1998) *English Local History: The State of the Art*, 22-3, for similar work). Another important influence in this shift came from several developments within the traditional history or professional history discipline itself. The *Annales'* emphasis on whole or total history; interconnectivity of microhistory; history from below, Besides several serious academic questions and allegations on the relevance of local history were being posed by historians. Frank Fureli (1992) argued that because local history diverts our attention by disaggregating the totality of experience, it leads to 'destruction of historical thinking', and that 'development are explained not as a result of wider social forces, but of accidental local details', so there is permanent disconnection between the 'banal' and major processes (as cited in Beckett, 2007).

As in America, in 1940, new links with academics and institutions such as American Association for State and Local History established it brought new impetus to local history writing. The scope of subject of local history was broadened and newer emphasis on methodology was introduced. Social subjects such as class, race, gender, demography, etc. became interests of local historians and newer sources like archives were explored. Even in England, local histories

were begun to be taught in colleges such as University of Leicester, where the origin, rise and decline of communities were being traced and studied. In Leicester School, local history was taught rather as social history and hence, careful works on demographic studies were carried out. In France too the local history became part of professional history projects as these projects were doing demographic studies. They brought more closer studies of local communities and their socio-cultural formation (Kammen, 2003:35). This not only led the inclusion of local history into the professional history but also broadened the subject interests of the local history itself. As a result more interdisciplinary approaches in local history writing became common practice.

Local history writings and its necessities were soon recognized in other parts of the world as well where it took on newer roots. Along with the academic internalizations; a more radical and political turns in local history writing was taking place across the world where local history writings may or may not be drawing its inspiration from its original context. These histories were written within and to challenge the structural relations of particular contexts. In various ways, they redefined and re-evolved the local history writing.

More and more regions, localities and communities who have either been not written about or were written off in dominant history have started writing about their past across the world. These writings came from a very different position, rather from a very political stance. It tried to defy the homogenizing and hegemonic top-down history writings, discourses and teachings creating newer epistemology about themselves. Here local history writing was not a mere recording or studying of the past but rather it was a political assertion of communities and people whose histories were marginalized. In South Africa, in 1980s, during the anti-apartheid movement the local histories were written as a political assertion against the local histories written by municipal authorities dominated by white people. These histories or local histories were written, as

discussed in previous sections, to celebrate the pioneers among the white people's victories, achievements and works. Basically they tell the stories about the defeat, occupation, oppression, marginalization and exploitation of the natives and the black people but from the perspective of dominant and powerful whites. For the first time, through local histories, black people's experiences begun to be recorded by black members themselves (Neiftagodien, 2010). They were the insertion of counter and alternative histories vis a vis to so called liberal and state driven historiography that had ignored and marginalized the existence of black people. Several local histories are written about among the indigenous communities in America and Australia as indigenous people's history.

It is this contextual sensitivity, opposed to generality and disciplinary laws of history writing, that makes local history unique. They emerged and got defined differently in different regions and different contexts. With this re-emergence the old struggle for finding its own ground and identity and redefining of its meaning, scope, methods, sources and even its purposes becomes more and more important. The need for more comprehensive definition and conceptual framework was urgently felt.

***1.7.1 Locating local history in history writings in India.*** Local history writing in India has an ambiguous, if not uncomfortable, identity. This is despite the fact that there are large number of works in history in India with particular interest to study and write about a community, a village, a region, an event or particular socio-political transformation in a particular locality. The peasant studies, agrarian, villager's involvement (symbolic or direct) in national movement, cultural or political event studies and sectionalisms by Subaltern historians; the agrarian, social, local power relations, land and economic relations by social historians; ethnic studies with understanding of socio-cultural and identity emergence under the ethnohistory; micro histories tracing local development; and very often an enthusiastic trend that emerged in southern India in states like Kerala and Tamil

Nadu where family origins and genealogies were being traced and build-understood as 'local history' (recently there are more serious attempts to contextualize and bring more methodological rigor). However, these works had hardly seriously recognized their works as local history despite their constant specificity to a particular locality due to nature of their study. They tend to or attempt to draw more conceptual interlinkages, keeping their socio-political geographical location undefined or inconsequential to the subject. Such processing of data and information blunt down the indicators of a factor or a variable.

In important work by David Ludden that looks at the agrarian relations based on the local meaning and their contexts to draw the connections that influenced the larger or more macro land and agricultural policies during the colonial period provides newer insights-. David Ludden (1984) points out the disconnect between the approaches that emerges from the local and ground socio-cultural agrarian relations and the top-down interpretation by colonial rulers who saw agriculture merely as an economic process and enterprise for production. The colonial narratives had looked at 'social nodes' such as landlords, banyas, zamindars, rajas, etc., simply as an evil and burden to productive peasants; and hence established likes of Lord Curzon as the savior of peasantry (Ludden, 1984). For instance, in local field, local web of relations such as network of traders, worship, royal authority, kinship, and caste etc., were essential for agricultural relations. Here productivity is conceived as prosperity, wealth, health and auspiciousness, and in terms of good things like rice, children, water, mosques and temples, festivals, magnificent rulers. While on the other hand the Britishers had very narrow definition of productivity- productive people, production activity and institutions which contribute to increase output. Thus, under their power local authorities lost their potency in agrarian system taken over by non-local authorities, bureaucratic authorities steadily increased along with the markets (Ludden, 1984:58-60). Such narratives, however meaningful to the colonial and imperialistic economy, has completely ignored their local and traditional roles and

hence, led to exploitation of the peasant communities from another end.

Therefore, he calls for more writings in local histories and with more methodological focus and clarity in the approaches. He argued for the use of local interpretation from the perspective of the actual actors. He talks about the different meanings ascribed to conceptual units such as land, production outputs vis a vis to production relations such as network of traders, kinship, authorities, castes, etc., are different from the academic or disciplinary concept from how people perceives them. All these factors collectively co-creates a unique local reality and determines people's responses, actions and decisions, etc.. He is critical of contemporary historians as well who claims to have gone closer to the field but yet are limited by their own respective disciplinary approaches that often produces fragmented and incoherent understanding. Further, such incoherence comes ironically due to disciplinary generalization which renders all secondary literature useless for local history and meaningless to scholarly debates.

However, what he failed to see and do was seeing a community, a village or a locality as a unique and distinct space, capable of creating its own experience and meaning. The conceptual threads often numbs the nuances of locality. Despite using the term local and thus local history, his work did not identified itself to a locality. Instead, like others who he had criticized, he too draws the generable conceptual themes, issues and factors. In this sense, what is local to him was not to study the locality but to identify a locality as a sample for generating data and information that can be then tangibly and objectively quantified, tested and interpreted. This by such academic processing perforates and destroys the 'local' and 'locality', which was supposed to be a determined and intact entity. His study thus no more remains a local study or local history, which should have accounted for all the aspects of its local character and their uniqueness.

### ***1.7.2. Methodological Framework: Towards the theory of local history for***



*traditional, oral and communitarian society.* Different disciplines and scholars took up history writing for different interests and inquiries using historical and interdisciplinary approaches and methods to write history- the history different from traditional, mainstream and macro history, of people and events that are never written or are marginalized. However, these projects had seldom used the word 'local history' or if not used it in its archaic sense of writing a provincial, village or family history. Others who have taken subject theme as the main focus of analysis have preferred to use different signifier names such as social history, ethnohistory, microhistory and subaltern history.

It is through following multiple trends of local history writing -- a post colonial, anti-hegemonic, non-dominant local historiographies of south Africa and other post colonial regions, and the culture specific trend that gives an ontological voice to history writing to the writer as well as to the narrator, the local or the 'natives' -- that I am trying to locate this work and methodology. For the purposes of this research, a close look at a trend of local history writing in Himalayan region is required. And this should begin with the understanding that India is diverse country with diverse regions and diverse localities, where multiple-identities and ideas of the 'nation' exists.

Coming closer to the region Northeast of India, the complexity of history writing becomes more evident due to dominant narratives and counter narratives. Taking into account the various standpoints, the 'local' is not merely a physical or geographical but a social and political location. While Noor Neitagodien (2010) argues that identification of physical space to determine what the locals says as the 'local' is synonymously understood with the place of residence of the black working community, a landmark of the apartheid. And such orientations are significant in engendering the socio-political nuances of their realities related to their location. Martin Gaenzle (2003), argues that there can be different perspectives about past among the locals. It would be wrong to assume their homogenous narrative just because they all live in the same location. We will

need to understand that there are macro processes and micro processes constantly co-constructing each other.

Lack of a standard and comprehensive definition makes it more complex to theorize or to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework and methodology. Nevertheless, as more and more works on local histories are coming up one can observe few common aspects of local histories are emerging and there is more crystallization of its conceptual understanding. These aspects of local histories are distinctively emerging and can help in distinguishing local history from any other trends of history writing. Carol Kammen's definition of local history serves as a point of departure. She defines local history as "the study of past events or of people or groups in a given geographic area-a study based on a wide variety of documentary evidence and placed in a comparative contexts that should be both regional and national." (Kammen 2003:4)

There are four important components in this definition which every local history generally covers-

First, the subject focus - the past event, the people, relation between the event and people or group of people and their spatial or geographical location. Unlike in the traditional history writing where the historical processes takes precedence in determining the development in historical narratives, the local history are framed around the people or individuals in a manner that such history gives agency to the people or the individuals in determining the meaning and path for that historical narration. Thus, local history is more people focused.

Second, the delimitation of the geographical location. Being people centric history, the geographical locations are representative of people's spheres of identity and their socio-economic and political environment. At the macro level the local history is perennially related to the larger geographical context of a country. And thus producing the very unique binary oppositional geographical

and conceptual locations- central-peripheral, local-nonlocal, mainland-marginal, national-local, etc., and nation-state centric history-people centric history.

Third, varied sources of evidence, which ranges from fixed archives, documents, photos, literatures, statistics, architecture, physical evidences as used in traditional history to more living and fluid oral narratives, cultural practices, folklores, memories, etc.. which draws it nearer more interdisciplinary social sciences of cultural, social and anthropological studies. Basically the local historian's sources are all the aspects of human life that has left evidences of their existence.

Fourth, context specific, the location aspect and localization of the history and experience, and focus on people of certain or specific group or community makes the local history very context limited and context specific. Though, it never limits itself in terms of developing the understandings on macro-historical processes and contexts and the inter-relations with other communities and societies that the community or people co-existed with, yet local history maintains its particular stand-point in developing the history through the perspective of people's experience (common or unique).

On the question of method, she observes that "Local history encompasses any form of history and it uses a variety of historical methods from oral to statical to literary... there is no standard apprenticeship that one must follow"(p.5)and that "Such study ought to be accomplished by a historian using methods appropriate to the topic under consideration while following general rules of historical inquiry" (p.4)

One of the core aspects of local history is that there cannot be a standard methodological approach to be followed. The methods adopted should be topic and context specific. However, time and again the local historians are pulled aside for not following or for lacking the perspective of historical methodology

(Kammen, 1990). In 1940s, Constance McLaughlin Green (cited by Carol Kammen (2003:33)) complained that most of the local histories were written for self-glorification of the community and that they were mostly antiquarian and lacked perspective on historical methodology. However, even as traditional history writing scope and methodology went through new changes during postmodern turn, new infusions into local history writing also were emerging. More and more academician engaged with local history writing were suggesting for more multidisciplinary approaches and called for more engagement with changes that are taking place (Wohland & Brown, 1996:33; Kammen, 1996). Martin Gaenzle (2003), Stuart Blackburn (2003), emphasize on more ethnographic and cultural engagement and their exploration as source for history. Noor Neitagodien (2010), Alessandro Portelli (2003), speak about the significance of oral history as method and source for writing local history.

*What is the scope of local history?*

“The local history is, despite its limited geographical focus, a broad field of inquiry: it is the political, social, and economic history of a community and its religious and intellectual history too. It is a place to look for individual reactions to historical events... to hear women’s voices, find information about child-rearing practices, ask questions related to education, leisure, and privacy... It provides an opportunity to study group biography, leadership, philanthropy, crime, and gender” (pp. 4 -5)

Like each of the local history is context specific, more often than not, the methods to be used are also context specific. The context could be the kind of topic that one has selected, one could do secondary literature survey, architectural study, oral history method, ethnohistory, etc.

*Spatiality and location in local history:*

“Local history is, despite its limited geographical focus a broad field of inquiry: the political, social and economics history of a community and its religious and intellectual history too. It is a place to look for individual reactions to historical events... Local history is the place to hear women’s voices- find information about child rearing practices, ask questions related to education, pleasure and privacy”. (p.5).

The scope of location here is very circumscribed with definitive exclusion of non-local. And then within this particular local she extends its scope to wide range of subject area right from political, social, economic, intellectual, religious spheres, etc.. and even to look at more private, subjective and ordinary routine spaces to capture what does the life look like in the locality.

However, there are several aspects that always transgress these boundaries of ‘local’. As none of the socio-geographical location can exist in complete isolation, in order to understand the history of a particular location one has to take a much wider study area and a longer stretch of timeline as a history unit. Neither can one ignore the histories of nearby communities and the developments. Martin Gaenzle (2003) calls “local” as rather indefinite and dependent on context. “The spatio-temporal production of locality is a complex affair: it is not only the conceptual demarcation of a life-world, a space and its history, but a “structure of feeling”, i.e. it implies an emotional tie and thus affects experience.” (Gaenzle, 2003:9) Thus, from these various stands the ‘local’ is not merely a physical or geographical but a social and political location. While Noor Neitagodien argues that identification of physical space to determine what the locals says as the ‘local’ is synonymously understood with the place of residence of the black working community, a landmark of the apartheid. And such orientations are

significant in engendering the socio-political nuances of their realities related to their location. Martin Gaenzle, argues that there can be different perspectives about past among the locals. It would be wrong to assume their homogenous narrative just because they all live in the same location.

Another important part to understand is that local history is constantly produced (Gaenzle, 2003, cites from Appadurai) through the interactions of macro processes and micro processes. Which means local history is no more simply an indication of physical geography but is circumscribed by more organic concerns, constantly produced and imagined by people. Kammen further observes that, “Local history is the framework in which to practice cultural history in an attempt to understand area’s distinct style... The tools and the products of folklore and folklife studies can illuminate the story of local history”.

The purpose for writing local history according to her seems to be simple, though varied according to contexts, to write and record the past of a location which are otherwise ignored in larger history writings. Though this simplistically defines the broader purpose of the local history writing, yet it is not enough in presenting how people are actually engaging with local history writing, especially when people at margin of power relation starts writing their own history. She fails to see political purpose of history. She does not seem to acknowledge the amount of historical works that are misrepresenting, glorifying the subjugation of certain community in history writings; and hence, the tasks with those communities in writing their local history is to re-assert, re-claim or cause the (resurrection?) of their past and present reality, to engender the politics and injustice hidden in history or professional history writings. This gives local history writing its own unique edge.

According to Martin Gaenzle (2003), Stuart Blackburn (2003) and Noor Neiftagodien (2010) the main purpose of local history is to serve the community or the people about whom the history is being written. Writing local history is an emancipatory project, a contestation against the hegemony and dominant history.

For communities in the margins and the peripheries, the experience of power establishment or nation-state establishment often involves the experiences of violent occupation of their locality especially when the community had an autonomous past. In case of the black people, the experience of white dominance over history meant non-representation of their past and their existence and absence of their question in political discourse. The local history writing for black people was to bring into existence the unique reality of the community and to bring in forefront the biases and discrimination of the white dominant history. Similarly, the local history writing in the Himalayan region by numerous ethnic communities was to reclaim their identity from the past as it existed in the text of histories and to assert their identity presence and voices as distinct and unique. Challenging the hegemony and dominance of the centre, it consciously produces decentered histories (Gaenzle, 2003).

Few important points that emerged from above discussion is that the space in local histories are social product. The intent of writing local history is the obvious socio-political resurgence against hegemony and dominant nationalist history. This means that the primary subject of the history is always the people who attributed meaning and significance to space, event or the time. This understanding is further enmeshed to the socio-cultural, symbolical and experiential aspects of the people about whom the history is about. However, Martin Gaenzle warns against the danger of parochial identity politics that might bog down the history writing projects. The question arises then that it is necessary to have one unified history of a particular society or about a particular past?

Multi sectionalism within the society is something that one can no more ignore, more so when one is writing people centric local history which in itself a claim against the homogenizing history. Thus, the methods and approaches adopted for writing local history are context dependent. Allied themselves with the emancipatory project, it gives voices to multitude to tell their stories. Here the purpose of local history is to democratize the history (Neiftagodien, 2010). It

empowers an ordinary citizen as an identifiable history agent. While in traditional history writing the ordinary citizens are transformed into units of broader or larger social processes, in local history writing each speaker contributes their experience and interpretation. As these histories are foundational for an identity linked to the landscape, they generally imply political claims such as land rights (Gaenzsle, 2003:13).

Finally, to summarize and to frame the entire discussion on what does a local history look like, what is its nature and what are its aspects and assumption. Local history is a framework which, a) describes of a location away and in opposition of the centre, mainstream, mainland and dominant space. It provides, or carves out a space of its own for the local history to be located. b) then it gives a sharp critical lens to relook and re-read the existing histories, which had flattened the histories at margins for giving space to what historians consider as important 'central' issues. c) it creates an autonomous space of locality to realize and write its history. It provides the layouts for the contextual nuances, tensions, contradictions and local meanings of experience, events and communications. d) It provides that unique agency for the representation where, while the local history stands in contradiction and resistance against the dominant history writing in one hand; on the other hand it acknowledges the presence of multiple identities within the community or locality who constitutes the community. Such representation may often stand as the microcosm of the macro differences that exists. Yet, Local history does not deny their existence and the multiple and multi-layered meanings they provide to the history writing or history interpretation.

**1.7.3. The local history of Kure Chambyo.** The Kure Chambyo of Taniis provide such site of multilayered memories and narratives. The event took place in 1949 when a large number of Taniis men attempted an attack at the Political and Military outpost of Indian government. The attack on the outpost led by thousands of Taniis



men had moral and political sanction of the community. It was one of the most important event that brought radical and turbulent change in the valley life. The attack was easily repulsed by the well armed Assam Rifles soldiers. For most of the Taniis, this was first contact with the outsiders and for the first time their valley was under the seige ever since they settled here.

The story of Kure Chambyo, is not a popular story and hardly many knows about it despite the fact that this event was the most significant event in Tanii history of recent time. Would the narratives and its values had been different if the attack was a success and they had managed to repulse the outsiders from their land? How does the common narratives inform us in understanding the individual narratives?

The ethnic narratives and narratives of ethnic community's are constantly intertwined with their cultural experiences and conventions of oral traditions. This study attempts to unravel the historical experience of the Tanii people of Arunachal Pradesh through an exploration of memory archives and local history.

### **1.8. Objectives:**

1. To write the local history of the Kure Chambyo event of the Apatanis, their own version of their past and lived experiences from both written and oral accounts.
2. To critically re-examine the historical representation of Kure Chambyo in both colonial and post-independence writings.
3. To explore and propose possible conceptual frameworks of history writing while working with an ethnic, traditional and oral communities, such as Apatanis, with no practice of writing.

4. To understand how memory and history are created processed, assimilated, preserved and interpreted in their oral traditions? And what are the various environmental, social, political and psychological factors that affects the formations and articulation of their narratives about past?

### **1.9. Research Questions:**

This study was guided by following research questions:

1. What is the status of local history writing in India?
  - a. What are the different strands of history writings, the writings from the ground and people centric history?
  - b. What are the methodological challenges, unique, to doing historical studies among the ethnic, traditional and oral community such as the Taniis.
2. How and why cultural and collective memories are created/constructed in Tanii society?
  - a. What role do they play in constructing Tanii reality and existentiality?
  - b. How they are realised, sanctified, preserved and propagated?
  - c. How and why are only certain memories assigned significance (e.g. men) in history?
3. What are the impacts of the advent of new governance and state system and the transformative development activities?
  - a. What are the new changes occurring in memory creation and presentation?
  - b. How do people engage with their cultural and collective memories?
4. What is the status of newer memories? Are they collectively realised, articulated and preserved like the traditional oral texts?
5. About the event of Kure Chambyo:

- a. Who are the main stakeholders?
  - b. What were the main causes, impacts and developments of the Kure Chambyo event?
  - c. Why the event of Kure Chambyo is not commemorated by the community?
  - d. How its narratives are articulated? And why?
6. What are the socio-political and economic changes that have happened in post Kure Chambyo? How do people engage with the transformations that are taking place in the Tanii valley?

### **1.10. Chapterisation:**

**Chapter 1.** Chapter one introduces the main premise and problems in historiography in India at present. Drawing from literatures the chapter point out towards a growing trend in history writing for more grounded and anti-hegemonic and anti-homogenizing history writing; and yet the absence of agency and perspective given to the people in defining their past and experience to people at margins and people whose history has been denied to them. Thus, the chapter lays the context for this dissertation in writing the local history of an event called Kure Chambyo of the Tanii community of Arunachap Pradesh, as the first and the last resistance or uprising put by the community against an outside authority in order to protect their autonomy. Thus, finally, the need for writing more local based and people centric history is stressed upon.

**Chapter 2.** Methodological concerns and possible framework of doing history, apart from the traditional and dominant understanding of doing historical research, among the community with no written accounts and whose past has been misrepresented and suppressed in official account is discussed in the chapter. Various

decisions based on reflexive engagements with the cultural and political field and vulnerabilities of narratives and memories, led the researcher to be intuitive and responsive to the speakers. As a result a mixed and complex methodological framework was adopted.

**Chapter 3.** The chapter lay down the socio-cultural and political context of the community. It is within this context that the outsiders were experienced- the rupture of their geographical, social and cosmological autonomy. The chapter also discussed the customs, norms and practices of oral traditions which the subsequent chapters will show has a very specific and unique influences on the way Taniis imagine, experience, remembers, process and articulate their narratives.

**Chapter 4.** The chapter discusses a very intrusive national integration policies adopted by the state (British and Indian) for Arunachal Pradesh. The socialization and assimilation, creation of alliance and loyalty, and disconnecting the people from their defiant past were the main concerns of the policy makers. These policies pervasively succeeded in transforming and changing the narrative of pasts first and then the way it is remembered now.

**Chapter 5.** The chapter in its first section discusses and compare the legitimacy and vulnerabilities of using oral stories and official documents- as source of history writing. The second section brings all the official documents available on the Kure Chambyo event recorded as ‘Apatani Trouble’ in official record. The purpose of this chapter is first to document the event from written official accounts for the first time, and secondly to highlight how it has mis-represented the event, the reports created by field officials, lying to higher authorities in Delhi, and how there is an attempt of suppressing the document. Thus re-asserting the critical question on legitimacy of these official documents for writing history.

**Chapter 6.** The chapter accounts the oral histories of four selected individuals who had the first hand account of the event. Three men and one women tells their stories as they saw it, experienced it and now see it while narrating the event and their life. The chapter discuss the templates of these stories and the moments of their narrations as an event of their creation. The chapter also draws analysis of various elements in these oral histories.

**Chapter 7.** Drawing from various interviews and oral stories, this chapter looks at various technologies- tropes, mnemonics, lived experiences and the art of oration- of orality and oral traditions that preserves history of the community. Secondly, a more detailed accounting and evaluation of various events- before, within and after the event- from the bits and pieces that forms the entire history of the event through oral narratives as the informants recounted them. Third, the chapter argues that the present narratives of the Kure Chambyo event and its aftermath is created within two domains or contexts- internal socio-cultural contexts and external power political context.

**Chapter 8.** The chapter summarizes the dissertation and concludes with an assertion that the local history or any people centric history writing should be a process of co-creation of the narratives and history where the informant speaks incordination with various other factors that influences their remembering and narration. These factors, needs to be underlined as co-author(s)/historian. And also that the researcher, the one who is going to finally sit and pen down these narratives, also needs to be stated out as a co-author/historian, because her influences as how the history is presented is crucial in understanding the history that is being presented.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

# **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: CO-CREATING THE MEANING**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The unique context of the study demanded unique and responsive methods. There are also hidden challenges and layers of meanings due to the political context of the event and its aftermath. This chapter discusses how reflexivity in methodology, combination of methods and approaches and use of hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm helped in dealing with such issues. The study is not only to look at what actually happened or how people 'see' their past now, but also to understand why there is a shift, disconnect and distance between the experience and their articulation/narration?

While oral history method is used as the main tool for generating life stories, narrative and ethnographic analysis of the context of oral for the purpose of this study, the traditional and ethnic community became a crucial aspect to consider. Due to the contentious and sensitive nature of the subject and considering that this is a very old event which has not been properly documented, there are various predicaments that researcher has to face. The main source of information was people's memory, and what and how they articulate their lived and personal experiences. Therefore, dealing with and accepting the subjectivities of both the informants and the researcher herself in the moments of sharing stories and caring for each other's vulnerability is a critical aspect of research fieldwork. However, unfortunately this inbuilt organic process of doing interviews often get 'gazed-away' from or concealed in methodological discourses as if revealing it will

lessen the heuristic value of the research. Instead sensitivity and reflexivity to these matters brings the needed rigour in research. During this research these social, emotional, and cultural aspects determined articulations of the historical and psychological condition of people's reality.

The field work involving both archival research and study and the field interviews, was done between 2013 and 2015. Many were speaking about their experience for the first time after the event while many have been re-telling their stories for years. Some speak from their experience and memory while others speak from their knowledge and skill. Social status, political positioning, exposure to modern life and cultural wisdom were the main determinants of the people's articulation of their experience and perspective about the past. Each revealed a unique aspect in the narration of the same event. This study explores the deeper meanings of each of the narratives which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. This chapter argues that undertaking research, especially the oral and in-person interviews, among traditional, ethnic and oral communities needs a different approach than presently available. Oral communities have their indigenous and specialized oral traditions, norms, lived experiences and realities which are distinct and often unavailable for researchers from outside. Contemporary methodological approaches make it difficult to access them, let alone interpreting and generating meanings.

## **2.2. Co-Creating Narratives And Meanings:**

*Cultural analysis is not "an experimental science" in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Clifford Geertz 1973:35)*

Historicism in anthropology tries to understand the change and transformation in cultural pattern or the way in which certain aspects of a particular community or society has evolved. Unlike the evolutionary theories, the new post-colonial and

more interdisciplinary anthropologists, especially those after Franz Boas and his followers, are not attempting to create a universal statement or theory. They look at the particularism of each society, as a unique place of its own evolution while also interacting with the outside world (Davis 2011; Geertz 1983; Kaye 2010). The way each society and its members articulate their surrounding and social system, thus is unique to their reality. They provide a rigorous methodology to create information and knowledge about such societies in order to understand their unique mechanism. It illuminates the important spheres of community life—namely the ethnographic, linguistic, archival and biological spheres, to develop a sense of being of the respective community. These anthropologists believe that these different spheres co-create the socio-cultural meaning. Thus, to understand the changes and the way the community moulds itself to different situation and interpret these experiences, the researcher has to depend on the community to reveal their stories of transformations as history.

Another aspect to be considered is that there has been a shift in the way people position themselves after their exposure to different life situations. For instance, one of my informants, Rambya from Biila village, over a casual conversation after the interview session mentioned his debate with his old friend over which is better social drink tea or ‘O’ (traditional rice beer of Taniis). He won the debate by arguing how ‘O’ is problematic, as it leads to poor health, unbalanced judgement, unnecessary conflicts and that an intoxicated person becomes game of a malevolent spirit called Yachu; whereas tea never causes any of these. Interestingly, all these arguments could emerge only when an alternative to ‘O’ as a social drink i.e. tea and other non-alcoholic drinks was available. Tea was first introduced by British officials and then popularized by Indian officials among Taniis. For many years it was a drink restricted to the powerful and upper classes, until the arrival of Co-operative societies and market places which made it a part of daily consumption. Till then, ‘O’ was the only social drink, served to all. There was no social taboo or evil attached to it. It was an integral part of their food habits as well as ceremonial and ritual performances where O becomes a



sacred offering to spirits and ancestral spirits. The visible and widespread change in attitude towards this practice came with the civilizing and modernizing teachings and socializing introduced by the Halyangs (non-tribals in Tani) who looked down upon it. Rambya, the Head Gram Bura (HGB) with his close proximity to government officers, takes pride in his new found belief. However, it is important to note that this shift in the attitude is accompanied by interesting interpretations and innovations in the narrative. He used several cultural and traditional illustrations and experiential anecdotes to explain his idea that emerged only in present time.

Understanding such ethnographic conversation is a complex sailing through layers of embodied cultural meanings. In this, the researcher, the researched and the subject context co-create meaning and knowledge about the reality of subject under study. While consciously chewing through the entire 'stuff' to taste them, the researcher has to simultaneously discern what is being communicated and what is not? What semiotic structures are determining the frame of these conversations? What "craft of thinking" (Cashman and Shukla 1998) and cognitive- memory processes are involved in leading and creating the conversation? How do ethnographers discern those meanings? In other words, the ethnographer who records the conversation has to constantly discern the meanings and the nuances. Raymond Madden (2010:19), calls a 'good ethnographer' as one who uses even their body as 'an organic recording device'. It observes and registers its surroundings; through hearing, smelling, touching, feeling, etc. She listens to what is being orally communicated; tries to perceive the surroundings- its tacit norms, moods historical time and trends where they take place; all of which together create the context. For instance, the social and emotional environment in a funeral, examination hall, local vegetable market, park, a site of student Dharna etc all create their own specific contexts.

One realizes that it is not only the narratives that constitute the meaning of the conversation but the entire cultural and social (and even political) contexts that co-create the meaning. Clifford Geertz (1973) in his 'The Interpretation of Cultures' emphasizes on thick description which juxtaposes the ethnographic detailing, historical narratives and the lived experiences to create the meaning in the research one is doing. He argues that it is such thick descriptions that can capture these processes of co-creation and also helps to meaningfully interpret, explain and develop a narrative process and the moment of speech when the speaker is speaking or narrating something in response to a question or conversational situation posed to him. But what about the socio-cultural context? How does it affect the speakers (both the interviewer and the interviewee), their process of interaction, the content and their interpretation(s).

The oral history project in such cultural contexts therefore has to consider these multiple sources that 'speak' during the oral history interviews or dialogues. Following are the main factors that played a crucial role in the process of co-creating meaning in people's narratives:

**2.2.1. Oral traditions and conventions.** One of the important sources that oral historians need to explore is the oral traditions of ethnic, indigenous and oral communities. Oral communities like Tani and many others in the North Eastern region of India, had oral traditions that were intricately woven to their culture and day to day life, before they came in contact with external societies and wider literate worlds around them. These oral traditions are not merely a repository of traditional knowledge. In Tani society, narration of oral tradition, depending upon the occasion, is a performance; different from a simple rhetorical conversation or recitation. Tanis believe that not all are born with the ability to learn and narrate oral traditions. As a result, various norms, conditions and taboos are attached to recitation of different genres of oral tradition. A lay person is often restricted from narrating them. Thus, the knowledge, ability and skills to orate the

oral traditions is highly valued. In most situations, the person with in depth knowledge of the oral traditions turns out to be the village priest, the Nyibu.

Thus, the oral tradition is bound by various norms and rules which have a bearing even on simple and informal narrations. Depending upon the gender and age, insider-outsider identity and level of knowledge of oral traditions of both the respondent and the researcher, the level of engagement of discussion is set. A young female is always in a more disadvantaged position than a male researcher. Certain genres of oral traditions, specially one dealing with death and disputes, are not meant to be shared with women. Many of these norms and restrictions are based on cultural biases. The onus thus lies with the researcher to train herself to discern the meaning making process within in order to interpret their experience and culture complex.

**2.2.2. *Speaker's interpretive voice and choice.*** The speakers or the traditional history keepers, who are also known as oral tradition experts, are not static beings, neither do their memories, interpretations, perceptions, perspective, intents and interests remain the same. It changes with the context. The earlier discussion with Rambya about the 'O' illustrates this. Rambya, who possess immense knowledge of Tanii oral traditions, customs, beliefs, culture and has lived as an insider to Tanii society for many years, used the same traditional mores, allegories, and experiences from traditional lived reality, and argued against the tradition of drinking O. Such interpretations and arguments emerged in the course of their valley being taken over by outsiders and the aggressive socialization they underwent to a radically different world view and way of life. Yet, it was the command he had over his interpretation of culture, traditions and lived experiences that allowed him to present his arguments or thoughts in order to win the debate. When a speaker holds so much control over the history or narrative of the past, it becomes their own legitimate version of reality.

Similarly, every speaker has his/her own interpretation of past informed by their own unique lived experience and understanding (whatever be the source of such understanding). This raises the question of the subjectivity of the informants. The event around which this research focuses is a volatile subject even today, especially for those who were closely affected by it. They have different emotions attached to it. The pilot field work revealed that different villages had varying experiences of the event and the level of engagement with the event differed among the sections and genders within the village. Therefore, it was necessary to be conscious of this background of different interpretations that were emerging while writing the local history of the entire community. The main concern that the researcher dealt with was regarding ‘how one may write the collective history of people whose experiences and perspectives are not only diverse but has also shifted over the time?’

**2.2.3. *The meaning making state.*** It is not just the younger generations who have a different perspective and approach towards their past, present and future, the older generation also has shifted their perspective about their own past, as discussed above. Talking about “allegiance and socialization” in the school discipline system in America, Loewen (1995) says, it instils a non-questioning attitude towards the state. In the case of Taniis, this process of socialization and allegiance is backed by the transformative developmental process sponsored by the state. These transformations are not only creating new memories for people but constantly contesting and diminishing the older memories of resistance. Taniis, who struggle to keep their home running hardly turn back to their history or raise any critical question against the state. On the other hand the constant production of officially censored knowledge demeans and displaces the traditional memory and historical knowledge. These experiences also influence their interpretive ability and hence their narratives.

Under the hegemonic national integration programme, these processes of transition are seldom critiqued nor are they articulated as systemic and structural

processes of uprooting and disempowering even by the locals themselves. Hence it is crucial to re-construct and review those memories before the generations who have access to them disappear. The native's version of histories is conceived from their own experiential memories and perspectives within their cultural, political or social environment.

**2.2.4. *The researcher's interpretive voice.*** The research process presents an inherent and complex problem of interpretive voice. Under the post colonial and post modern academia, especially in social sciences, the giving and acknowledging the voices of the speaker were questioned and new insights were brought in. However, in the field of research, despite all the conscious efforts and concerns about the power relation between the researcher-researched, there seems to be no actual change and dialogue. Ultimately, it is the researcher who 'speaks' and represents the voices.

This gives the researcher an immense interpretive power and control. Thus, rather than taking the research process as a mechanism run by predetermined set of tools that automatically produces empirical truth and the researcher merely as an instrument that carries it, one should consider the researcher as an organic being which embodies the entire research process and are susceptible to multiple factors in the field to determine the process. The motivation of the researcher, the field environment and research context within which the researcher has to function, the processes inside the researcher's reflexive and interpretive mind are all determinants. The researcher always provides a view to the field and even to the narrative field that is constructed to develop a cogent understanding. For this she carefully selects and arranges the facts and argument. It is a vision from a particular angle and from a vantage point of the researcher with the ultimate interpretive power. Though both the narrator and the narrative contexts are actively engaged in presenting and representing the meaning, it is the researcher who interprets these narrative voices. Thus, because of what the researcher

experiences or what the researcher is ‘capable of experiencing’, understanding and articulating; the research outcome is highly dependent on the researcher.

In absence of proper and voiced definitions and conceptual/disciplinary recognition of these phenomena, the contingencies of the researcher’s experiences, biases and power relations remain inarticulate; worse, it is assumed to be taken care of by the researcher and the objective research process. Her presence and her queries influence the narrative articulation and processes in more than one way. Thus, apart from the narrative context and the narrator, the researcher and the research process also introduce or interject a context. These contexts add or remove some layers from the ethnographic conversation.<sup>2</sup>

### **2.3. Methodological Framework: Addressing the Concerns of Rigour and Ethics using Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Rigour is the degree of standards of inquiry to which researchers hold themselves in addressing the challenges of credibility of one’s research findings. Rigour, therefore, can refer either or both to methodological thoroughness and precision or criteria used to judge the trustworthiness of the results. Although most researchers are likely to support the need for rigour in data collection and analysis, qualitative inquiry has historically been plagued by a lack of agreement over the criteria for judging the adequacy of the endeavour (Patton 2002). While some have disagreed with the very idea of establishing criteria (e.g. Sandelowski 1993; Seale, 2002), others have argued that such criteria must be set inside the

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<sup>2</sup>I was concerned about how to deal with these situations which would affect the information I was going to get. The entire process was greatly helped by my brief pilot field work conducted before my actual field work started. The interim period I had spent in attending research training programmes such as on oral history research workshop conducted by Centre for Public History in Bangalore, reading and consulting with colleagues, guide and my Doctoral Advisory Committee members.

paradigm itself (e.g. Drisko 1997; Healy and Perry 2000). Holroyd (2007), Koch & Herrington (1998) and Lincoln & Guba (1985), find such preoccupation with rigour, reliability and validity often unnecessarily underpinning hermeneutics to methods. This leads to the risk of a fixed standpoint and a solitary horizon of meaning which are often informed by the background or pre-knowledge of both the researcher and the participant (Holroyd 2007).

Although this development may increase the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry and bring it closer to the consistency in approach called for by quantitative designs, the effort to enhance methodological rigour using predetermined strategies may miss the idiosyncratic threats to rigour that inevitably emerge when a study is examined for its specific vulnerabilities. Those threats can materialize only from the context of the research, which includes the unique circumstances of each study (e.g. lack of access to an ethnically diverse sample, reactivity of participants because of the stigma associated with the research topic), and the demands of the qualitative paradigm chosen to answer the research question, e.g. grounded theory calls for saturation and theory building (Glaser and Strauss 1967), critical theory calls for the privileging of a value position, i.e. feminism (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005).

After my pilot field work I realized that most of my challenges during the research would be in terms of interpretation. My speakers were all subjective beings. They embodied contingents as well as fragments and layers of meanings gathered over the period their lived reality and experience. Therefore, I found Hermeneutic Phenomenology would be the paradigm best suited for my study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a disposition and attitude of inquiry (Henrikson & Friesen 2012) towards knowledge creation process, where instead of treating experience as the object of inquiry, it emphasises on the being of the experience. As in, what does it mean to 'experience'? One tries to understand and interpret the meaning of that experience ontologically by considering a person as an

interpretive creature whose articulation of their reality is constructed, fluid, and relative.

Epistemologically, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and the object of the research. In this exercise both the researcher and the participant actively work together to co-creates the meaning from within their existential and contextual location (Lincoln and Guba 2005). Thus in the context of this study about the Kure Chambyo and its aftermath, the question that this study tried to deal with are- what does the Kure Chambyo and its aftermath mean to the survivors? What was the experience of witnessing and having lived those days? What does it feel to gather one's life and move on? What it felt like to experience violence, fear and oppression? What it feels like to have their valley swarmed and taken over by outsiders and to witness so many changes in their own lifetime? What it feels like to be subverted, and to suppress those memories and experiences and never talk about it? What it means to experience the event from within that location as a Tanii? How do their being a Tanii influence their experiencing, remembering and understanding the experience and articulating it?

Van Manen (1990: 30), referring to writings by Gadamer and Rorty, argued that, 'the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method', instead there are specified attitudes to research. These may include openness or making oneself available to the phenomenon as it presents itself (Gadamer 1960 &1995; Heidegger 1927& 1998; Husserl 1936&1970; Merleau-Ponty 1945&1995), understanding meanings presented by a particular culture, phenomenon and each subjective individual (Heidegger 1927&1998; Merleau-Ponty 1945&1995), thinking in paradoxes and integrating opposites (Dahlberg et al. 2001; Merleau-Ponty 1948&1968). In addition it employs an analytic process described as 'entering the hermeneutical circle', which involves examining the text as a whole, followed by its constituent parts, and then returning again to the



text as a whole (Giorgi 1997). Samples are often small (Creswell 1998; Dukes 1984; Morse 1994; Sandelowski 1993) and purposeful because the focus is on in-depth study of information-rich cases and the extraction of essential characteristics of a phenomenon, rather than searching only for variation between research respondents.

Thus the strategies to improve methodological rigour began with and were derived from the challenges particular to each inquiry as it emerged, instead of a pre-established list of procedures. Although the strategies chosen may wind up being similar to the commonly accepted set of practices, the contextually built approach assures and in fact requires a more fully informed analysis of the challenges, creativity in thinking and action, thoroughness, and a system of accountability tailored to the demands of the particular study. This bottom-up approach is philosophically congruent with the qualitative endeavour, which seeks to understand and examine a phenomenon inductively and within the context.

Paradoxically, while hermeneutic phenomenology provides the framework assumptions for interpretation it simultaneously exposes interpretation to various vulnerabilities. Thus, within the context of this paradigm, to avoid biases or being blinded by objectivity, one should be open and sensitive to the focus of the research. To do so, the researcher must be disciplined to be self-reflexive and reveal one's biases that can both obscure and illuminate his or her understanding of the phenomenon under study. This 'intersubjectivity' allows the researcher to use his or her own experience to understand the respondent's experience (Dahlberg et al. 2001). Creswell (1998) and Dahlberg (opcit.) suggests prolonged engagement with the respondent, maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions and thick description of the data.

Hermeneutic phenomenology also demands the discussion of contextual factors that influence a study and its results in order to assess validity and objectivity (Polkinghorne 1986). Here objectivity refers to intellectual honesty, thoroughness in reasoning, and prohibitions against the imposition of projective interpretation, skewed sampling and omission of negative evidence (Lindström 1990 cited in Dahlberg et al. 2001: 231). Validity refers to the ability to follow the researcher's logic throughout the study and that the study itself contains no internal contradictions (Dahlberget et.al. 2001; Kvale 1989).

## **2.4. Research Decisions**

The research on Kure Chambyo began with a three month pilot study. One month was spent on visiting and exploring various archival and written resources that were available on subjects related to Taniis in particular and on the various socio-political developments that took place in Arunachal both during the colonial period as well as the first two decades of post-independence period. Two months were spent on the field to explore what kind of information was available- both oral and material. During the meetings with various people- village *Bulliangs* (see Glossary), priests, local intellectuals, scholars, and other male and female village elders, a few issues emerged that could become a challenge during the main field work phase. They included the informant's age (very few surviving informants with firsthand experience), linguistic barrier, trust, analysis, and one's own biases. Following decisions and procedures were followed during the research period in order to address above concerns:

### ***2.4.1. Using oral history method as breakthrough for hermeneutic***

***phenomenology:*** These oral histories are based on the accounts of the remaining village members who had firsthand experience of the Kure Chambyo event.

Though the interviews were carried out with different age groups, the oral

history interviews were done specifically with people who were adults or young adults during the period (1940-1950). Because of their age they were engaged in various socio-political activities in the village, as compared to younger boys and girls who were generally kept away from such activities. Thus, they had more experiences and had witnessed various developments in the society. They were also more conscious/aware of various happenings in the village. However, this in itself presented various challenges such as their advanced age, and more importantly the various socio-political socializations and environments within which the narrative process of this research was to take place. Hence, undertaking oral history and recording the life stories of the persons rather than conducting subject specific interviews were helpful in breaking through these barriers. The stories of events were told as in during the course of one's life. And the longer term of engagement with the informants helped in building relationships and trust where one could share their stories openly and safely.

Adopting oral history method also helped to dislodge the highly formulated and practiced narratives. Some informants already had their formula story as they must have narrated the story several times or were being guided by their oral traditions. These stories list out names of persons, places, particular actions, events or anecdotes. One could observe how the similar narratives formats were repeated by everyone. Many have refused to or found it difficult to go outside this pre-determined narrative structure. For many, Kure Chambyo is an intense, painful and volatile subject. In this situation, the oral history method enabled the possibility of setting up a very different conversation in relation to the event- one that departed from the fixed narrative, as those events and experiences were narrated along one's life journey. In this narrative structure, the story begins with their growing up in the community among their own people and in their previous way of life, followed by the first visit of the Halyang (non-tribals) and the stories they heard about various disturbing developments culminating in the Kure Chambyo event and its aftermath, and finally the present way of life.

These oral histories gave crucial glimpses of the way of life, attitudes and beliefs that existed in a very different environment and past. The very interesting shift in the opinion or positioning even within the narratives (see Chapter Five for detailed discussion) was also distinctly visible. The speakers articulate the story as an act of injustice done by the government to its people. The stories of violence, oppression, pain and suffering were asserted over other versions where the speakers justify the actions of the government as a necessary act to break down the 'tribal arrogance'.

The oral history approach provided agency -individual and collective -to the speakers, so critical and indispensable for social and local history. It brought the most needed methodological rigour in collecting the narratives and in understanding the context subjectivity of the speaker in order to analyse those narratives.

**2.4.2. Using multiple sources and triangulation:** Three levels of triangulation were used using multiple sources. The first was using all available written documents and literature. As discussed in the previous chapter, official documents of the event (also see chapter three for more detailed discussion and existing reports) were very rare and those that existed and were accessible misrepresented the actual event. Therefore, the search for documentary evidence was extended to other secondary documents - namely larger policy documents, legislations, personal records of the officials, reports on tribal relations in the hills, military and political reports. They yielded names of individuals (both local and outsiders), dates to build the chronological order, the psyche of the administrators- their fear, concerns, attitudes, biases, etc. These documents provided a window into the larger process of colonization of the region, including the Tani valley.

The second level was through meeting and interviewing the people using different methods. It involved trying to perceive their understanding of these developments, the event and its aftermath, the coming of the outsiders and their present situations. While informants could not articulate the experience of socialization or the loyalty and allegiance building processes of the administrators, they spoke about the period- the pain, fear and sufferings that haunted some of them even to this day long after the Kure Chambyo took place. Interviews were conducted with all the surviving members in the village who were adult at the time and had firsthand experience. This ensured inclusion of different sets of people from different villages. All the interviews were conducted over the duration of a year through multiple visits.

Thirdly, using narrative analysis, an attempt was made to understand the strong influence of oral tradition conventions and linguistics over the narrative and the narrative style, and the way informants were narrating the history as discussed before. Narrative analysis of the interview records helped to identify - the tropes used by the people, the silences, the semantic meanings, the interpretive narration by the informants, and how the speakers were structuring the narratives into a very traditional form of narratives. This method helped in bringing out the meanings of emotions and feelings that were otherwise shrouded by what speakers/informants were trying to communicate.

Apart from written accounts, photographs were used for two purposes- as a memory aid during the interviews and then as a sensitization tool. The photos are from the official records available in IPR office in Itanagar and from various websites such as Cristoph Von Furer Haimendorf's collection in SOAS (School of Oriental And African Studies) and Cambridge University in UK. The official photos were taken during the 1950s and 1960, to record the administrative development in the region. They were taken very unwittingly where the outsider, the photographer or the officials- were the main protagonists and shows how they perceived the tribes they were working with. The photos range from the

ethnographic- attire, ornaments, ritual sites, etc., to the political – procedures, functions, events, etc. These photos inadvertently captured the power relations and processes of socialisation and nationalisation which were otherwise absent in the oral narratives.

All this information about the past and day-to-day life of the people converge to create what could be called as the experience of being a Tanii, the ontology of Tanii. Each of these experiences and their experiencing of it reproduces, reasserts and encapsulates the entire domain of their specific belief, cosmology, attitude, fear, logic, and codes that can help in discerning the traditional mind or ‘craft of mind’ (Madden 2011:19). Learning and understanding them provided the key to enter into the ontological domain of Tanii life.

**2.4.3. Dealing with vulnerability and distrust:** The respondent’s vulnerability and distrust often has the potential for presenting a socially desirable response. Therefore, building a relationship of trust was very important. Making discreet disclosures of the researcher’s perspectives was necessary to ensure more open interaction or dialogue. This also helped to foreground the researcher’s political-emotional stands and possible biases on the subject. The need to remain open, sensitive, and non-judgemental, as required by the qualitative paradigm, kept the researcher on watch due to the volatility of the topic and the intensity of the interviews. This vulnerability was reduced by spacing the interviews, and making extensive field diary notes.

Therefore, it was important for the researcher to build a relationship of trust with her informants and create a climate for authentic engagement. It is important to disclose one’s research interest and approach or position with the informant. The researcher’s identification as a learning and struggling insider, her ignorance of the older and more formal language and about her own community, might initially

create some discomfiture, but demonstrating commitment to the research process and subject goes a long way in opening doors on the field.

**2.4.4. Addressing the insider's predicaments.** When researchers are new to the topic of inquiry, their poor knowledge create vulnerability as they may fill in areas of ignorance with conjecture, uninformed attitudes, or preconceived ideas. As a child I listened to the stories about the Kure Chambyo conflict between Taniis and Halyang from my father and then later from others. However, these stories were not about warriors who fought to defend their land but instead mocked those who carried out the attack against the army. I was told that our elders were uneducated fools and it seemed true to me. Every day in our school we pledged 'brotherhood and fellowship' and 'loyalty and patriotism' towards India; so, to fight against Indian government, my own country, made no sense. We were taught to develop a scientific attitude in every sphere of life. Growing up in an urban town, learning Hindi, becoming a Christian, and shifting outside the region for higher studies and jobs; all this had dislocated me from my community in many ways. As I grew older I never heard the story again and soon forgot all about it.

Getting back into the tangible and intangible nuances of social and psychological ethos of traditional and community life was difficult. More so because, ironically, as an insider I could see and feel the difference. Furthermore, the period under the study and the people who were being interviewed belonged to a different era and a different lived experience. Understanding their psyche, language and positioning was crucial in understanding what they were trying to say.

A researcher uses the self as the primary analytical tool; reading and reflecting on the descriptions of lived experiences and observing the living reality of speakers is the primary analytical activity. I maintained self-reflectivity towards my attitude and pre-understanding throughout my research. After going through the

actual official documents in various archives and understanding the larger historical and political developments and motivations of the imperialistic British government, followed by the insecurities and concerns of the Indian government; the different biases and sympathy among the administrators; the national integration program designed to unstitch all aspects of the people's sense of autonomy and autonomous identity, while inately celebrating their culture and traditions in museums, manuscripts and handloom industries; attempts by Hindu right wing missionaries to revitalize the indigenous faith, and reading about similar experiences of different indigenous communities across the region who still struggled for their autonomy against or within India, and the critical theories and indigenous assertions to determine their own epistemologies, and knowing that most Taniis, who were exposed to modernization are deeply enmeshed in capitalist economy, and believed that all state funded development is for welfare, a kind of patriotic confirmation which is problematic, it was a challenge to maintain an unbiased attitude and approach.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, unrecognized foreknowledge from prior experiences stands in the way of complete openness and therefore is considered a bias or prejudice. There is always the possibility of researchers making assumptions about the phenomenon because the pre-shaped knowledge reduces their ability to maintain an open and discovering position (Manen 1990). Hence, learning can generate bias. While on the other hand, recognized foreknowledge, however, can be selectively used to enhance awareness of intersubjectivity or how the researcher is in the world with others. For example, hermeneutic phenomenology requires bracketing (Husserl 1970) or making explicit the investigator's understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions and theories so they can be suspended. Thus, epistemologically the knowledge is to be co-constructed and transactional (Lincoln and Guba 2005). Consequently, researchers can more successfully challenge and keep their foreknowledge at bay when they strive to meet the demands of the paradigm.



Thus, becoming aware and acknowledging my own political positioning and ‘bracketing’ them was important. Maintaining field notes on observations and on one’s own emotions, reflecting and discussing with other PhD scholars, with my guide and others in academics, over the period helped in self-reflectivity.

**2.4.5. Narrative Analysis: Co-Creating and Transporting Meaning- from Traditions to Academics.** Each piece/version of oral history and narrative is valuable. Many of the interviewed were speaking about their personal life and experience for the first time. These narratives were about their pains and joys and were interspersed with silence. Some narratives told the story of recovery and moving on. However, all these stories followed the particular narrative style of their oral traditions. Translating them into an academic language and category without altering their meaning, intent and style poses a challenge. Using narrative analysis helps in identifying the tropes- oral and material, understanding the silence, leading and sometimes conflated meanings. This procedure serves as a check and balance on the probable impact of the researcher’s limited knowledge, better informs the research design, the interview guide, and the findings and increases the likelihood of researchers being more sensitive and responsive to the phenomenon they are studying.

The interpretivists talk of uncovering the hidden meanings and nuances ignored by conventional researches. This approach is hermeneutical and presumes the existence of multiple realities that can be accessed by involving the informant in the meaning construction process (Geertz 1973). Unlike the Husserlian system, it requires active participation of subjective beings, both the researcher and the participant. Thus, letting participants speak for themselves is important even though the data gathered will include the researcher’s personal reflections on the subject (Laverty 2003).

Different narratives of the same event emerged, each representing a unique socio-political background and perspective. The comparative analysis of these narrative accounts helped in triangulation of the actual event process and to build a catalogue of information to fill in the missing pieces. The comparative analysis of narratives and official documents and literature shed light on the different social and political environment of that period. It informed me of the larger colonial and political context within which the British and the Indian governments functioned in the region and their policy/attitude towards the tribes and the adivasis; and also how these mechanisms were transforming the life and future of these communities who were still isolated from the outside world. The narrative analysis of the speakers and their stories/words helped me to understand what they were conveying through their spoken words as well as their silences. These shared emotions and experiences also showed how the context has changed from when the event took place to the context when they are being narrated. (See chapter five for more detailed discussion on the narrative analysis.)

Thus by sharing the responsibility and power of the meaning making process with the participant, one ensures the co-creative process of knowledge building. This delicate balance can be brought about by more conscious decisions and exercises in the ongoing relationship of the researcher with the participant.

However, while this effort to bring oneself closest to lived reality of the participant is crucial, the constant desire to be valid and reliable and the concerns about the techniques and procedures can take away the interpretive spirit of the hermeneutic phenomenology thus making it counter-productive. Hermeneutic phenomenology talks about co-creation of interpretive meaning (Koch 1999; Lavety 2003; Watt 2007) which requires the researcher to participate actively in the meaning making process.

Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the attitudes of the methodology employed and the criteria or demands set in accessing the data. As Koch (2003) says, interpretive research is an interactive process where meanings are co-created around the environment and context which are constantly changing. Hence in hermeneutic phenomenological researches, the research demands are not met by some set formula of techniques and procedures but by contextual and subjective methodological designs for gaining the data and analysing them.

**2.4.6. Working with elders.** The event occurred in 1949 which is 67 years ago and hence, most of my informants were in the age group of late 70s and 100 years of age. As a result there were very few surviving informants. However, the main challenge was methodological and ethical concerns. The ethical issues were in getting a conscious consent for the interviews, which meant to make the interviewee aware of all the intents and implications of the study, and the rights he/she has to privacy and interim withdrawal (Davis 2010). My informants consented orally to share their information. Also, due to their traditional sense of responsibility and obligation to share information and stories to others, especially the younger generation, my speakers willingly shared their stories and views. I, however, always took their prior permission with a detailed briefing of my research project and interest. I explained to them their rights to withdraw at any point of time from the process or to remain silent at any point of time and their right to point out if the contents need to be edited out. In cases where my informants had lost their vision, I told them about the voice recorder that I was using. I also gave them time to prepare their thoughts and recollect memories. I always spoke with the other family members about the research, and thereby ensured a transparent research process.

According to Council for Disease Control (CDC), the elderly, though not inherently vulnerable, often become vulnerable due to aging, which creates an emotional and physical inequality of power relations between the subject and the researcher (Walsh nd). The feeling of powerlessness, lack of social support or

desire to be acknowledged might cause the elderly to participate in a study and not because they actually wish to participate. During my fieldwork, I found that most of the elderly men and loved to talk. They were very happy to talk about their past, their life and various subjects they observing now such as use of mobile phones, visiting Itanagar and to cities like Guwahati, changes in people's attitude, fashion trends among the young boys and girls, about their well to do family members, or the television programs they see local channels, etc. It is also often observed that older people tend to be more trusting and loyal towards authority and thus might agree for interviews out of a sense of obligation if they are approached with certain authority (Walsh nd). Other ethical questions include minimizing participant's burden considering their health and emotional status, being sensitive towards the cognitive changes with increasing age, being aware of the researcher's own biases against old age, etc.

## **2.5. Research Design: Experience and Description**

Methodologically, there will be various challenges starting with the selection of the case sample for the interview. The sample has to be selected in such a manner, that they either represent the most common and important aspect of the life situation of that particular community in relation to the historical event or that the unique experience he/she brings out enriches the historical event of the community being studied.

**2.5.1. Archival Sources.** The written documents were the official records created by various departments and ministries both during and after the colonial period. The event took place in 1949 (see chapter three for details), not 1947 as Stuart Blackburn (2010) claimed. However, there were several intervening episodes and developments which had ramifications on the culmination of the event. The imperialistic and political interest of the British government to cover and occupy the region gradually had affected the local dynamics in various ways. The plain

tribes, adjacent tribes and hill tribes were aligning differently with the new colonial power. Each of such interactions were being documented and reported to the higher authority. The local Political Officer would submit fortnightly and other specific reports to the District Commission, who would in turn compile the entire report as a quarterly consolidated report which was send to Delhi.

The field work for archival and written accounts was done in two phases. First was during the pilot field work, during May- June 2013, in which I explored the existing documents- their kinds, availability, location and accessibility, on subjects related to Arunachal in general and about Taniis in particular. The second phase was during the actual field work conducted from October 2013 to May 2014, in intervening periods, when various archives and collections were referred during visits to the National Archive of India New Delhi, the State Archive of Assam in Dispur, State Archive of Arunachal in Itanagar, the Deputy Commissioner's Record Room at Shillong, Deputy Commissioner's Record Room in Ziro , and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

While official records and written documents were extensively, if not obsessively, created, organized and maintained during the British rule; there is a quantitative and qualitative plunge in the documentation process of the post-independence era. However, there was more diversification of the document sections into different headings and departments as the areas of engagement had expanded both geographically and socio-politically. One reason for this gap could be the declassification of many colonial documents more than the newer and possibly more critical documents of the post-independence period. Nevertheless, there is a visible downside in the quality of reports that were created. Some of the files contained only a random single page data table while some official field tour diaries were exact copies of the previous tour diary. There were numerous documents recorded in the indexes which were not available. While physical maps related to Arunachal were easily accessible in the State Archive of Assam,

the same maps were denied access in the National Archive of India. The State Secretariat in Shillong informed that all relevant document of Arunachal were transferred to Arunachal after it attained complete statehood. However, some documents crucial to this study were found from the limited collection of documents in the Record Room of the Deputy Commissioner's office at Ziro, Lower Subansiri district. Those were the records related to the Political Officer Menzie Boro and Assistant Political Officer R. K. Gogoi's (1948-1953), which belonged to the main period of my study. The data was still inadequate and unreliable as it did not correspond with the oral accounts of the people. The second search focused on the academic literatures in the form of published books, papers and articles and unpublished MPhil and PhD dissertations in different universities a such as Guwahati University, Rajiv Gandhi University and NEHU, and organizations like ICHR and North East Social Research Center. This search was for the historical components, particularly dealing with the history of Arunachal Pradesh and Taniis specifically, and other tribes of the region in general, belonging to both the colonial as well as the post colonial period.

**2.5.2. Field interviews.** The second part of my pilot fieldwork involved going to the actual field and meeting people. I met few known intellectuals from the community and several prospective interviewees. I wanted to know what kind of information, memories and knowledge was available. I had more than three sessions of interviews each, with a few elderly men and women. This experience also helped in identifying the challenges that I would have to encounter.

People have different sets of memories due to the different roles they had played and also due to their different socio-economic and political positions. Women, whose presence was insignificant in the event that was happening- had different kind of information which was significant due to their traditionally ascribed roles and presence in each occasions. Another reason for the presence of variation in the memories and experience is the activities and processes introduced by the

state. The officials selected some important political representatives and ascribed them certain roles- different from the traditional roles that I mentioned earlier. Secondly they also selected a cadre of loyalists, who had a different outlook towards those officials and then there were other community members who looked at them differently.

Another challenge is the silence that people have chosen. They had either suppressed their memories or interpreted it differently to themselves, and even remember it differently. Another challenge was my poor understanding of the language the elders speak, which is a little different. Their language was dense in culture and symbolism, with its source in their time period, which gave them a different set of experiences. And some of them tended to speak from their traditional performative stand and position.

After six months, I started my actual fieldwork beginning with re-visiting all the archival sources and conducting the field interviews and observations at Ziro.

The study was conducted among the Tanii community, and the whole Tanii valley is the universe of the study. The interviews were done in all the three village clusters- Tiinii-Diibo, Niichi-Niitii and Talyang Hao which consisted of seven major villages namely, Hari, Hangu, Hiija, Diibo, Kalung-Reru, Bamin-Michi and Tajang. I followed a semi-structured sampling method. While I did not select any individual or decide any specific criteria and allowed the snow-bowling method for reaching out to my informant, I still had the set understanding that my ideal informant would be the village elders above 70 years of age, both male and female. The event took place in 1949 June so, those who are in their 70s now were in the age group of 10 and above then. This means they would have some memory of the event or had some substantial experience during that period. However, on realizing that meeting someone from that age group was unlikely, I was open to meet any elderly members in the village.

In practice, when I started interacting with the people, my relatives and relatives of my friends who introduced me to them, would take me to 'experts' on oral traditions, in fact often they would tell me not to speak to the older people as they felt that due to their old age they might not be able remember anything or say anything properly. These experts were mostly in their 50s and 80s and many of them turned out to be very informative, as someone who is a Migung expert tends to have a good knowledge of the past. Some had actually pursued the story and gathered good details. However, their narratives are not based on their lived experience but on secondary experience or secondary knowledge. As discussed earlier, this brings a different layer of interpretive approach to the narrative. They could describe and explain what they knew, learned or assumed. The informants I was looking for were the people who could describe and explain their lived reality and the environment which culminated in the event. However, there were several limitations here as well. Many of my informants had clouded memories and their descriptions tended to be summative and interpretive. It was for this reason that I carried out several rounds of interviews with each. With few informants who had more extensive engagement during the period, I conducted oral history interviews.

There were other challenges as well. For instance, due to their advanced age many had problems with their vision and hearing. Most of my main informants were immobile and in vulnerable health conditions. Therefore, my interviews were conducted at their homes surrounded by their family and guests.

In total I interviewed total fifty-five people, thirty-nine men and sixteen women of these, six -one women and five men- were selected for doing more in depth oral history interviews. The interviews were done using semi-structured interview guides. Since I was focussing on a particular historical event I had to get certain information about the causes and consequences and individuals and events, and the chronological order. I also needed to have an understanding of their opinions



and personal experiences. Hence, there was specific information I needed to elicit for which I used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews helped me in carrying out in depth interviews where, for each specific subject I followed with more in depth questions and did cross-checking inquiries as well. Yet, instead of interview schedule I used interview guide because it was an exploratory and qualitative research which means I had a few broad topics and within each topic I had specific subjects to cover. For instance, when someone would share about the sufferings at the hand of the army, officials and Gaon Buras, I had to get specific names of the people, and what they were doing? How he or she and the family were affected? What the other village members were facing? How it all ended? What price they paid? What they thought about those things, and whether they were justified or not? Etc. However, the guide was open enough to not insist that my informant follow any specific narrative route. They spoke as they recollected their memories and as the conversation flowed. Due to advanced age, some of my informants exhibited mild dilerium where they would either lose track of the conversation or repeat the same things. In such situations I would bring them back to our discussion. There were also concerns regarding the authenticity of the information they shared. Therefore, repeated interviews and cross-checking interviews were conducted to ensure that the information was correct and any mistakes were corrected. Cross-checking with other informants also helped in triangulation.

Also, during each interview there were other people involved who would join the discussion from time to time and share some information or elicit new information which I was unaware of. For instance, the presence of the spouse, especially the wife (in case the informant was male), elicited more information, which might not have been the plan of the informant. But these spouses when approached had refused to give any separate interviews. I have noted their presence in the interview process as ‘Voices in the background’ (see Chapter Four). However in few, though rare, cases, the presence of other people around affected the interview procedure negatively. Sometimes the discussions were

diverted completely and sometimes my informants were not comfortable. In another case a neighbour who was listening to the interview process had turned my informant hostile and warned him about sharing certain information after I left.

**2.5.3. Women's Voices.** Interviewing female informants were slightly a different experience as in many cases their initial response was to deny that they actually had any information to share. However, most time they would become appreciative of the fact that they had many things to share and that through our interview exercise they could 're-live', recollect and cherish many of their experiences which they had forgotten. Women, definitely had many things to share and because of their gendered roles and responsibilities, their experiences were also different about many aspects and hence the approach too. What is interesting and important to note was that in their narratives, they were the protagonists of their lived experience. Their experiences and observations were channeled through their own social situation and perspectives. In 'We Were Making History: Women in Telangana Uprising' by Stree Shakti Sangathana, a crucial space for women's voice and agency in order to understanding the history has been highlighted. Women's history, as a necessary ideological and political intervention to re-interpret the past (Scott, J W, 1989), thus its intention being more political than mere archival (p19). The authors point out that such history should not be playing a mere contributory or compensatory role but to raise question about the absence of women and also to raise critical question about the truth claim by male-centered history which claims on its factuality and neutrality and hide the ideological processing of memories and experiences (Stree Shakti Sangathana 1989: 19-31).

I observed female informants were more straight forward and vocal about their feelings, fears and dislike for the *Halyangs* of those days. Men, who had to interact with the outsiders and experience the power subjugations and manipulations on their day to day basis, had to deal with a different kind of power

politics and socialization; it affected their voicing out their views or in interpreting their experience. They tended to be more reflective and abstractive in their expression. While in case of women who, who due to their gendered roles and responsibilities, remained mostly within their villages, busy in their cultivation, had lesser exposure to socialization and allegiance processes, and also due to their particular experiences of sexual assaults and threats by army men, women were more critical in their view and also expressed more about their experience of fear of meeting or chances of having to come across the *Halyangs*.

These voices of women in representing the past and present of the community often get subsumed by the traditional narratives and stories which believes itself to be gender neutral. The traditional oration and roles and responsibility of such orations, especially whenever the history and sacred texts are concerned, are recited, spoken or performed mostly by men due to several customary norms (more detailed discussion on oral traditions in next chapter). Thus, a limited space and scope of subjects that are accessible for women are available. As a result, women's voices and agency in representing their stories, experiences and interpretations are unheard. Therefore, to count and account for women's voices in this study was done with a conscious effort. Analysing their narratives was also conscious process of understanding and acknowledging the unique experiences of women, information and the perspectives they brought to the understanding of the entire event of Kure Chambyo and after math.

Despite belonging to the same community and having an emic advantage in accessing the private meaning domain, every unit of interacting group has their own set of meaning index which can be understood and experienced only by the member or an outsider who has spent enough time with the group or individual that they develop enough empathy that they can sense those emotions. While these emotions and meanings might not be unique only to the group, their subjective interpretive rights/ability belongs only to its members.

## **2.6. Conclusion: Co-writing- voices, context and culture in Tanii history**

My oral history interview with Puna Tada was a complex experience, though not a unique one as it was typical of the experience I had with many in the community. It was only during the transcribing process of the interview records that the multiple overlapping domains and layers of meanings became evident. The oral history narration took place in a very culturally laden narrative environment/domain.

As an insider, I had the privilege to understand and grasp this domain. Pierre Bourdieu (1993) describes his concept of ‘Habitus’, that it is through day to day practice of body, and emersion of mind into the act that one can generate the esoteric meaning of that doing/act and interpret it. An insider, who embodies them, can discern, understand and consciously or unconsciously react and respond to them and if possible, write down and express the exact encrypted meaning and experience of embodied being. Thus the meanings were being co-created by different variables- the voices of both the informant and researcher, the cultural context and the historical context.

Individuals in traditional communities are inscribed into their tradition. Although they live their individual lives, they also bear common values and perspectives inherited from their past. Then, by adding their own stories, they creatively interpret and reinvent tradition and make it alive. Individual narrators are at the core of oral history, which does not exist independent of them. Moving away from pre-formulated questions, being aware and sensible to their cultural context and letting them lead us through their narrative strategies instead of imposing the direction and forcing the content of the interview is the way for narrator centric

oral history. Their way of life, traditions, belief and environment co-creates their reality.

The local's versions of their history and their evaluations of those past events were always filtered-out in earlier studies conducted among tribes in the region (Das 2010) or were never captured in-order to meet various colonial aspirations by early ethnographers and scholars. Anthropologists, like Haimendorf, despite his admiration for Apatanis, have preferred to remain silent on political resistance to external interference by Apatanis and the vindictive retaliatory actions taken by Indian Army (Blackburn 2003, 2008 & 2010). The entire post annexation history of Apatani valley exists only in the form of government gazettes or official documents which might be a very selective record of the events and imaginations. Even the recent research projects on Apatanis are functional in nature, concentrating on socio-cultural or economic aspects of the Apatani society based on colonial format of enquiries rather than on critical or political queries. Thus, by re-creating the local history of Apatanis, this study will try to explore the scope for allowing greater agency to local voices in defining and writing their history. The study will also entail a critical review on their representation in the mainstream history writings.

The Apatani history has to be created from multiple sources- cultural, historical and experiential memories of the people. The memories here, means the experiences of pasts at/of the individual rhetoric, or collective cultural level. The collective cultural or social memories of past in form of formal and informal oral traditions, like stories of their origin and migrations anchor their ethnic identity and integrity. They are preserved and passed-on through generations as traditional wisdom and knowledge system. However, at present these cultural memories have become static (as there are no new additions to it), diluted and thus endangered, even though new and experiential memories are constantly being created.

According to Pierre Nora (1989), 'Memory is a perpetual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present', they are constantly created, diluted and imagined. Yet, they always originate from some tangible experiences or life events of the subject. These experiential memories may consist of various rhetorical experiences of past like interactions with neighbouring tribes, visiting bazaars in the plains of Assam, seeing a motor vehicle for the first time, going to schools, etc. Then there are other set of memories of more serious nature like the first European visit and their gradual domination over the traditional governance system, land relations, religions, economy, etc. These memories form crucial linkages of events that produce the present state of life in the valley. Unfortunately, these new memories exist only as informal memories in the realm of casualness (unlike the traditional/cultural memories). They are neither recognized nor ascribed a collective status, and are not preserved and passed on, and thus endangered.

Under the hegemonic national integration programme, these processes of transitions are seldom critically viewed nor articulated as a systemic and structural process of uprooting and disempowering them, even by the natives of the present generation. Thus, it becomes more crucial to re-construct and review those memories of the past before the generation with access to these memories disappear. The native's version of histories should be conceived from their own experiential memories and perspectives within their cultural, political or social environment.

## CHAPTER 3:

### APATANI AND THEIR ORAL TRADITIONS: LAYING THE CONTEXT

#### 3.1. Introduction to Tanii<sup>3</sup>

The Tanii is one of 26 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. This sedentary community has the total population of 29,546 (Female 14,583 and Male 14,963) according to Census 2011. Till 1950s when the Indian government established its control over their valley, the entire population was settled in their seven village clusters located in the single valley now known as Ziro, the district headquarter of Lower Subansiri. Now as larger population of Taniis have moved out of their traditional villages and settled in the twin town called Ziro and Hapoli also located within the valley, and many are either working or studying in different parts of the country. Cristopher von Furer Haimendorf and Ursula Graham Bower are earliest ethnographer who studied the community in 1940s when the community was still not exposed to the world outside. They were highly impressed by the advanced state of Tanii society for their peaceful existence with high degree of stability and organized way of social life.

**3.1.1. *The Tanii People:*** Officially Taniis are entered as ‘Apatani’, in all academic publications, official documents and census enumerations as well. Thus, ‘Apatani’ is more popular and dominant in common communication as well to represent the community. However, the community themselves identify themselves as Tanii. The misnomer is believed to have emerged when colonial officers had entered the name first as ‘Apa Tenang’, then ‘Apa Tanang’ and finally as ‘Apatani’, based on the information they gathered from the

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<sup>3</sup> This section is an excerpt from a chapter titled ‘Gendering Land and Engendering Rights: A Study among Apatani and Nyishi communities’ in a forthcoming edited book.

neighbouring communities of Taniis. Former two nomenclatures are how neighbouring different groups of Nyishi communities, especially of Joram and Yachuli (Kani, nd: 37), addresses Taniis as where ‘Apa’ is an address or prefix which marks reverence or affection before the name and ‘Tanang’ or ‘Tenang’ means ‘Tanii’ in their accent.

Linguistically they belong to Tibeto-Burman language branch of Sino-Tibetan family. According to their oral traditions they identify themselves belonging to the pan Tani group of Central Arunachal (Tani-the mythical ancestor of all Tani group). Recently there are various speculations and theories being discussed with regards to genealogies and place of origin of the Tani group from where they migrated in time unknown. Their landlocked valley is intensely irrigated and permanently cultivated. According to Stuart Blackburn (2010), the physical limitation of the valley had influenced the pattern of settlement, household size, land use and natural resource management system, highly energy efficient agricultural system and the evolution of dense social fabric.

They have clan based patrilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal village settlement system with strict community endogamy. Each of these villages is further subdivided into exclusive and exogamous 78 clan-colonies forming a village unit that are ritually bound. These clans are further classified into close kin (Halu) and filial kin (Uru). Though each household consists of a nuclear family, the Uru is the basic social and political unit. All patrilineal inheritance, transactions and social identifications follow this line.

The second layer of social organization is the double-descent system of close kinship on both lines. Through the institution of marriage two exogamous clans enter into a ‘contract’ whereby new sets of relations and affiliations are established. While the patrilineal relations due to patrilocality are often tied to a territory, it is the matrilineal line of kinship (uterine links), both on the mother’s



(wife) side and the father's mother's side, that traverse across the valley. Matrimony was one the means to extend one's network of alliance and influence. Soio-politically they become enduring allies in times of need.

The third line of network called the *Bunii Ajing* (sacred friendship) is formed between two non-kins from different and distant village clusters. These friendship relation are contracted and sanctified through performance of rituals. These friendships are intimate relations where Bunii Ajings make solemn promise to look after each other through thick and thin, and protect each other's interests in their respective villages whenever they visit. In traditional times such friendships played such a crucial roles in trade relations and alliance buildings. These friendships are passed on through inheritance where the father distributes the *Bunii Ajings* among his son(s). Similarly, when such relations are extended to other tribe like with Nyishis it is termed as *Manyang Ajing*. The terms and intimacy are similar.

These relationships are based on mutual reciprocity and act as a social and psychological cushion or security against the unforeseen events. They are reasserted, cherished and reciprocated throughout the year during various social occassions and festivals, and even in times of conflict.

Taniis maintain similar reciprocal relations with the world of non-living called *Neli*. It consists of two category of non-livings. The first are the souls that become either harmless souls called *Yalo* or ghosts called *Igii* (*Roshang* being the strongest groups of ghosts). The other catogeory is of the spirits called *Ui*-malevolent one are called *Cicing* and benevolent one as *Tiigo*. These *Uis* includes the ancestral spirits, Stuart Blackburn had counted upto 150 *Uis* named out in chants (Blackburn, 2010:131). Each of these spirits and their significance are part of Tanii cosmology. Thus, these realms of living and non-living lives in a very close conjunction. During annual festivals such as Myoko and various

other occasions such as marriage ceremonies, these ties both with the world of living and non-living are renewed when the host village cluster invites the remaining villages and the spirits and ancestral spirits through rituals. In return blessings and goodwill are promised.

While spiritual and cosmological realm of society is taken care of by priest the *Nyibu* and the messenger *Gorra*. The village administration and judicial matters are organized through different set of institutions like *Miha Pelo* (a council of men) guided by village eldest, *Popi Sarmi*, and chaired by a hereditary and ritual clan representative called *Bulliang* (also see Chapter Five for detailed discussion).

### **3.2. Early Written Accounts about Taniis.**

The earliest official record about the Tanii was made in 1825-28 by Robert Wilcox and then later by Dalton (Kani, 2008). These accounts based on informations provided by other tribes created a fable like image for the valley as no outsider could reach the valley. The imagery of self-sufficiency and prosperity, orchards, well irrigated rice fields and aloofness of the valley and people were the determining theme in these narratives as well as when the early visitors actually managed to reach the valley. In December 1890, the first European Mr. H. M. Crowe, an Tea Estate manager of Joyhing, to visit the Tanii valley, was confused over the naming of Taniis. They were variously referred as Onka-Miri, Ankas, Akas, Aka-Miri, Apas, Daflas, Daflas or Abors of Ranga valley, Apa Tanung or Tanang or Tanae and most recently as Tanii (Choudhury, 1982, Michell, 1883, Frontier and Oversea Expeditions, 1907, Blackburn, 2008).

The valley created immense interest but the stories of menacing Tanii and their strength kept Britishers at watch from any adventure to deep inside the hill. In a

report on topography, political and military ‘The North-East Frontier of India’ prepared by Capt. John F. Michell of Intelligence Branch in 1883, a report prepared Major Graham in 15 March 1875 on Daphla expedition is quoted where he mentions about the discovery of Apa Tanung valley on his way to the Ranga valley by Lieutenant Harman. Though he did not visit the valley and saw it from far away and collected informations from Nyishi interpreters only. He notes that they hardly interact with other tribes, independent of plains, are under Tibetan influence, have 4 feet wide roads in their villages and have stone built granaries. Making strategic notes he writes:

The land of the Ranga valley would be capable of supporting large population, and will probably be someday colonized from India or England. It appears probable that a force marching straight for the villages of the north-west corner of the Ranga valley would find abundant supplies in Apa Tanung villages; for we are told, on reliable evidence, that they possess large stone-built granaries, and we know from actual observation that their country is highly cultivated... They have their own Tanu Raja and through their materials resources it is assumed that they have contact with the Saath Rajas of Tibet and are under their influence. (p. 258)

After this two significant records were published after the first visit to Tani valley in 1890 by Mr. H. M. Crowe and then in 1897 about the punitive expedition made by Lieut. McCabe. Both the accounts re-affirmed the imagery of populous, prosperous and beautiful valley. However, they debunked the war like ferocious image of Tani. They found Taniis as peaceable, gentle and industrious. They recommended more interaction and opening for Taniis to visit the plains as their population could provide good supply of labour for tea estates in the foothills.

### ***3.2.1. Cristopher von Furer Haimendorf and Ursula Graham Betts.***

Cristopher von Furer Haimendorf, a trained anthropologist he was appointed as Special Officer Subansiri in 1943-44 to work for Advisor of Subansiri Sub-

Agency J P Mill, the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Affairs, his visit carried the intent of establishing political influence over the valley. The second significant early ethnographic work on Taniis was done by Ms. Ursula Graham Bower Betts, wife of the first Political Officer of Subansiri Sub-division Cap. Tomithy Betts. Her endearing and witty publication is titled as 'The Hidden Land' published in 1953.

Haimendorf's work, who re-visited the valley twice later in 1977 and 1980, is the most extensive and intensive ethnographic writing on Taniis so far and is considered as the authority on Taniis. List of his writings on Taniis:

Himalayan barbary (1955), Apatanis and their neighbours (1962), A Himalayan tribe: From cattle to cash (1980), Life among the Indian: The autobiography of an anthropologist (1982), Tribes of India: The struggle for survival (1982 & 1992), Cattle to Cash: A Himalayan tribal community (1982) and Himalayan adventure (1983) (re-edition of Himalayan Barbary).

The colonization of Taniis is an example of covert colonial tactics where economic activities, punitive actions (Luthra, P. N., op. cit. pp.2) was accompanied by employing of anthropologist (Das, Debojyoti, 2010) to facilitate the British dominion. Both writers were trained Anthropologists and had work experience in Northeast with Naga tribe. Both have produced invaluable work which were the first and the only extensive records of the Taniis society in 1940s, prior any outside 'civilizing' influences. In fact their works and reports opened up the valley to the outside world for the first time and based on their recommendations subsequent plans were carried out forcing tremendous changes in the life of the valley. The main responsibility of the political officer was to establish firm claim to the region and the strategy to be applied was "slow pressure and gradual infiltration" to neighbouring regions. Graham (1955) candidly shares the directive her husband received:

He was to proceed with greatest deliberation and caution in all his dealings with the tribesmen and, since their only previous contact with the outside world had been with punitive expeditions exacting retributions for tribal raids on the plains, he must explain to the people that the Government's aim in entering their country was a benevolent one. He must guide advice and control, but must not resort to force. The task of the platoon of Assam Rifles attached to the Area would be to see that the King's writ, as symbolized by the Union Jack..., ran in the immediate neighbourhood of the post and the track..., must be an object lesson to the tribes, a demonstration plot of law and order. But for present intervention beyond these narrow limit would be not only vain but disastrous...and any rash action which exposed it might well mean the end of the Political Officer and his whole party. (Bower, 1955: Preface)

It was only towards the last years of Haimendorf's academic career when he became critical of the Indian government's tribal welfare schemes, including many of the programmes he had participated in (Debojyoti, Das, 2010).

In recent times, especially when entry to Arunachal was eased for outsiders, several research projects and academic writings have emerged both by local and outsiders. However, most notable and extensive work on Taniis in recent time was carried out by Stuart Blackburn, trained as folklorist and working as Research Associate in SOAS, UK. He conducted his field work in 2001 to 2003 in phases. He studied the oral traditions of Taniis including the myths and ritual chants. On many accounts he found Taniis oral traditions as unique in its semantic organizations and their performances by the priests.

In a very similar line local intellectuals and scholars have been working on reviving and preserving the oral traditions of Taniis by documenting them. Various Phd and Mphil dissertation done in Rajiv Gandhi University located in Doimukh deals with the cultural and political institutions of Taniis. These engagements by the local scholars made them to realize how the linguistic and

conceptual knowledges available are limiting in translating and explaining the traditions and culture of Tanii. The Tanii apex body called Tanii Supung Dukung and Apatani Cultural and Literary Society are working towards development of Tanii script using phonetics so that documentation works can be done for all oral traditions.

### **3.3. Tanii oral traditions:**

The two broad families of oral traditions among Taniis are- the *Miji* and the *Migung*. The *Mijis* consists of sacred oral texts performed in chants or sing-song form of Taniis. It includes myths, mythologies and knowledge of unknown and ancient past when men and spirits are used to interact freely. The traditional village priests, the *Nyibu*, are considered as the experts in *Miji*, they are the one who mediate between the two worlds through their knowledge- the ancient past and present world, the living and the dead, and human and spirit world- during various rituals and ceremonies. Thus, due to the divine and sacred nature of the *Miji* texts, and also because of the difficulty of learning the texts which is performed only in old and formal dialect, not everybody learns or are capable of learning *Mijis*. The *Migung* consists of knowledge about events, stories and traditions of pasts mostly in relation to humans society. So it consists of history, customary practices and laws or norms, all treaty and agreements, knowledge of land, river, routes, genealogies, etc. *Migung*, though does not involve sacred texts and hence, can be narrated without any ritualistic bindings and hence anybody can learn it, it has its own norms and requires a specific expertise of knowledge.

**3.3.1. Orality as skill and gift.** Both *Miji* and *Migung* can be acquired through careful learning and training with an expert in the knowledge of *Miji- Migung*. The learning involves researching, listening to several speakers, cross-checking, comparing and triangulate the information gathered, understanding, memorising and practicing it regularly for years to actually become an expert. The expert's

test and reputation come when they are recommended or invited by somebody to narrate or act as a *Gondu* (see Glossary) to represent a case. One is considered for a good *Gondu* if they are was able to successfully resolve cases by convincing the other *Gondu* party with their arguments and knowledge on the case. One's knowledge, memory, oratory skills, temperament and qualities such as wisdom and wit, and skills such as diplomacy are highly valued.

For the experts or the one who pursues the knowledge of *Miji and Migung*, it is a passionate vocation and matter of their prestige and dignity. Late Nani Taping (interviewed on 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2016) narrated his story, once he was invited as a *Gondu* to negotiate in a boundary dispute involving a Tanii and a Nyishi man. Though, he won the case but he came back dissatisfied as he could not clarify certain subject to his opponent speaker. So, he sent a messenger to Nyishi village requesting a debate on the subject and to fix a date and place. Then he asked another friend and one of his clan elder whom he considered as his teacher to join him for the debate. He asked all the necessary *Migung* questions from his teacher and on assigned day moved to Nyishi village with some rice and rice beer for a day long walk. He planned his strategy for the debate, he asked his friend to open the debate and invite the opposition team to speak first after which he will speak and give all the answers one by one while he asked his teacher to just listen and observe carefully if he spoke correctly. He won the debate this time properly and even today he felt proud that all his opposition acknowledged that Nani Taping knew the best version of the particular *Migung* and appreciated him for informing them. With much content he said that now they are going to remember him even after his death. Mostly he was happy that his teacher approved of his knowledge and skill.

However, the knowledge of *Miji and Migung* is never considered as a mere result of human endeavor, they believe that it is a special inborn gift bestowed by a spirits called *Charung*. *Charung* gives the gifts of intelligence, good

memory, talents, thirst for knowledge and creativity. The *Charung* is also responsible for the beautiful voice of the birds. Therefore, the *Miji and Migung* orators or singers also have the talent of singing and have good voice. However, the *Nyibu* the village priest, apart from *Charung*, is also blessed with guardian spirits called *Jilo Lyayu* who protect him during the rituals. It is believed that these guardian spirits cannot be propitiated at one's will rather it is the spirits who choose the person, hence it is a gift. Yet, *Nyibuship* is seldom an imposition or hereditary but a matter of choice (Yaming, 2009: 92, Haimendorf 1978, Kani, 1993). Some realize these gifts from very young age while others realize much later in life (Blackburn 2010). A good orator or knowledgeable person is highly regarded in the society.

**3.3.2. Exclusiveness of oral traditions:** As mentioned above, both *Miji* and *Migung*, and other oral traditions are narrated in a formal and old language. As a result a lay person finds it difficult to understand, learn and orate. Further, due to the sacred nature of *Miji*, the chanting or oration of *Miji* takes place only under certain circumstances or during ritual ceremonies. Similarly, *Migungs* of particularly the ones involving war, violence and death are never narrated unless a situation demands it. One is careful and take the responsibility while speaking those *Migungs*. It is due to these critical and sacred nature of oral tradition texts that they are neither performed unreservedly nor performed or narrated by any lay person.

There are many other taboos and norms restricting their common and colloquial performances/ narrations. For instance, a folk story called *Kari Siimi*, about two orphan brother and sister and their tragic death and disappearance, is considered as *Migung* under certain considerations such as the use of certain geographical legends in the story. According to norms this story should be narrated or sang in *Biisi* (a sing-song form) only by a person who knows the complete story and that it should be sung till the end without interruption or leaving any loose ends.



Failing to this the orator would face an unfortunate fate or even death. Similarly, all the stories of past involving an unnatural death or violent conflicts are narrated in a fashion that its ends are justified or final and peaceful resolutions are met with no continuation of story. The belief associated is that whenever such events are narrated, one is bringing the attention of the dead souls and invokes a malevolent spirit called the *Yachu* (see Glossary). Speakers who leaves the loose ends allows these spirits to enter and cause harm or lead to another conflict. Thus, the narrations of such stories or oral traditions becomes the exclusive domains of the experts who are who are skilled, ‘gifted’ and has a ‘professional’ role- such as the *Nyibus*, *Goras*, *Gondus*, etc.

Also, due to the patriarchal stereotypes and settings such as considering women as weaker with weaker souls. and gendered norms debarring women from being part of certain rituals, women are not encouraged to speak *Miji* and *Migung*, or perform rituals as *Nyibu*. *Migung*s involving death and violence are often not shared with women.

**3.3.3. Cultural and linguistic bearings on narratives.** Most, if not all, of the informants interviewed were old men and women of the villages who grew and lived in a very traditional environment. Their lived realities and experiences were very different from what they experience and observe at present. While their world view at present are formed out of those cumulative experiences of several developments, they are still practitioners and believers of their traditions. They still speak and converse in an older and more formal form of Tanii language. This older language, also often referred as *Miji* language, is more complex, dense and semantically aesthetic. It draws much from symbols and references from their traditional surrounding, a context very different from present. Thus, often understanding and interpreting the language becomes difficult.

One evening, I was interviewing Kago Nabing in Siiro village. My interest was to gain some information about few important leaders in past such as Kago Bida, Padi Lailyang and Nada Riika, who were the first appointed Gaon Buras by Haimendorf and later by new administrators. He visibly seemed frustrated talking to me and having to explaining the meaning of almost everything. Then, finally one evening my father dropped in to pick me up on his way back. As he joined the conversation I realized there was a sudden and visible changes in my informant's demeanor and narrative style. Till now he seemed distant and careful or spoke in a very matter or factly manner about those three individuals suddenly turned out to be his regular company and fellow. Now suddenly he could speak about politics and difficult subjects with passion. There was no language barrier for him. The old language that he was using, which had its bearings from traditional and older way of life, made sense for my father and thus was easier for him to connect with my father.

But this apart there was a significant difference in the narrative style as well. He was now personalizing their unique characteristics with his own observations. His narrative was now more nuanced, symbolic parallel and ornamental as he explained the unique personalities and styles of those three persons. It was this chanced situation that revealed so many facts and details about past in one hand, and on the other hand about the quality of those facts. The linguistic ornamental attributions which explains so many things about the experience and environment of the speaker, but also reveals the narrative domains and referral points of the speaker themselves during the act of the speaking. Their generation, oration and their experience and interpretations takes place within a specific cultural context. Therefore there is an evident bearing on the speakers, especially the traditional experts, of these cultural norms and traditions.

### **3.4. Origin and Migration: A Self Conscious Story**

Past is difficult to imagine if there is no consciousness about time or any sense of chronological order of progression. However, many have debated if this overlaying of past over time and space should be understood as a progression- that moves with a certain orientation of direction- or as a marker of change from one state to another. Colonial historians had denounced ancient India as a historyless because of this lack of sense of time. However, rarely we find traditional historians defending numbers of similar concepts existing among different groups of communities who define their past through such intangible markers or landmarks. It is only in post-modern and post-colonial time that oral traditions is accepted though with great deal of apprehension as a legitimate historical texts. Most of these oral traditions are still accepted as second class source of history. However, what is problematic yet is that oral traditions and oral histories are admitted as a supplementary source of history for writing the History, not as history. The history that never be the history of the community. It is rare that the oral traditions of any community is accepted at their own strenght.

Often these communities are called as pre-historic community. However, it is often argued that by term pre-history one might not mean that these communities existed from ancient past but that it is assumed that they do not have history or they are history less communities. However, far away from such epistemological concerns and deliberations on how historical or unhistorical are the oral traditions for the History, the Tani oral communities have been preserving and practicing their oral tradition as the repository of the knowledge about their past. These knowledge explains their present, these histories in their oral traditions explains the continuation of life of their community. As their past is connected to their present.

**3.4.1. Phases of Origins: Unknown Land and Time.** Taniis divide their history or past into four plus one main epochs- Uyi Supung, Iipyu Supung, Mudo

Supung, Tani Supung. The world evolves through a complex politics and struggle between human and spirits for dominance, ultimately leading to separation of the spirit and human world in accordance to following phases:

*The first phase: Kolyung Kolo Supung.* Kolyung Kolo, means the most distant past or the beginning. Supung means a world. In Kolyung Kolo, there was an eternal or a golden womb from where two sets of spirits (gods and goddesses) were born. The benevolent spirits like Anchangriting, Andosikho, Achangpiigandg and Andoriting conjugated with goddess Tangu Nountii Anii, who got pregnant with the universe- the earth (Chantii) and the sky (Dotii) in shape of two balls. The other set, of malevolent spirits, conjugated with goddess Tangu Ngurii Anii, and gave birth to other spirits like Hirii, Gri, Gyopu, Milya, Dopung, Yalu, Yachu, Iyu and Taisime. These spirits turned against the universe and started troubling them through diseases causing their improper growth. Thus, the supreme creator Pinii created the priest Kolyung Bumya Nyikang who was advised by the supreme advisor Kolyung Popi, in mediating between the spirits through performance of certain rituals. Finally as they were cured, the earth and the sky took their perfect shape. Then other gods of earth Chahajiji created the plants, Doha Marmo created same for sky. Chaha Sii and Durgu Sii created domestic animals, etc.

However, there still was lots of chaos and confusion as there was no light. Therefore Kololoping and Kololoter conjugated with goddess Ahingrupu (golden womb) and gave birth to two suns- Jampi, the female one who rose from the east and Janter, the male one who rose from the west. But as they produced too much of heat affecting plants and animals, Janter was killed by Tamu (a very powerful spirit). The gradually other things such as stars, water, rocks, trees, etc. were created by different spirits.

*Second Phase: Uyi Supung.* Two important spirits Chantung (Earth) and Chankha were born by mingling of sun rays and water. These spirits gave birth to Abotani or Tani, the forefather of human kind (Abo means father and Tani is his name), and Toro (a mythical Tortoise). However, it is said that the first Tani was still not in complete human form. Therefore, a series of Tanis was born- Nikung Tani, Nima Tani, Nigi Tani, Niipi Tani, Nitu Tani, Neyya Tani, Ato Harin, before the perfect Tani, the Neha Tani, was evolved. Neha tani was the forefather of the present human race. Along with him other sacred and powerful creatures like tiger (Lyobo Siinyo), leopard (Nyokhe Tumbo), cheetah (Garbo Taker), snake (Bulliang Duyu) and eagles (Bullying Diiye) were also born. Therefore, these creatures are considered as the brothers of Tani. Also in another myth Tani is considered as the father of many other living and non-living things on the earth out of his marriage to different kinds of things such as rocks, straw, leeches, herbs, etc..

In this phase all the creatures and spirits were living together and competing with each other. They were shape-shifters. There are series of folk tales associated to this phase, for instance competition between Tani and his brother Buro Piicha and Siiki or the story of a Tiger and a Snake who turned into human to marry a woman. There was constant competition and Tani outsmarted them all and became the most powerful. He had a special gift of third eye in the back of his head called by which he could see both the spirit and human world. He had a knife like appendage at the back of his heel by which he could kill all beings. He was also protected by his sister Dolyang Chanjang, who is said to be the first and most powerful priest in Tani traditions. Tani started killing many spirits to establish his himankind's dominance. As a result all these beings came together, conspired and revolted against Tani. They got hold of Tani by using trick and released him only after the surrender of the third eye and the appendage. After this, the spirit world and human world separated themselves.

*Third Phase: Ipyo Supung:* As Abotani was formed into a fully human now. The Tani's descendants had started consolidating itself and have started developing their own distinct identity as a group of people different from others. Though, it is impossible to guess or find out about the geographical location of this mythical place from various oral traditions that talks about this phase yet one can clearly gauge that this place of Tani's ancestors are more real than just myth.

Different groups/race of mankind were created- Tani's Donyii (Taniis), Rigung Chatung (Dodin), Rilochari (Dolo), Nyime Tupe (Tibetan or Chinese), Lubogmbo (Sulung), Juma Jugi (Halyang/Non-tribals), Doka-Arki (Nyishi). It was followed by Niikun Neya, Ato Talyin-I, Tokung Toh and Ato Talyin-II. This is the phase where most of the social and cultural invention, diversification and evolution took place. As Tani's started interacting with other communities or group of people, as many stories reveals, it learned or adopted their practices. As a result various other rituals, socio-cultural practices and formation of various social institutions like Bulyang, Gorra, lapang, etc. took place in this phase. For instance, the stories about the beginning of rice cultivation practice among Taniis reveal that rice cultivation was not an invention but a learned practice from some other group of people who are supposedly lived in a plain region. Two versions of the oral tradition about the rice cultivation is presented here. Then there are other stories of how Taniis came into learning metallurgy and use of ornaments through the story of Abo Loma.

Various important religious ceremonies which are still continuing such as Mipu Hape (Murung), Diu Raru (Myoko), Tagyang Tapin (Subu), Sanda Nanda (Nanda), Doni Tani (Dree) and Talo Piisan (Imyoh/Poison) were also formed in the Ipyo supung. Very importantly, the social stratification with the birth of Kojin- giving rise to patrician Gyuth, and Pusang- of plebeian Gyuchi also took place in Ipyoh supung. The social stratification in such line shows that Tani's

society had achieved certain level of stability and advancement where such division could be formed and grow into a hereditary line of section of people. The phase where descendent of Kojin and Pussang were formed is called Mudo Supung. Also the migration of Tanii people started during towards the end of this phase.

*Fourth Phase: Miido Supung.* They took Landu and Lancho path and crossed the Chilang mountain to reach the Miido Supung or Lemba. This place or phase was significant phase in the sense that it is in this place differentiation and segregation of people into different group, race and category took place.

In another version, there is another intervening phase or place between Miido Supung and Tani Supung, called Nyime (Tibetan) Supung. People lived here for generations and assimilated themselves well. A Nyime king called Payang Radhe of Nyime married Piikung Piibo, who bore six daughters. The Taniis are said to be the descendent of three younger daughters –Ane Hara and Aba Tayu's descendent are Talyang, the originator of Kalung, Reru and Tajang villages, and Hao of the present Hari village; Ane Bending and Tasso Darbo's descendent are the Tiin Diibo- the present Bamin, Michi, Mudang Tage and Dutta village and Diire-Hiija Diibo, Hiija and Duta; and Loli Yari and Babin Hiipa's descendent is Hangu, whose descendents Aba Dotii whose descendent are of the Niichi-Niiti village.

Here people further split into different groups depending upon their choice of food crop. They believe that when Ane Danyi (Mother Sun) asked the human kind to choose their own mode of life so that she can bless them accordingly, the ones who chose rice seeds and irrigable terrace land for cultivation and thus they became Tanii. The ones who chose millet as their crop and rocky and steep hills became the Nyishi and those people who chose beetle nut and plain hot

place became the non-tribal plain people (Halyang). The descendent of Kojing and Pussang were formed in this phase. The descendent of Mudo Kojing and Mudo Pussang were Mudo Talyin, Mudo Tinii, Mudo Gyati, Mudo Tiipu, Mudo Tiira, Mudo Pugang, Mudo Siikhi, Mudo Tayo and Mudo Piilo. However, here again as they started moving out from here the different races of people separated and took different direction. But before they departed they held a big feast and sacrificed a mithun known as Diping Subu for they might never meet again and departed saying: *Milo byasa, Hirung byasa* , meaning ‘like wild boars takes on separate paths, so must men should follow its own path’.

*Fifth Phase: Tani Supung.* The most important development of this phase was the final settlement of Taniis to their present homeland. Taniis believe that they migrated from north, a country which was situated near two rivers known as Supupad and Pudpumi. The Tanii, after separating from their common Tani group, now had crossed the Himalayan range, crossed the Kru and Kiime rivers and then the Subansiri river, which flows through the Tibet to India. Here they took a turn Southeastward and settled in Sipi valley called Karr located beyond the North bank of Pij Cholo, raising from the north bank of Kamala river. Here again the Tanii group separated themselves once again. Maybe the scarcity of resources or proper cultivable land, group of people, probably belonging to same clan family, started moving out.

**3.4.2. The Settling Batches and identity formation.** The migration to current valley took place in three batches and through different routes, with which more tangible division of villages and sub-tribe identities are begun to be identified-

*First batch:* Tiinii-Diibo cluster comprising of Hiija, Dutta, Mudang Tage and Michi Bamin villages; crossed the Kuru river between Mint Lat. They stayed in Tapang Talley or Talley valley (30 to 35 km away at the east of the Ziro valley) for sometime before they finally migrated to Ziro.



*Second batch:* The Talyang-Hao group of Hari, Bulla and Kalung villages migrated via Pepu Sala (north of Ziro valley) to present settlement. They are said to be the first one to come to the valley.

*Third batch:* Niichi-Niit group of Hangu village, came via Nari Anko, (north east of the valley). They crossed the Kamala river near the Hill Miri village of Gocham.

Ursula Graham in her book 'The Hidden Land' (1952) records Bulla, Hija, Hari and Hangu as the first settlers while Duta, Mudang Tage and Michi Bamin came later. There are different variation to the migration story, further they are narrated in a Miji or old formal language hence it is difficult to identify people and places. The details are also incoherent as they are narrated according to the context dialogue and with different focus theme. Depending on the question being raised different area of details would emerge. For instance, if somebody ask 'how Myoko festival originated?', or 'Who is Dolyang Chanjang?', 'Where is Kari Simi located?', 'Why did Tani killed Siiki?', 'How did Taniis learnt the metallurgical works?', etc.. All these involves the narrative of origin story and migration. Thus, each legend in any narrative acts as a port for opening up a new set of narratives and asking the right question is the key to it.

They all settled first in a place called Biirii, known as *Supung Biirii* in Miji language, located in the middle of the valley. From here, after performing their rituals of consulting the spirits, each village group took a branch of peach flower from one tree and dispersed to their present village locations where they re-planted the peach tree. Each Myoko festival sacrifices to ancestors are offered under this tree.

In another story line, the valley when Taniis first settled was swampy and was inhabited by furious animals and reptiles. One of the legendary creature called the Buru used to live in those swamps. Its description resembles a reptile or crocodiles, yet their characteristics and behaviour makes them a mysterious creature. Ralf Izzard who wrote a semi research semi adventure journal book called 'The Hunt for Buru' in 1940s, could not find any evidence of its present existence but the legend persistent. The Taniis drained the swamp and killed all the Burus as it became difficult for them to continue their cultivation. In another version, a legendary couple brass plate- *Myamyas*, who are believed to be living, had killed those Burus.

The legend also has that there were other three groups of people who lived in the valley- Ziro, Dusu and Tabyu people. According to oral tradition narrated by Hage Talley and Hage Apa recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016: There were three groups of people who inhabited the valley along with Taniis. The Ziro and Tabyu people lived in the North-West of the valley, particularly in the Ziro hillock. The Dusu people lived in the South East of the valley. It is believed that Ziro people became troublesome and started violating the agreements and customs as they grew in strength. who grew in strength became very arrogant and started disrespecting Taniii traditions. Their leader, Menge Radhe or Ato Ziro, started asserting its dominance over all. They used to harrass and forcefully took Taniii women for marriage and mistreated them.

One such woman with beautiful voice used to sing and play sorrowful ballad on *Elu* (straw pipe). So much was the pain in her song that it caused heavy storm, hailstones and flood. All the ripe crop which was ready for harvesting were washed in the Kiile river and was carried to Dusu Duyu's field and caused famine in the valley. Dusu Duyu had collected all those grains and became richer. He was arrogant and cruel man. As due to famine every household had to visit his house to borrow rice grain, he used all unfair means to measure and

exchange rice for all valuables items. Finally, one day all Tani villages came together and killed him. Similarly, the entire Tani villages came together and formed a great force and attacked on Ziro people to drive them out of the valley. They killed the most while some managed to escape. Many believe that the Banginis in the West Kameng districts are the erstwhile Ziro people.

Since their first settlement to the valley Taniis had diligently worked in turning their hostile yet fertile valley into an orderly, high yielding and securely nestled houses, gardens, fields, grazing land and forests. They fought out and resisted every attempt of encroachment to their land or undue molestation to its people by building strategic compact village which increased their number strength to resist any attack or to organize group of people within few minutes. They formed (or has been maintaining since their migration) social organizations and institutions within the valley and also with neighboring tribes to form alliances and friendship ties to look after their political as well as economic interests. There are another set of oral traditions under *Migung* category which gives details of formation of those treaties, boundary agreements (*Kiidi Migung*) and establishments and formed agreements of routes (*Rego Migung*) to travel outside their valley.

The excavation carried out by AA Asraf in Parsi Parlo site, at now Kurung Kumey district, reveals that pre-Neolithic tools were found in the area. Three phases of Neolithic culture found were of- aceramic neoliths, ceramic neoliths and ferrolithic stage (Ashraf, 1990). He notes that among six basic types of rocks found, Jadeit is not found in India but in south-west Yunan, that confirms its connection more to north than to rest of India. Further, T formed cylindrical stone hammer is unique to NE India, and they are also found in Szechwan stone age culture of Eastern China. The cord marked pottery and shouldered celt found in Kamala valley has connection to Neolithic culture of South East Asian civilization. Thus, it establishes close linkages of the people in the region to China, but from its east not north.

Takhe Kani, a Tani scholar, believes that the *Ui Supung* and *Ipyo Supung* was located somewhere in Yunan and Mongolia provinces of China, while the *Miido Supung* in Tsampo valley. He also asserts that the word ‘Supung’ is actually distorted pronunciation of ‘Tsampo’ (Kani, 1993). Radhe Amung, a cultural anthropologist, maintains that the migration took place in two phases. The first phase took place in Miido Supung, where all different races of people disbursed and took their own routes. The Tani or Abotani group took into southern direction where they entered Nyime Lemba. Nyime is referred to Tibetians/ Lama. Their oral tradition mentions Nyime Pembu (Nyime Mountain) and many other references such as Nyime King or Nyime women whom Taniis had married. The second phase, according to Radhe Amung, took place after entering the present Arunachal, most probably after crossing the Himalayan ranges in the north, where the Tani group divided themselves among different ancestral families. Here Tani, Adi, Miri, Nyishis, etc., took on their own routes. Though, it is not know how long they settled in the land before they separated, yet there is a common oral tradition still existing among all the Tani groups that tells story how two brothers separated. The younger brother who was trying to follow the elder brother who left the house, settled in different places where we find different communities of Tani family settled. He searched and followed the elder brother till the foothills of plains from where he returned back. Thus, the Miris and Missing communities of Assam plains are believed to be the elder brother’s descendent while the hill Tani group belongs to the younger brother.

### **3.5. Taniis and their neighbors and Halyangs**

**3.5.1. *The Nyishis.*** Critopher Von Furer Haimendorf wrote the book ‘The Apatanis and their Neighbour’ in 1963. Though the book is a description of the socio-economic and political relations that Taniis have maintained with its neighboring tribes, largely the Nyishi tribe, one would not miss the unflattering

comparison he makes between Taniis and Nyishis. He writes: ‘The relations between the complex and highly specialized Apa Tani economy and the more primitive economy of the neighbouring semi-barbaric Daflas (Nyishi) and Miris are a remarkable example of the interdependence of basically different culture’ (Haimendorf, 1963:47). He calls Nyishi and Miris, who have practically surrounded the Tanii homeland, as ‘unruly’ and ‘barbaric’, while Tanii land as ‘marked by stability, ordered and secluded life’ and an ‘oasis of peaceful existence’ (Haimendorf, 1963:4-5). He further go on to make a point that Taniis are a different and much advanced race altogether and that they are literally held captive by their Nyishi neighbor. It is in continuation of this narrative where he in his policy recommendations in he calls on his colonial benefactors as to be the liberator.

The political overtone of the book overlooks the synergic and sentimental relation that these two neighbor had. For Haimendorf it was all economic necessity that led Taniis to form alliances and friendship treaties with Nyishis who are far inferior to them. Nevertheless, it was a complex one as Haimendorf writes: The Apa Tanis relations with their Dafla and Miri neighbours fluctuate between intensive trade contacts involving frequent reciprocal visits with much animated conviviality and period of hostility punctuated by kidnappings, raids and killings.’ (1963:121)

To give him a benefit of doubt, it is possible that most of his information sources had their own political interests in telling him stories or giving information that suited their designs. Haimendorf came among Taniis with military strength and impressed its power over the Nyishis. Thus, most of the people he spoke to must had their own grievances against the Nyishis and because of the nature of his presence there and information he was gathering, most of the speakers spoke mostly about political and conflict related matters.

Nevertheless, Taniis identify Nyishis and Miris as belonging to same ancestry. They have maintained a long relations with their neighbor- both through a formal and informal treaty. The formal treaty is called a Baro-Manyang treaty/friendship. Here two distant Nyishi and Tanii individuals formally form a bonding sanctified by rituals. They promise each other all- moral, political and economic support, in times of need and necessity. They visit each other's during their respective festivals or important occasions with gifts and goodwill. If the Tanii friend has some business in its friend's village he or any of his family member will stay in their Manyang's house. The Manyang would help in carrying out the business- say purchase or selling of ornaments or other goods or finding works. They provide political refuge to each other. Any harm or loss caused to one's Manyang while in his village will be taken as offense against the family itself and will be avenged.

In olden days when trade and barter were the main means of transaction, one had to travel far distance either to find a prospective buyers of their goods or to purchase something that is not available in nearby location such as salt. In those days it is these Manyang's who formed an important transit stations who provided information, shelter and security. However, most of the time long distance travels to unknown places were avoided and instead intermediary trade channels were used. Nyishis neighbors formed an important trade partner who supplied Taniis with all its necessary items such as valuable ornaments, Tibetan swords, prayer bells, brass plates, and other metal items which they bring from further distant areas with their own networks. Apart from this, other products such as cottons, ginger, maize, coloring materials, etc., which are abundantly produced in warm Nyishi villages or pottery, wild animal meat, etc., were traded for rice and woven fabrics.

Such relations requires strong reciprocity from both parties. However, as Haimendorf had noted that there were also very turbulent relations between Taniis and Nyishis. Each Tanii village if had their friendly Nyishi villages then

they also had enemy villages with whom they constantly had feuds and conflicts. There were boundary and encroachment issues for land and hunting ground. There were kidnapping, occasional raids, stealing of livestock, ambushing and even murdering. Haimendorf found that most of these cases were against the Nyishi people. Taniis being settled community with agriculture as its main mode of economy are mostly a peasant like community, while Nyishi are more martial like. However, Taniis' strength lies in their number.

**3.5.2. The Halyangs.** Though, the Halyang of Miido Supung are believed to be brothers of Taniis, they actually refer to Miris and Missing communities who have settled in the plains and have adopted their material and social cultures. With them they share the common ancestry and migration stories. Yet, this understanding of term Halyang has expanded over the period since their exposure and interaction with different groups of people. Thus, now Halyang means any non-tribal people who dwells in plains of mostly with non-mongoloid features who are considered as outsiders, including the foreigners. Thus, the tribal communities from central India or Assam would still be called as Halyang, while tribal communities from within the states and from other states of Northeast, who have mongoloid features and have socio-cultural resemblance are addressed by their specific identities or otherwise as Missang, Taniis term for Nyishis (though it carries some derogatory notion).

It is not known since when Taniis had been visiting the plains but there are accounts and markers of Taniis visiting the Halyang. Taniis routes like Haging Pudu are said to be used for going down to the Halyangs and my informants have shared about their visit to plains.

Tilling Tapi of Hangu village shared about his visits to the plains during winter along with village elders who were familiar with the route and plains. They used to work in Halyang's fields to harvest the rice or for clearing their jungle for

opening new farm area. He said there was a particular house in the foothill village where they used to visit particularly. He cheerfully share that how hardly they spoken with the people for they did not understand each other's language but could understand each other's needs. They were given a shed in the field itself. After finishing their work they were paid in items and goods. Usually the best thing they would ask for was the Erie silk cloths which was strong and warm. With other items they would exchange them for fermented fish (Ngiiyi Papi), salt, hoes and other tools. This they would exchange for rice on their return to the valley.

However, in 1943, Haimendorf made his observation that the material culture resembled more towards the north than with the south. It is true for all the items that were brought from plains were of necessity and in demand yet they are not as expensive as items that are supposedly brought down through various intermediary networks from Tibet, mostly for their ritual significance. Thus, one can assume that the trade relation with the plains is relatively newer.

Also, the official records of colonial government, who especially after the introduction of Inner Line system, had been monitoring the visits made by hill people to the plains, especially Taniis. Their visits were very less and in small number but increasing especially after 1889 when Mr. Crow of Joy Hing Tea Estate in North Lakhimpur paid the first ever visit by Europeans to Tani land (ref.). My informant never seen any white Halyang during their visit to the plains as they limited themselves only to the village they visited. They would not explore much for the fear of catching plain's disease.

In the valley, people who used to visit plains were not considered as of high esteem. The rich and important people would not depend their livelihood on trading. The industrious Taniis find themselves occupied through out the year in their field or other activities within the valley. Only poorer families with limited



rice field and no other livelihood source but to work in other's field or to carry out bartering work would make journeys outside their valley, either to Nyishi villages or to the plains. Sometimes rich patrician would send their servants to plains to buy certain items. Many would die on their way, many would come back with some sickness and die. They have to perform cleansing rituals upon their reaching the valley. They have to announce their arrival while entering the village so that people could avoid their contact. For ten days they maintain taboos whereupon they lock themselves in their house to avoid any contact. Many elderlies believe says that there never used to be so many sicknesses and diseases in the valley before the coming of Halyangs.

However, interesting twist of fate begun after the arrival of colonial rulers in the foothills, about whom Taniis were still unaware. Much unaware of the introduction of new jurisdiction and Inner Line system by the colonial government. It is these complicated stories and development within the context of exisiting socio-political happeneing within which the first coming of military forces are unfolded.

### **3.6. Migration a Disputed story- Counter Claims**

**3.6.1. Archaeological evidence of migration.** The archaeological excavation study conducted by AA Asraf in Parsi Parlo site reveals that not just neolithic but also pre-neolithic tools were also found. Three phases of neolithic culture found were of- aceramic neoliths, ceramic neoliths and ferrolithic stage. He notes that among six basic types of rocks found, Jadeit is not found in India but in south-west Yunan, that confirms its connection more to north than to rest of India. Further, T formed cylindrical stone hammer is unique to NE India, and they are also found in Szechwan stone age culture of Eastern China. The cord marked pottery and shouldered celt found in Kamala valley has connection to

Neolithic culture of South East Asian civilization. Thus, it establishes close linkages to China.

Takhe Kani, one of the most regarded local scholar, believes that the *Ui Supung* and *Ipyo Supung* was located somewhere in Yunan and Mongolia provinces of China, while the Miido Supung in Tsampo valley. He also asserts that the word ‘*Supung*’ is actually distorted pronunciation of ‘*Tsampo*’ (Kani, 1993). Radhe Amung, maintains that the migration took place in two phases. The first phase took place in Miido Supung, where all different races of people disbursed and took their own routes. The Tani or Abotani group took into southern direction where they entered Nyime Lemba. Nyime is referred to Tibetians/ Lama. Their oral tradition mentions Nyime Pembu (Nyime Mountain) and many other references such as Nyime King or Nyime women whom Taniis had married. The second phase, according to Radhe Amung, took place after entering the present Arunachal, most probably after crossing the Himalayan ranges in the north, where the Tani group divided themselves among different ancestral families. Here Tanii, Adi, Miri, Nyishis, etc., took on their own routes. Though, it is not know how long they settled in the land before they separated, yet there is a common oral tradition still existing among all the Tani groups that tells story how two brothers separated. Some calls them as Abotani and Buro Pucha, while in other stories the elder brother is referred as a Tiger. Because of some misunderstanding and disagreement the elder brother decides to leave the family. The younger brother when insists to follow him, he promise to leave his traces on the way in the form of banana trees that he will cut down. He said if he find the new outgrowing plant tall as a meter high then he should abandon following him as this will be a sign that he is too far now for him to catch up. Thus following the younger brother who seemed to have followed the elder brother till the foothills or plains when saw the outgrowing banana plant already a meter above they returned back to hills. The selection of the banana tree was to keep the younger brother away as banana plant is known to grow fast unlike other trees. Thus, the Miris and Missing communities of Assam plains are

believed to be the elder brother's descendent while the hill Tani group belongs to the younger brother.

This narration apart, the Taniis still have its much detailed narration of its migration story recorded in '*Dogging Huniing*' or '*Doging Geniing*' oral texts and recited by the village priest who has to follow this mythical-migration routes during the payer incantation. Though, it is not known how long Taniis settled in a place before they further moved during the second phase of migration, according to their oral tradition here they have crossed the Kuru and Kiime rivers which flows from Tang Tsampo valley in Tibet. After this, the Tanii group further got divided themselves into three batches (as discussed earlier) in search of the elder brother whom they believed have settled in a fertile and plain land. Also there are several oral accounts among the settled communities various regions like Nyapin, Daporijo and Tali-Kolorian areas which accounts for earlier Tanii settlements there (see Kani, 1990:37).

### **3.7. Conclusion**

No matter how disjointed were the history of India and that of Apatani people in pre-British era, it was juxtapose by the annexation of the Apatani valley under Indian political administrative unit in 1948.

The natives' memories of their pasts locate them outside the narrative scopes provided by the nation-state of India. The community reimagine itself from these experiences preserved in their community memory and commemorate them in their festivals, rituals, traditions and customary law practices. It is these experiential memory and engagement that builds their ontological relation and identity to their land, homeland, and the belief and desire to keep its integrity and autonomy intact. In another words, their identity, ownership to their land,

landscape and cultural memories are deeply intertwined. The experiences they generate reproduces a unique worldview and perspective reflected in narrative and narrative style for Taniis. However, a complete rupture to this reality and a detour was forced when the outsiders first appeared in their valley. The valley was opened up and now patched to larger nation-state of India and world economy with no turning back.

Taniis now mostly struggling for keeping their home running hardly turn back to their history and least raise any critical question against the state. At most they would only demand for proper electricity supplies or for better hospital services. The process of socialization and allegiance is backed by transformative developmental process sponsored by the state. These transformations are not only creating new memories for people but constantly contesting and diminishing the old memories of resistance. Ranajit Guha (1997) writes, 'A generation, conceptualized thus, acts not only as a force for continuity but also as one that promotes diversity and change, since what it inherit is always less than the whole of its ancestral culture.'

On the other hand, the constant production of officially censored knowledge demeans and displaces the traditional memory of historical knowledge. Also the modern notion of what is history and what qualifies as historical materials sets conflict in the traditional Taniis notion of history. While modern history limits its chronological recordings to time since the first official account of Taniis community exists, that is to early nineteenth century, whereas traditional memories and history takes Taniis history to their cosmological space including the original stories and establishes their independent identity and indigeneity to their land.

Their memories hold the experiences of resistance struggles and violations of their rights by India. The memory of this struggle holds out the fact that they

knew of their independent identity and nationality. However, within the scope of hegemonic nation-state of India and its history, such history becomes the uneasy history that nobody would like to celebrate. As a result these memories are now stigmatised as a secessionist memory. Rendering, many indigenous communities such as the Taniis vulnerable to becoming historyless.

## CHAPTER 4:

### THE STATE IN APATANI HOMELAND: THE MEANING MAKING STATE

#### 4. 1. Introduction:

Half a century back, if the local histories were written it would have told the story of state annexation of non-state people and their land in the region, and about the futile resistance put by the peoples against the new authority. A century prior to that, many of these people in the interiors of this highland never even existed in the consciousness of British India; and vice versa. They were outside the State system of the plains of Brahmaputra in the south or the Tibet in the north. Despite some fluid socio-economic interaction across few bordering stretches at the foothills, the hill people and the plain States were strangers to each other, and by nature of their interests they were even averse to each other<sup>4</sup>. Yet, today there is this complete transformation in people's attitude towards the State system. The State dependence, State allegiance and thinking in terms of State systems of judiciary, governance, administration and constitution has become so normative in the day to day life of people that it is difficult imagine a world that was before the coming of the State. Given its own course of socio-political evolution, a civilization would take centuries of political churnings and reformation to arrive at the modern political State system; unless an alien catalyst is introduced to bring a tangential turn in order to eliminate the churnings of political revolution and reformation, which gives an impression of evolution. In Arunachal, the

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<sup>4</sup>While it was in the interest of the ruling states in the plains to bring the hill people and their terrain, which were seen as an unruly region, under the state rule, however, upon failing all their military and administrative attempts, they had to revert back to defensive measures by keeping away the intrusions from the hills on their subjects in the foothills. The hill people never wanted to surrender their sovereignty to plains whom they saw as an intruder to their autonomy and alien to their mode of living which was most strategic and practical to their environment. Thus, despite the interdependent nature of the local economies at the peripheries of the state power centres, at the foothills both the parties wanted to keep away each others at bay. For more insightful and even liberating discussion on the dialectical relation between the state and non-state people, also represented by the sedentary plain and the Jhumming hills, in pre-modern era see- Scott, C. James, (2010). *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan.

process of ‘state-assimilation’<sup>5</sup> involved a complex political development where the entire State system was superimposed over the diverse group of non-state people and autonomous societies. Brining critical changes to their worldview, ecological relations, economy, socio-political life, belief and ideological system, their entire traditional fabric was ploughed out to make it more uniform under the new uniform law and administration to govern them. The socialization that was followed that the State commands and receives the highest esteem and loyalty from its people. This chapters discusses on those State policies and activities in Arunachal Pradesh that was instrumental in such consent creating transformative process during the early period of the state formation.

Owing to its unique geopolitical location the policy makers were faced with unique challenges during the early formative period of this territorial entity within the Indian nation-state. The total incognito status of the territory in terms of its terrain, population inhabiting it, their political temperament and above all their allegiance to neighbouring countries. However, the most definitive challenge that dominated the entire thinking behind the policy formulation was the alleged threats faced from China who shares a much contested international boundary in one hand and then the various nationalist movements across the northeastern region . Losing this ‘buffer region’ to any of these contestants would be as if to have its enemy in its courtyard. It is important to note that the ‘enemy’ here is the enemy of a State, the contest of claims and counter claims for this territory begun only after the territorialisation of this fluid and borderless hill region. However, what seems to be a borderless land mass to State’s imagination was already marked, named, exploited, cultivated, foraged, hunted-on, owned, fought out for and exchanged by the people. The rivers, the landscapes and the flora and faunas are already culturally and historically earmarked in indigenous knowledge and memories. If the state has its written history, documents and constitutionalized

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<sup>5</sup>The process where an entire mass of non-state people are strategically sensitized and socialized to the State system using State driven mechanisms and instruments. It is an intrusive process that intends to transform the attitude, perspective and nature of the people, who were otherwise were different. When the process is complete, the entire resources of the people- their person (labour, intellect and emotion) and their acquired physical resources (natural and domesticated resources like land, forest, river, fields, etc..)

laws to define and claim its rights, the tribal communities have their lived realities and cultural memories that establish them as the indigenous owner of the land. In their autonomous communities they were oblivious of territorial competitions of States. It was after the establishment of the national government that for the first time the indigenous tribal communities were losing control over their resources—both physical and social, to the State in a one way transaction. The growing State control and claims on resources is correspondingly proportional to the loss of control by the people. Under such hegemonic system people's articulation of such loss tends to be vague and regressive because there seems to be no remedy (instrument) to it.

This chapter is based on both secondary and primary sources available in the National Archives New Delhi and collections in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi are referred, and field interviews conducted among Apatani community members. However, at the very outset it must be stated that the paper is not a policy analysis of education system per se but rather an unravelling of the varied policy processes behind the formulation of those policies and their presentations before the public as the larger philosophy for NEFA. There are various challenges that one comes across while doing such studies which involves critical analysis and tries to look beyond the interpretations obvious in the official documents. The sources are often elusive and inaccessible as many official documents go into Personal or Confidential files. While many were subjected to incidental damages like misplacement, many are destroyed during periodical dismantling of documents. However, even when one do get hold of some documents, the fact remains that these documents are the records of official narrative and represent only official perspectives. It is only on a closer look at these records that the individuals behind them, their subjectivity, inherent systemic biases and varied nuances behind those papers come into life. Such critical readings brings to fore another layer of stories which otherwise are concealed through bureaucratic filtrations; and it is these hidden stories that sometimes reveal the complex background and processes behind the crucial



decisions, plans and alterations. Further, as an attempt to understand the State process from peoples' perspective, the narratives and experiences of Apatani community is included as site of enquiry. The juxtaposition of these field data with the official documents reveals the inconsistency between what State present as a coherent, unified and compelling narrative as seen in official and public documents and the policy designs and objectives that are set behind them to transform the public.

#### **4.2. The Disjunction of Arunachal in the Northeast**

As observed in the Present, Arunachal Pradesh makes a striking disjuncture in the Northeast India. Here, the national media and the state media never fail asserting its loyalty towards India. The recent entry of Democratic Alliance of Nagaland political party in Arunachal was met with strong opposition in social media and newspapers and found student unions demanding apologies from the party representative for introducing the party in the state. They found it as 'outrageous' and 'insulting' and termed it as an attempt to malign patriotic and nationalist image of the state. For such a nationalist loyalty, Arunachal Pradesh is often presented by central government as a 'model state' for its successful integration policy peaceful and progressive strides towards development and integration with Indian nation-state and economy. Based on the emerging circumstances, one can infer broadly two aspects of national policy for education. First, it helps in gaining co-operation, disciplining and training its subject population by defining and setting the role models. It has to be mentioned here that setting up a nationalist role model and their acceptance by local population is actually part of a complex socialization process than how it appears at face value. Second, it defines the defaulters, anti-nationals, 'terrorist' and criminals; the characteristics that are to be discouraged or eliminated. Thus, this state presents a very interesting site for understanding the nature and formation of a nation-state identity as conceptualised and operationalised in the philosophy for NEFA.

**4.2.1. Disrupting geographical autonomy for emotional integration.** As seen in history, the constituent assembly formed a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi to formulate the constitutional framework for the governance of northeast frontier territories after India achieved its formal independence<sup>6</sup>. This territory which was under the province of Assam during the British period was divided into several regions and tract including the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT), which later became the present state of Arunachal Pradesh minus the Tuensang district. While the Bordoloi committee recommended inclusion of the territory under the Provincial Government of Assam. However, the centre decided to deflect the recommendation and constituted the territorial entity called Part B for this frontier tract, and brought it under the direct control of central government, Ministry of External Affairs with the Governor of Assam as its local agent. When hue and cry was raised in Assam against the Indian government for creating division between hills and plains<sup>7</sup>, it was stated that this provision is made for a special situation in the region and that ultimately it will be merged with the Province of Assam in due course of time (Clow 1945 & Guha 1977) As it turned out, this was never to happen. NEFT became the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954, under Indian State as an agency looked after by the Governor of Assam, who in return is the agent of the centre in Delhi. In 1965 it was transferred from subject of the Ministry of External Affairs to the Ministry of Home Affairs. When NEFA was constituted as a Union Territory in 1973, its identity, with proper physical boundaries, complete census data and the new

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<sup>6</sup>Bordoloi committee which conceptualized the “Autonomous District Councils” embodied under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India, which was designed to appease the demand for complete autonomy, following the colonial policy it was meant to build some safeguard for marginalized communities. Also see, Barbora, Sanjay (2005) *Autonomy in the Northeast: The frontiers of centralized politics*. In Ranabir Samaddar (ed.) *The politics of autonomy: Indian experience*. New Delhi: Sage publication. pp. 202, 206. However, Arunachal Pradesh which was earlier under excluded areas is not brought under any of the schedule areas (Fifth or Sixth Schedule Areas) which were constituted for tribal populated areas, especially in the northeast, instead Arunachal is brought under the PESA Act.

<sup>7</sup>For instance a note written by Shri Shri Lilakrishna Dev Goswami titled: *Study of Hill-Plain people relation -A few words about the people of Siang and Subansiri*. File no. Res (H) 6/65. Itanagar State Archive, Itanagar.

nomenclature as Arunachal Pradesh, was concretised. The name Arunachal Pradesh which is derived from Sanskrit, has a strong nationalizing claim, a nation of a particular class. By 1987, when Arunachal Pradesh attained its statehood, the people who populated the state belonged to a new generation, a new lifestyle, new economy and environment. Geographically, the network of roads penetrating deep into the hills and air-force facilities brought every part into direct access of the State and through military bases to anchor its control, its grip were well established. This way the territorial imagination of this state by the State was complete. The implication of this historical event can be described along Ranabir Samddar's conceptualization, "Territoriality means besides enforcing control over access to the territory and reifying power or "containing" events but also mapping out "political regions," disciplining memory and realizing the "space-time" union in the career of a nation-state." (Samadar 2001:1-19) Now it was viable to give them the constitution, laws and electoral mechanisms and few rights to govern themselves because till then the State conveniently believed that people were not fit to govern themselves. However, unlike other states and regions with predominant tribal demographic concentration, where fifth and sixth schedule of constitution, which legally recognize the historical rights and the customary laws of the indigenous communities, Arunachal Pradesh was not given such constitutional status, the legislative setup and Panchayati Raj Institution in the line of other states where tribal groups form the minority.

The credit for this official success is given to series of policy makers, advisors, governors and administrators; the most illuminated of them are the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself, Verrier Elwin, the Advisor to Tribal Affairs, Nari Rustamji, K. L. Mehta, P. N. Luthra, etc. However, it was Jawaharlal Nehru and Verrier Elwin who are adjudged as the architect of the philosophy for NEFA that paved the way for national integration of tribes across country. Nonetheless, Virgnius Xaxa finds such assumption little 'far-fetched' (Xaxa 2004). According to him this model succeeded due to certain pre-conditions that were peculiar to Arunachal at that time, they are, lack of modern education, absence of a critical

mass of middle class who could have politicized the situation, and the demographic situation, which was widely dispersed, coupled with low percentage of tribal population in the state. He concludes that it is these factors that actually helped in the success of the policy and that now there is more integration of the state with the rest of India than with the rest of the region, both emotionally and intellectually. This conclusion requires a problematization from a different set of questions so as not to fall into the trap of false and petty arguments based of the perceptions created by the State, which in return further feeds the myth of legitimacy. In fact, problematization should focus on intentionality. This will reveal the nature of state and the intentionality in the philosophy for NEFA in order to explain the process of territorialisation without any internal resistance.

**4.2.2. *Producing Loyalties and Allegiance.*** In past 70 years since the introduction of the first school, a critical number of literacy has been attained in the state (66.95 percent literacy in 2011 from mere 7.1 in 1961). If modern education was supposed to bring such enlightenment and critical consciousness among the people as argued above then modern education should have been the priority threat to the State. Whereas it was observed that introduction of modern education and universalizing education was one of the earliest and priority State program since the colonial British government period. This move indicated that school education is one of the important apparatuses of the State in socializing and conditioning its subjects (Hoar & Nowell na). Along this line of thinking, James W. Loewen (1995) conducted an experiment with his live audience. He asked his audience to predict how people from different educational background must have responded towards America's invasion on Vietnam. Contrary to audience's view that the more educated people must have condemned the invasion, it was found that people who are less or not educated were more critical towards American action. He explains that it is general tendency to think that education brings more rationality and informed knowledge. Whereas the fact is that education actually induces a false consciousness about the intrinsic righteousness and goodness of one's country and its authority.

With regards to the absence of a critical mass of the middle class in Arunachal Pradesh, it may be noted that the class system in political sense<sup>8</sup> in traditional tribal societies of Arunachal was introduced by the ‘outsiders’ who created power centres and delegated authorities. The administrators introduced armies of local positions like Political Interpreters, Political *Jamadars*, Porter *Sirdars*, Gaon Buras and in today’s contexts Panchayat members, political leaders and government servants from among locals. They were merely representatives and mouthpieces of the administrators through various bureaucratic rituals<sup>9</sup> inadvertently ascribed with few authorities. This inspired new aspirants among the locals to become part of the system and to get some share in power. This circumstance is verified in the way how the recent protests and resistance against the mega dams staged by affected members are immediately termed by the educated middle class population, mostly government servants or government beneficiaries, as anti-development activities instigated by anarchists groups. Thus, despite the presence of critical mass of educated middle class in the state they are far from being politicized and be critical. In fact they became the agent of the State in policing the conflicts and perform reformatory, progressive and modernizing roles in the state.

Moreover, with regards to aspect of tribal and non-tribal population ratio in the state as an important factor in determining political dominance and opinion formation, it is observed that field data corroborates the stated inference in many

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<sup>8</sup> The traditional societies usually had socio-political class or status which can be interchangeably used. While some of the status were traditionally attributed, some were earned through during one’s lifetime. The status groups includes village priests, village council members, village headmen, warriors, influential, intellectuals, etc.. While these status or positions ascribed some influence it is never attributed with authority or centralized power.

<sup>9</sup> Achille Mbembe calls this the bureaucratic fetishes that is designed to inspire awe, subjugation, respect and loyalty. For example the elaborate funeral services organized for the army personnel, the farewell ceremonies, felicitations, award functions, etc. In the context of Arunachal, the conferring of rewards and gifts and the red cloth for Gram Buras, a colonial legacies that is still being followed, are the public demonstrations which has no legal base of power conferring activity. These acts were always performed in public view, very often amidst small celebration, so that while receiver receives the recognition the audiences are inspired to feel obliged. For a very interesting further discussion see Mbembe, Achille (1992: 1-30)

ways<sup>10</sup>. However, this has not been the case before the colonization of this state. There was a deliberate design and interest behind such change in demography. In the year 1944, when still under British regime, the Political Officer Capt. Davy of Balipara Frontier Tract proposes the settling of Gurkha families in the area. He explains its benefits as:

“...if my suggestions were put up, not only would we establish, well within the hills, a colony of loyal, hardy and comparatively civilized Gurkhas<sup>11</sup> who, with the intimate knowledge of the country which they would obtain, would form the nucleus of a valuable forward screen and corps of guides in any future emergency, but would also have great civilizing effect upon the surrounding Daflas.”<sup>12</sup>

Post-independence, there was a huge shift in the demography of the tribal and non-tribal population<sup>13</sup>. Despite the provision of the Inner Line Permit system under the Inner Line Regulation Act 1873, which was supposed to monitor and restrict the influx of outsiders into the state in the interests of local tribal population. However, the territorial creation of the state and its subsequent division and bifurcations and administrative expansion brought and settled large number of outsiders to the state by the government themselves (displaced refugees, government servants and military personals). Besides, there are other non-tribal population who comes to the state to join various informal and labour oriented livelihood activities. The outcomes of such process leads to resource insecurity and generates conflicts along the binary constructs of outsider-insider, indigeneity, citizenship and nationality.

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<sup>10</sup>The 2011 population census do not show ST and non-ST population status yet. 2001 census entered only 64.5 percent population as the ST population in Arunachal. The first complete population census conducted in the state was in 1961, which do not give any figure of ST population. In 1971, the ST population was

<sup>11</sup>With all due regards and respects for the community.

<sup>12</sup>Capt. Davy Political Officer's Tour Diary. D.O. No. Camp 30 (1) D. 2718- CA/45. Dated 13<sup>th</sup> March 1945. (pp. 21-22)

<sup>13</sup> According to 2011 Census the total ST population in the state is 68.8 percent of the total population.

In an ideal situation, the history of Arunachal Pradesh should have had rich and diverse narratives and contestations of political appropriation, legitimacy, shifting loyalties and dislocation of indigenous people's history. Instead what we have is a linear official narrative of history that talks about civilizing and modernizing acts by the benevolent state for its 'wretched savages'. These official narratives are constantly reproduced and national integration policies in Arunachal so minutely orchestrated by the state that one of the principal struggle while writing a local history for a community like Apatanis is in articulating the State as the historical aggressor, and in identifying the intrusive and pervasive role of the State apparatuses in suppressing this consciousness among the locals. Thus, the so-called disjunction of Arunachal Pradesh from the rest of northeast is a construct not a historical truth.

### **4.3. Re-visiting the Philosophy for NEFA**

Early this year during a hiking organized at the bank of Pange river in Pange valley, some 15 kms away from Ziro, the Apatani homeland, I met an Apatani man from Siiro village who was constructing a watchtower near the river bridge. A major part of the Pange valley falls under his community's land area. Every third year in March during the *Myoko* festival<sup>14</sup> of the Apatanis, they perform a ceremony called *More Eha*, meaning offerings made for spirits and spirits of ancestors in the ancestral forest. It involves visitation to their particular ancestral clan forest. Each village household is carefully represented and each spirit is meticulously remembered for the offering during the chant performed by the village priest. The social purpose of *More Eha* ceremony is to initiate young male members to the traditions and responsibilities of adulthood. The young boys join the elders and the village priest in this ceremony and visit their jungle. While the

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<sup>14</sup>There are three major Apatani village clusters in Apatani valley- Hiija-Diibo, Hari-Biila and Hangu. Each year, turn-wise, these village cluster celebrates the Myoko festival, where one plays the host and the other two are invited as guest. The Myoko festival is one of the major festivals among the Apatanis.

priest performs his rituals at appointed site, the elder show around the young ones their ancestral land and during the course, narrates innumerable tales and histories. If the forest is far away, they spend their night in the jungle. At night around the fire, amid gossiping, teasing or clearing the bad air, traditional knowledge and wisdoms are passed on from elders to younger ones.

Pointing towards the river Pange this man told me, “Just on this side of the river where you all have organized your picnic, there will be a boundary wall for the wildlife sanctuary<sup>15</sup> that is coming up here.... they have already started the wall construction from the downstream and soon it will reach up here. This watchtower is for the gate here. In future, even for a simple visit to this place, you will have to take permission from the forest ranger. They have already put up all kinds of restrictions here. We can’t even carry a small *Gitish* (catapult) when the ranger is around. They say it is for wildlife protection, but we know better of it. They themselves bring their guns and takes away animals from our jungle.” Slicing his machete through the bamboo knobs, he added with a long drawn breath, “So much of land...doesn’t feel like giving it away to *surkar* (government) just like that.”

In last few decades, every Apatani has learned the monetary value of their land. However, the loss mentioned here is not just material loss but social and psychological. It would mean alienation from their ancestral land and from so many memories of generations attached to it. It was also a moment when one could experience the hegemony of the State as a real and tangible force represented through its different institutions, not a mere abstract idea represented by officials with local faces. This is the price that every tribal community are paying for the ‘consent’. As an attempt to understand this complex reality, the philosophy for NEFA is problematised broadly under two aspects of consent making project of the state as given below;

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<sup>15</sup>The state wildlife department had declared the entire forest area of Talley Valley, including the Pange valley, as a wildlife sanctuary. Though the exact area size is still unknown.



**4.3.1. The Panchsheel and its lived reality.** The entire principle and philosophy for tribal development in India which was laid down in the tribal Panchsheel<sup>16</sup> as envisioned by Jawaharlal Nehru, first appeared in foreword written by him in Verrier Elwin's book 'A Philosophy for NEFA' in 1957. In his generous foreword Nehru testifies of Elwin's influences in shaping his views on tribal affairs. It almost sanctified the authority of the book and of Elwin himself on all matters relating to the subject area. This book, which went through two editions and got reprinted six times, was widely circulated among the officials engaged with tribes in general and NEFA in particular. It was considered nothing less than a gospel for tribal development programs in NEFA. It was written by Elwin from a vantage point where he had direct access to core policy makers and highest authorities, including the Prime Minister himself and, to field level officials<sup>17</sup> who could be instructed to provide information on matters related to NEFA (Mandelbaum 1964).

Studying various official documents and files of officials, both at the highest policy level and at very field level, one cannot ignore but begin to see the different individuals and their personalities rather than seeing them as merely an instrument and understand the administration in vacuum. From those papers, one unravels the individuals, who they are, their family, what they are dealing with, their mental state and where they come from-both intellectually and culturally. In

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<sup>16</sup>The five fundamental principles or Panchsheel for tribal affairs laid down by Nehru in the Philosophy for NEFA are:

- (1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- (2) Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
- (3) We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- (4) We should not over-administer these areas or over-whelm them with multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
- (5) We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

<sup>17</sup> File no. PERS/1/55-56 Vol I. Record Room of DC Office, Ziro.

small pleasantries, stern remarks, thoughtful reminders or just blunt let-out of emotions, one could discern the intangible relations between the individuals representing positions and responsibilities. Without considering the human element and their subjective backgrounds, these documents become a mysterious puzzle of a giant organic machinery. There were several disjunctions between what the policy makers like Verrier Elwin, Jawaharlal Nehru, K L Mehta and others were envisioning, who were at the steering of 1950s and 60s policy making of tribal welfare, especially in NEFA and the staffs who were implementing them at the field level and several legislators. Their documents make compelling arguments for protection of tribal people's interests and to deal with them with all sensitivities. However by 1960s it seemed that they all got caught into too many personal and political matrices and gradually gave in to popular or jingoist demand coming from all corners for more and more intrusive integration of the area to India, especially post 1962 Sino-India war.

Elwin is known as a 'friend of tribals' in India, as he himself believed and struggled through-out his life to conform to it. The philosophical base of his works was based on his idea of the moral world of tribals which is now being criticized as 'ecological romanticism'<sup>18</sup>. He saw any system that was diluting this world as a threat. Thus, though he started his career in India as a Christian missionary, in due course of time he became critical of Christian missionaries working among the tribal communities in central India. During his apprenticeship under Gandhi he saw the connection between colonial rule and exploitation of tribals. As a result he became critical of Britishers as well and supported nationalist movement. He believed that the future and security of tribal rights lay in assimilation into Hinduism. To this young anthropologist's eyes (who was also an outsider), there seemed not much difference between the tribal world and Hinduism and failed to see the historical contestations and conflicts between the two. It was this image of being a tribal sympathizer and an 'expert', plus a

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<sup>18</sup> For more critical and historical discussion on ecological romanticism see Prasad, Archana (2003) *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the making of an anti-modern tribal identity*. Gurgaon: Three essays collective.

nationalist and a hindu sympathizer, that he was invited to join the new administrative set-up for the NEFA. Elwin, who was now inclined towards more sedentary life with his family, took the opportunity (Elwin 1964). However this time he had to work with true bureaucrats and politicians, under some defined objectives and restricted domains (Elwin, 1964 opcit). Such elevation in position with the hope of engaging and affecting large number of people through his ‘expertise’ was most exciting. However, towards the end of his career he seemed to have become disillusioned and became highly frustrated by the general mood that prevailed towards the tribal area. His position during these latter phases became very complex. On the one hand he was constantly defending himself against people, from within and without the system, who criticized him for his ‘museum specimen’ policy<sup>19</sup> while on the other hand he was constantly advocating for more ‘breathing space’ for tribes within the system and all this while having to constantly prove his loyalty towards his employer<sup>20</sup>. However, in 1958, in his letter to K L Mehta, in a radical diversion, he opposed exactly every policy and schemes he had suggested and was being introduced for the tribal area development<sup>21</sup>. In another letter to then Governor of Assam, Nari Rustomji, he expressed his resentment against his gradual exclusion from developments taking place in NEFA under the ‘new set-up’, and he questioned the ‘nervousness’ among people in bringing him in the picture<sup>22</sup>. In his autobiography he writes about being misunderstood and tries to explain his position, however, not to the tribals but to the policy makers and administrators.

As observed, academicians have an advantage of tracking back their words by reworking on their works according to their comprehension of the field reality or

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<sup>19</sup>Verrier Elwin’s collection. File no. 128. NMML, New Delhi. Verrier Elwin collection. File np. 96. NMML, New Delhi. Note attached with letter written by Elwin to K L Mehta, ICS on May 31, 1961.

<sup>20</sup> ibid. Letter to K L Mehta, 15.5.55 Shillong on P N Kaul’s note. File no. ATA/c/4; 1954-56. Verrier Elwin’s collection. NMML, New Delhi.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to K L Mehta on reducing the staff and schemes, 28 Feb 1958. File no. 7; ATA/c/4; 1954-56 (?); Letter. NMML, New Delhi.

<sup>22</sup>Verrier Elwing Collection, File no. 126. Correspondence Verrier Elwin to Nari Rustafam. NMML, New Delhi. (Not dated, though it must have been written after 1960 considering joining of Nari Rustafam as the Governor of Assam)

depending on the trends. Elwin was also a policy maker. He changed his book titles and his ideas depending on demands of his employers<sup>23</sup> or publishers asks, irrespective of what consequences it might have on the people. he was talking about and thus, what implications it might have on his credibility. For instance, Elwin's stand on land ownership by the tribal community for their cultural, economic, political and psychological well-being is well known and was reflected on several of his publications before his full-fledged engagement with the tribal communities of Northeast India.

In 'A Philosophy for NEFA', Elwin once again begins by urging for the absolute rights of the community over the land and praises the Jhum Land Regulation Act 1947. Ironically in Arunachal Pradesh the land regulations and incorporation of certain changes in policies, like the absence of *res nullius* to drive for identification of *terra nullius* and their accession under reserved forest area, follows an interesting parallel with stages of Elwin's book revisions. In the words of Roy Burman:

Elwin's role in this episode comes into question- in the first edition of his book 'A Philosophy for NEFA' (1957) he mentions that all lands in NEFA belongs to one or the other village community, but in the second edition (1959), this 'all' has been replaced by 'most' (1960:68). (Burman 2004)

Roy Burman further notes that curiously the concept of *terra nullius* discarded from in all ex-colonial countries is introduced in NEFA vide D.O. No. 24/58 of 26 April 1958 with Elwin's acquiescence if not active collaboration. After this, the formal adoption of the concept of *res nullius* was only a matter of time. Maybe this is not what Elwin must have envisaged as he did not survive to see the outcome of this regulation but it had set precedence for alterations. By 1990s, two-third of Arunachal was claimed as state-owned forest, and under the new Arunachal Forest Act 2000, the creation of tenancy has been legitimized. Today, a

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<sup>23</sup> Letter to K. L. Mehta on Phil of NEFA; Aug 56. File 7; ATA/c/4; 1954-56 (opcit.)

railway route reaching straight inside the Arunachal border few kilometres away from the state capital Itanagar is almost ready, six airports are under construct, 154 Mega Hydro dams are coming up in the state and land acquisition process for the construction of national highway is carrying on. Land reclamations by the government requires the government survey officers to mark out land area where such constructions are to be done and publish a notice in newspaper summoning landowners to meetings where they are told that their land is going to be taken away and that they may make claims on compensations.

**4.3.2. *The Policy Laboratory.*** The overused and clichéd expression of anthropological museum or ‘specimen’ labelled on the policies of tribal development adopted for this state, often merely to criticise Elwin’s policies is another trap of false arguments. It would begin and end with Elwin’s policy as if he was working in a vacuum. In order to make a meaningful analysis and critique, the actual expression to describe the situation could be ‘policy laboratory’. This expression is more dynamic yet underlines the sense of a controlled environment; it brings out the critical role of intentionality in the forefront in comparison to static and the apolitical ‘museum specimen’ analogy. In the laboratory setting, the intentionality of the experiment is pursued by an interest party to achieve a specific result; integration/nationalization/consent creation/allegiance. To do this they employ ‘experts’ (policy makers and administrators) with experiences and ‘right kind of attitude’ or just with mere grit to see through the experiments<sup>24</sup>. The experiments are conducted in a completely controlled environment where different elements or factors are either introduced or removed to achieve specific outcomes. The ‘specimen’ upon whom the experiment is being carried out is completely powerless and has no say over the experiments or even negotiate. The myths and illusions, created by the State as a benevolent and constitutional State works as the sedatives that camouflage or buffers the perception of reality. In

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<sup>24</sup> Therefore, during early days of establishing the government, we see there are several army officials among the administrators, mostly at the field levels. They had the strategic knowledge and experience of commanding and managing the large units of military set across the state at various strategic points. And, they had the grit to work under harsh conditions.

order to understand the magnitude of this experiment, one has to go beyond the official or officially approved narratives. Calling such philosophical base of policy making as cultural hegemony of the powerful, Jagdish Lal Dawar, discusses the case of architectural designs suggested by ATA (Advisor for Tribal Affairs, Verrier Elwin) for school buildings (Dawar 1993). Elwin suggests that in order to make these institutions 'attractive' and 'in-line' to tribal way of living, various tribal elements and their architecture should be incorporated to it. For example the construction of fire hearts is fundamental part of tribal aesthetics to which the tribal mind is tuned to. This was rejected with a counter suggestion that the tribal houses are unsuitable for dwelling, hence, their house itself should be improved under the guidance of NEFA officers. It proposes the removal of designs or structures that are unsuitable and unhygienic for dwelling while keeping all those tribal articles and elements that are really aesthetic. Thus, another series of exchange that followed was on the replacement of the fire heart itself with more modern designs that comes with *chimney* and consume less firewood and how to educate tribal communities on its benefits. As Jagdish Lal Dawar puts, there was a gradual policy shift according to the aesthetic whims and wishes of the policy makers who decided on what is tribal aesthetics, what should be preserved and what to be processed.

#### **4.4. Schooling the Consent**

Commenting on the controversy around school textbook syllabus of history, Vinay Lal (2001) argues that the subject of history is different from other subjects like chemistry or maths, which can be delivered objectively. It is often a subjective interpretation and explanations of the past which is discussed and debated differently in different times and by different interests groups; and yet in India history textbooks, school level are taught and treated as sacrosanct texts. It follows a natural-law like nationalist narratives which progresses through chronological events led by few individuals, and climaxing towards the creation of a grand nation by a united mass called India. History written with such

authority becomes intolerant to divergence or debates in the perspective of tribes. The question that should be asked is, then whose history is being presented? And whose are not? why? and what happens to those whose histories which are not represented?

In the case of Apatanis, and to that matter any other tribal community in the state with no recorded history, their collective socio-cultural memory are their history. However, in the past few decades this traditional community went through such tremendous changes due to several developments that was taking place in their valley. With every passing generation, a set of memory is being lost which is filtered and replaced by newer sets of memories which is being created and internalized through new sets of experiences. Ranajit Guha (1997) writes, ‘A generation, conceptualized thus, acts not only as a force for continuity but also as one that promotes diversity and change, hence what it inherit is always less than the whole of its ancestral culture.’ In other words a newer generation is created- a set of population who are different from the traditional population in terms of their intellect, experience, exposure, socialization to nation-state and in attitude. In this creation, the education system (especially at the school level) plays a very crucial role in creating allegiance and socialization (Loewen 1995) The allegiance is created by presenting a certain narratives of history which glorifies the State and a nation, and socialization by inculcating certain attitude and ideology over the other. This process of allegiance and socialization sets in motion two ancillary process- the process of consent creation as discussed earlier and the process of defining what is anti-State, illegal and criminal.

Introduction and extension of school education among the hill tribes had been one of the priority project among the colonial rulers in the region. As early as 1946, a make shift school in the Duta village of Apatani valley was started, though, this school was later burned down by villagers during their resistance against the ‘outsider’ in 1949. After the permanent establishment of Indian government in the valley the school construction drive took new impetus and several other schools

were opened in every village where schooling was force-fed on the villagers. The oral stories tell that village Gaonburas and Kotokis were asked to enlist children from each village and bring them to schools. Failing to do so would bring harassment and even cause for arrest of the villagers. Even the Gaonburas had to face harassments from the administrators for not being able to produce children for school. An old lady narrated how women folk used to cry and follow when their children were taken to schools by force. There were incidences of young children being tied by rope and taken to the schools.<sup>25</sup>

There were several reasons for not sending their children to schools. In tribal economy even young children was part of labour force in the household. Right from collecting firewood, working in agricultural fields, fetching water to cooking and looking after the younger siblings, they cannot be spared away. Secondly, the fear of going to school was a result of the perceived aggression of the government in their valley. It further created as bitterness and distrust among the people as children were ‘demanded’ to be sent to schools. Besides, traditionally Apatanis used to look down upon the plain and non-tribal people. They were about the safety of their children under the *Halyangs* (non-tribals). Third, they were also concerned after seeing young boys getting attracted to *Halyang’s* ways and that the children were taken away from their daily traditional social and economic life and activities. The rich men in a bid to rescue their children, paid their dependent families to send their children to school in exchange of their own. While the poor men had no other way but to ‘give away’<sup>26</sup> their children. An old man in Hari village said with a smirk:

Well, this is what happened with poor and rich men of Apatani valley. People did not want their children to learn the *Halyang’s* ways and serve them. So when *Surkar* ordered for children to be sent to school, the rich men who needed their children to look after their property, paid their dependent families to send their children to school. The poor

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<sup>25</sup>This incidence was narrated by only one interviewee, who heard it from someone else that such things were happening in Hangu village.

<sup>26</sup> During the interviews, the expression used for sending their children to school was ‘*Halyang pa bipa kula*’ which can be translated as ‘to give away’ or ‘to forsake’ to *Halyang*.



men with no means and choice had to send their children to *Halyang's* schools. Those who went to school learnt reading and writings and *Halyang's* ways. Those rich people who did not go to school could not manage their wealth when time and economy changed and became poor. Thus the rich men of today were actually the poor in old days and today's poor men were actually the rich people.

It is important for the State to create its own symbols and attribute meanings to it (Mbembe, opcit), in a way that it makes sense for the sustenance of the system it creates, and then impose them on its subject through indoctrination so that it constructs legitimacy. The modern education produces new skills, value systems, needs, necessities and rewards that complement the new settings and uproot what was old, the traditional economy.

#### **4.5. Creation of Base for Modern Education Among the Tani**

The Apatani valley was self-sustaining and relatively a prosperous one. They were settled agriculturists of the highland valley system for centuries. Through their ingenuity, conscientious and industriousness they developed agricultural practice that yielded rich production. It allowed them to remain settled in one place and trade the surplus with their neighbouring tribes in surrounding hills. The richness of their prosperous and densely populated valley became fable among the other tribes and roused fascination among the British colonisers when they came to Assam. The Britishers named the valley as 'the hidden land' and feared making any attempt to visit the valley in order to avoid any embarrassment caused by their miscalculation of Apatani strength. It was only in 1889 when a tea estate manager made a first quiet trip to the valley, which was later followed by several others. The distinct beauty of the valley, the advanced and peaceful existence of Apatanis left deep impressions on its early visitors<sup>27</sup>. However, it was only in

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<sup>27</sup> See Mr. Crowe's report on his visit to Apatani valley, 1891; Leut. McCabe's report on Apatani expedition, 1897, Capt. Davy's report in 1944 in Kani, Takhe (Ed.) (2008) *The Apatanis: In the days of British, tour diaries and reports of the European visitors on the Apatani since 1828 to 1948*. Itanagar: IPACL

1944 when an anthropologist Christopher von Furer Haimendorf, made a detailed ethnographic study of the tribe and remarked that Apatani society was almost like a 'civilization in making' (Haimendorf 2001).

After the independence of India, the annexation of Apatani valley was complete and it was opened to the world outside. An airfield right within the valley and a motorable road connecting the valley straight to Assam was constructed. A flourishing town with a market and various other administrative infrastructure and a military base were established. As the nature of economy shifted from agricultural to monetary economy introduced by government service system and small businesses; the self-sustaining valley pushed to a situation of complete dependence on outside economy upon which they have no control. While the sense of inadequacy and helplessness is growing, psychologically people tend to believe education is becoming the only course of future security. The old man being interviewed above, was laughing when he said:

Why else do you think parents are queuing up in front of big schools to enrol their children? While earlier they were paying off to avoid sending their children to school now they are spending all their earnings on children's education and if that is not enough they send them for tuition as well... so that they can earn enough to send their children to better schools.

Few photographs I came across in the Information and Public Relation office at Naharlagun provides very vivid and interesting occasion of seeing 'things' that was happening in the valley. Most of these photos were taken by official photographer to capture the visits of important VIP visits, to mark important occasions such as opening of roads, inauguration of a water tank in certain village, or to record the expeditions carried out in remote areas. These photos taken mostly from vision of official and administrative and an outsiders reiterating their perspectives and assumptions about the local community. They reiterates the assumptions and biases of the administrators and outsiders. The local Taniis are seen impoverished, needy and as wretched lot as officials also often

recorded about them. However, unwittingly they vividly captured and demonstrates the mental, emotional, physical, social and power distance. People huddled and seated on grounds while officials sitting on elevated platforms, young girls uncomfortably dancing with their heads and face to ground, an opening ceremony of a bathing ghat where to demonstrate to officials and their families and children young boys and girls were being bathed naked, an old woman standing clasping her hands and eyes to the ground again (she looks shuddering and clueless about what is happening or what she is supposed to do there), the local political agents instructing the crowd, or Kupe Tanyang showing picture of Radhakrisnan to children on children's day, (See Photo 1). The texts alone- oral or written, do not speak enough. These photos open up completely another dimension of experience and understanding for its readers or viewers.

The IPR office has collection of these photos under the heading 'Subansiri Area'. These photos are preserved not for record purposes but as a repository from where various government and departmental publication may draw pictures. As a result the photos are not provided with descriptions. Most of the photos are 2X3" black and white photos with various wear and tear taking place. Some photos were removed for their 'inappropriate' contents such as showing nudity. Though, it is indeed questionable that for what purposes those photos were taken in the first place. I particularly remember of a staged photo of Tanii man and woman sitting in intimate position. Then there were other photos of women who would not cover their upper body. Those photos were not allowed to be taken by researchers. The question arise is how those photos which were not inappropriate to be clicked once becomes inappropriate for viewing over the period?

There are so many emotions written on different people's face or in the formation of crowd that will take pages to describe and yet never be enough. There is something very unique in reading and recognizing human face and emotions and their behaviours, they exposes one to moment and helps in drawing connections and meanings as our brain cells quickly recreates the entire emotions and

experiences for us. While these photos were taken to capture and record for the official purposes and by the people who were dominant, hence, the frame of ideas are around the main actors, what they were doing. It thus unconsciously recorded and fixed in these images the mindset and attitude of the people in power, the ruler or the dominant; further more highlighting the divide and distance with the ruled and the powerless. Picture no. 4, shows T. N. Kaul sitting on the platform and casually giving away the 'gifts' as if he is enjoying the gift giving session and yet showing his disinterest and the mundaneness of the activity. Two things it bring out, first, the arrogance and patronizing of T. N. Kaul which was visible even in other photos as well as in his writings in official documents.

Secondly, the arrogance, patronisation and self-assurance with which the VIPs conducted themselves are hard to miss. Such gift giving sessions during the VIP visits had become a norm. Taniis or any other hill communities had never such experience of gift giving or receiving act. The seating platforms would be pompously decorated with handcrafted designs and symbols, it would be elevated above the ground so that there is divide between the locals and the outsiders or Halyang, from where the VIPs and officials could look down on its subject. The locals who were not used to such physical demonstration of power and stature relations were then called one by one to receive 'gifts' from the 'honourable VIPs'. This was an un-reparable training on power subjugation between the authority and the dominated which continued even till today. Though, in mid 1960s there had been strict closure to such gift giving sessions by the VIPs as the government could not bear the expense and that it was felt locals had become more 'needy and greedy' due to this. There was a sense of discontentment or discord about the presence of Halyang in the valley and for what they did to Taniis for several years.



**Photo 1. Kupe Tanyang showing and explaining about the photograph of Dr. Radhakrisnan to children. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.**



**Photo 2 Bathing demonstration of Tanii children after the inauguration of a bathing Ghat near Hangu village, while officials, their wives and children and other workers look at them. Tanii men are standing in the back. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.**



**Photo 3 Tani men gathered in form while the VIPs walks and inspects them.**  
Source: IPR Office, Naharlagun.



**Photo 4 K.L. Mehta casually sitting on the lavish parapet, and giving away the 'girls'. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.**



**Photo 5. VIPs visiting and inspecting the the villages. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.**



**Photo 6. A VIP visiting a house. On the top are the various photos of nationalist leaders. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.**



**Photo 7** VIPs distributing the gifts while sitting on the highly decorated.  
Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.



**Photo 8** An old women was made to watchover during the . The old women  
looks nervouse and worried. Photo source, IPR Office Naharlagun.



#### 4.6. Education as a Ground for Combative Nationalism

Education in Arunachal was introduced for two main purposes; one to create a cadre of human resource who can serve at government offices and, two, creation of a loyal population who would appreciate what government is doing<sup>28</sup>. Both serve to meet one end - to create allegiance and consent. In a note dated 20 Feb 1954, responding back to the proposal of establishment of Publicity Department to fulfil the 'Delhi Plans' for NEFA, which is suppose to "the sell NEFA to India and sell India to NEFA", Verrier Elwin writes:

In regard to the scheme for making NEFA conscious of its part in the life of India, for countering separatist propaganda, for integrating the tribes in the great national family- which is, of course of paramount importance- I wonder whether a separate department is necessary for this purpose... (it) could surely be dealt with by our Education Department.<sup>29</sup>

The education department was using array of methods and tools for the purpose for which the budget was earmarked annually. To attract people they were using Mobile Cinema Units, Magic Laltern shows, sports, entertainments, Community Radio sets, Tribal Tours and so on. The more critical activities for attaining national integrity- such as introduction of Hindi replacing Assamese (despite protests in Assam- who saw this as design of Government of India to destroy the traditional friendship between hills and plains) in schools, singing of national anthem, saying morning pledges of unity and loyalty to country, celebration of Independence and Republic day, series of birth and death anniversaries of Indian freedom fighters that immortalized and glorified them in tribal mind, portraits of national leaders adorning school walls, cultural exposure tours, histories textbooks telling about India and Hindu mythologies and tales, literary and

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<sup>28</sup> File no. 8; 1953-61; Correspondence with TN Kaul , 19 Jan 1955. Verrier Elwin collection. NMML, New Delhi.

<sup>29</sup> File no. 128, dated 20 Feb 1954. Verrier Elwin collection NMML, Delhi)

cultural activities that are carefully observed by teachers, etc.. In another note sent to T N Kaul by Verrier Elwin on 19 January 1955, the aspects of lab experiment becomes more prominent:

One is selection of few girls and boys and develop them in every possible way, even (if) some detribalization happen and just hope that they do not start despising their own history and culture. Second is (for) the mass people-give them policies on law, order, medicine, agriculture- but educate them at most elementary level to avoid detribalization by every mean.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it can be inferred that holding tribal people to their tradition so as to make them a museum piece was not the intention. The intention is to create a cadre or class of educated tribal who would rule or administer the tribal mass on the behalf of the government. This stands in irony when, Elwin warns against the kind of detribalization that was taking place in his *The Philosophy for NEFA*, where he argues that the tribal communities are becoming self-conscious about how outsiders are looking at them and feel inferior about themselves. As a result they tend to hate and do away with their traditional way of life (Elwin 1959). He was critical of officials, who were supposed to be the ‘ambassador of India among the tribes’, themselves were causing such damages by introducing their class and caste based biases among the classless tribal communities. However, Elwin seemed to have turned a blind eye to the fact that the cultural end and political end of his policy are doing exactly to the same effect. Where he seemed to be critical of kinds of cultural changes that were taking place in the area due to influences from outside, he failed to see the policies he designed and proposed for the political gains of India with that were having the same implication. The way of life in this hill area was already constantly being moulded for the State and national interest in this policy lab.

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<sup>30</sup>1953-61; Correspondence with TN Kaul (Tikki) or KL Mehta, Jt. Secretary, GoI, MEA TN Kaul sent a note on 19 Jan 1955: Memorandum on the impact of modern civilization on the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh with certain proposals for their development” and asked for VE’s detailed comment on them and to see if any parallel can be drawn on them for NEFA.

In several of official notes there were zealous reporting and constant discussions on the Chinese intrusion or possible intrusion from across the border. The administration was psyched by China and the desperation to compete with her in winning over the locals<sup>31</sup>. In order to prevent the locals from getting attracted to development activities taking place across the border more development activities were planned under the second Five Year Plan. The focus was to introduce projects that was more 'spectacular' and appealing to people such as airstrips at Mechuka and Tuting, landing of jeep, etc.. "Certain useful and spectacular projects such as the speedy introduction of electric light generator at places like Tawang, Mechuka, Tuting and Walong will also pay dividends".<sup>32</sup>

The language used in these documents reflects on their perception of the local communities as illiterate and even illogical people who could be won over by such demonstrations of advancement. And their loyalties are measured as dividends. There was complete lack of sentimental connection and understanding of the local culture and social history. For instance, Buddhist monasteries were looked with suspicion for the possible residual control of Tibet. Nari Rustomji writes to Commissioner NEFA: Cannot they all be tactfully won over to study in our schools? They could be given stipends and other special inducements. Please confirm, as we must stop this tendency before it spread further in this and other areas.<sup>33</sup>

He further orders to find seats and provide financial assistances to colleges to take students from NEFA and asks to increase the number of students sent out for

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<sup>31</sup> There was a very serious letter written by Nari Rustomji to M Ramunny, Commissioner Naga Hill Tuensang, telling him how China is planting roadside trees in massive scale in order to attract its people, and why such similar activity is not carried out on this side. NK Rustomji papers, file no 10;

D.O. No.NGO. 53/60. Dt. 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1960. NMML, New Delhi.

<sup>32</sup> Report of Ministry of External Affairs and note on the political and administrative problems of NEFA. File no. 110; ATA/P/1; 1955-56 (Top Secret). Verrier Elwin collection. NMML, New Delhi.

<sup>33</sup> Subject : Tribal students of NEFA studying in Chinese Schools Assam Governor's note. Do. No. F. 31 (46). Dt. 12.9.61. NMML, New Delhi.

higher studies from 4 to 20 from each of three divisions.<sup>34</sup> All measures were taken to restrict any cross-border interactions like opening of military outposts across the Chinese borders and instructions to lure children to study in Indian schools rather than studying in Chinese schools and/or Buddhist monasteries. What State administrators seemed to have missed that these communities have their relations across the border since time immemorial and many of them ethnically belonged to same community. It is the State which is imposing such boundaries and are straining their traditional relation.

In another instance, another dreaded fear that occupied the policy makers for very long was from the home front, the separatist movement within the Northeast. However, it was constructed around the influences of Christian missionary active in the Northeast. Thus, the competition that existed elsewhere in India between Hindu nationalist and Christian missionaries found its ground in this far flung frontier as well. After losing other states in Northeast to Christianity, the Hindu nationalists found themselves in an advantageous position in NEFA mostly due to early Indian occupation of the state. Countering Christian missionaries became a nationalist program in NEFA as the State itself was funding the entire policy. The understanding was that the Christian missions worked hand in hand with colonial rulers during British period. Thus their education imparted western and modern thinking that are infusing political consciousness among the tribal Christians in the region. Such thinking is making them averse to rest of India, they look down upon their Hindus brethren as backward and also starts disassociating themselves from their traditional way of life<sup>35</sup>. Elwin, in his note to K N Mehta, dated 5 May 1955, raises his fears that there might be a demand of “Christian state” if steps are not taken on time. Therefore, he suggests intensification of what he calls as

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> In a note to TN Kaul on 19 Jan 1955, 1953-61; Correspondence with TN Kaul. Verrier Elwin collection. NMML, New Delhi.

‘psychological warfare’ against the Christianization and for the control of press who were representing the separatist demands.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, the field level officials, devoid of sophistications of their superiors, tend to spill the beans. For instance, a tour diary submitted by a Political Officer, dated 19 March 1956 from Lohit district under the subject- ‘Reasons for denunciation of our Administration in general’, says:

Padams and Idus lives in close contacts with plains for generations, thus though their cloths are same their ideas are transformed (because of) the work of American Baptists Missionaries who provide free education to tribal children (they) also has strong influences. The educated ones considers themselves superior, not willing to work in field neither to work in govt jobs, they live in their own world and look at administration with suspicion and spread wrong propaganda against government.

He continues explaining what these ‘propagandas’ are doing:

“Expressions such as ‘privileges’ ‘sanctions’ ‘TA’ ‘audit’ are now frequently heard from the tribals as a result of such propagandas. They want to send their children to schools only if employment (is) assured. They expect payment for every little work they do, even though it may be for their own benefit, eg. They take contracts but (are) not willing to re-construct or repair a school building or teacher’s quarter or any such institutions in their villages without receiving payment, even though their own children are studying there. Thus, our works to persuade them for co-operation is really difficult.<sup>37</sup>

Kelkar, who criticised Elwin’s policy of keeping the borders closed and for not doing enough for ‘national-integration’, raises his concerns about Christian influences in the NEFA and proposes bringing more Hindu missionary workers

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<sup>36</sup> In note to Ken on 15.5.55). ATA/c/4; 1954-56; Correspondence with the Advisor to the Governor of Assam

<sup>37</sup> No.III-9/55-56/13981 dt Tezu, 19 Mar 6 from Lt Col GS Puri, PO Lohit FD to The Devp Commisioner NEFA, Shillong

and opening Gandhi Ashrams in NEFA. Elwin, dismissing Kelkar's concerns, wrote in response:

We are doing a very great deal (considering what we feel the people can assimilate at the present time) in the way of integrating their culture with Indian culture as a whole. *A large network of Schools, in which the education is essentially an Indian education with certain adaptation to tribal needs...* The ideas of Mahatma Gandhi are taught..explained by Political Officers.. translated in tribal languages... Missionaries have been checked by our policy- treating local religion with respect and tightening and linking bonds of people's culture to India ..Cultural shows are presented on all important occasions in which *half the items are of an all-Indian characters. The radio and gramophone are introducing Indian music.* Objects of Indian arts in each divisions are placed. Everyone officers as an ambassador of a greater India.<sup>38</sup> (Emphasis added)

Policy orders officially restricting any Christian missionaries from entering NEFA and promoting Hindu missionaries like Ramakrishna Missions, Vivekananda Kendriya Vidhyalaya, Sharda Missions, etc.; and Gandhi Ashrams and Kasturba Ashrams where 'Social Workers' can substitute for works of Christian mission elsewhere were carried out.<sup>39</sup> However, by 1960s, Elwin himself, who initially supported the working of Hindu missionaries in Naga hills and even in NEFA had become vary of them for the tendency of their puritan attitude that looked down upon tribal customs and ways of life.

#### **4.7. Conclusion: Three Theoretical Propositions**

In conclusion, three main interconnected propositions were discussed in the chapter. First, to understand the complex processes of hard, concrete and well

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<sup>38</sup> For both Kelkar's letter and Elwin's response in letter written by Elwin to K L Mehta, ICS on May 31, 1961. Verrier Elwin Papers, sub-file no. 96. NMML, New Delhi.

<sup>39</sup>For more discussion and references on the subject see unpublished paper (Title: Making religion out of religious: The role of state, culture and faith in the making of Apatani Christian community) by the author presented in Tribal Theology Seminar Series organized by NESRC, Guwahati in 26<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

calculated development policies by the State, one should study the subtle background of socio-cultural and political nuances that intersects in a person called the policy maker. Their philosophical and ideological background and the socio-political environment under which they are negotiating their idea. As seen in this paper, very often they are not mere cold calculation but an outcome of a failed debate, personal temperament, state of mind, family situation, etc. The impacts of such policies are equally diverse and multidimensional. To understand these nuances one first needs to get hold of the data, and this is where the second proposition of the paper lies in i.e., one should diversify its data sources and break away from traditional mode of analysing those materials. One simple reason is because the sources and data are limited (because either they are not archived or was simply dismantled) and very often inaccessible for scholars. Therefore, one has to multiply the sources of information and data. Instead of only looking at the reports, statistics, memorandums and notices; one should go to the primary documents- the personal files, diaries, personal communication, notes, letters, etc. (if one can get catch hold of them). One should not miss the small remarks put in the corners, the cross reference, the dates, list of people to whom the copies are sent, and so on. These documents need to be read critically which means, one should go beyond the official narratives. While one should exercise their own discretion on reading too much in between the lines, however, the other crucial source of information can be gathered through the ethnographic researches which involves going to the people itself, the people who are impacted, in other words the policy lab specimens. At least at present, the secondary sources on the subject are highly limited hence, one should go to the primary sources. And it is only by juxtaposing these data and sources that one is likely to get a true and more complete picture and this in return can be used as the metadata for understanding the true nature of the State.

Third proposition underscores a discourse on the nature of the State. The proposition that ‘the regulated state and class state cannot exist together or unless the class state is part of the regulated state itself’, does not seem to have validation

in the case of NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh, of India. The socialist State of India has always been represented by a class in power- who defined nationalism and national culture in the country, and tried to determine it for the entire India. The Arunachal Pradesh, due to its unique history, location and its inhabitants, presented unique challenges before the State. There were too many uncertainties. Neither it could afford losing it nor having it as a situation like Nagaland, Manipur or Mizoram by using its military force to occupy it, though they have not restrained from using it whenever situation arose. Thus, creating allegiance, legitimacy and consent was the only way. An image of ethical and moral State was created through the entire official narrative of philosophical, benevolent and sympathetic administration that was working and protecting the interests of 'noble savages'. Without such frame of understanding it becomes futile and frustrating to comprehend how possibly the policy makers saw the consistency between the philosophy of protecting tribal life and their rights in one hand, and on the other hand pushing changes that was creeping through every aspects of tribal community life. Their strong sense of responsibility and affection towards tribes seemed to have qualified them to be their spokesperson and to protect them. The policy makers and administrators backed by their military and monetary power became the decision makers who decide to allow the tribes to decide for themselves. Any constitutional guarantees for tribal rights without addressing this inconsistency are illogical, illegal and amount to violence.

To establish one's dominion, the powerful one creates a set of its own vocabulary and concepts which is used for furthering its dominion in such a way that it creates an illusion of empowerment and agency for the dominated so that they remain satisfied with petty politics. Such language are being taught through various State apparatuses, such as the education and judiciary system which 'educates' and reproduces citizens that can communicate with State in its language. The ones who do not speak in this language or depart from them would be termed as unscientific-irrational, uncivilized, undemocratic, and rebellious; and their activities immediately get interpreted as anti-state and anti-social. Thus the



real challenge for us lies in framing this entire argument without getting into the vocabulary of ‘rights’, ‘justice’, ‘legality’, ‘constitutional’, ‘autonomy’ or ‘sovereignty’ that the state claims to be the custodian of. To be able to appreciate the myth and illusion of justice, rights, equality and democracy of a constitutional state like India and its legitimacy claimed over a tribal state like that of Arunachal, one has to have a dynamic and even anarchic approach to begin with.

The ‘consent’ was created by edging and tracing nationalism in this frontier state. This nationalism was first imagined by the policy makers for the people in this land. Imagined<sup>40</sup>, because there was no socio-historical base for such nationalism to begin with but merely colonial inheritance of around a century of territorial claims. Post independence, these claims were then imprinted on the people using array of tailor-made policies which were presented under the garb of patronizing ‘philosophy’. The impression of coherence, in the state documents such as – the constitutions, laws, policies and programs in relation to tribal communities, presented before us are to hide the primal fear of self-preservation and the preservation of its class interest. In one hand, we see a philosophical foundation that is laid down by the first Prime Minister of India Nehru himself, who very emphatically calls for protection and non-interference to tribal communities and their way of life. On the other hand, the national integration program was being robustly carried out under which there was continuous and systematic infiltration of the state. Arunachal is kept out of purview of Fifth or Sixth schedule entitled to other Northeastern states. The Panchayati Raj Institution thus introduced has reduced the traditional council to irrelevancy where the customary laws are constantly being breached through various judicial and constitutional institutions.

<sup>41</sup> The token representation of only two MPs in the parliament hardly invokes any real participation in the decision-making in the country. Such myths and illusions

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<sup>40</sup> The term ‘imagined’ implies as conceptualized by Benedict Anderson for his ‘Imagined Community’ as a discourse on nationalism. Anderson, Benedict (2006) *Imagined Community*. London: Verso.

<sup>41</sup> It is most desirable that one should also work on the framework of ‘legalizing the consent’ by the State, an anarchist perspective.

in the name of rational and scientific enlightenment. Such imposed constitutional integration brings only superficial unification. The integration thus achieved is to create consent without legitimacy. It is at such juncture that one gets the rare chance to peek into the real-self of the State. Such moments, as rare as it is, should be chanced upon to make an intimate evaluation of the nature of the State and the myths and illusions of consent and legitimacies it creates.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MISSING DOCUMENTS: THE KURE CHAMBYO IN OFFICIAL RECORDS

#### 5.1. Introduction

Starting from the simple desire to represent one's idea through symbols, the desire to preserve that idea and knowledge, and then to use this knowledge and system of representation as a technology and instrument, human society has travelled a long distance. According to Benedict Anderson (1983) in no time in the history of humanity when an idea travelled so fast, so extensive, and deep than since the print media became part of human society. However, for very long time writing or keeping records has been a necessary indulgence of the powerful to keep an account of how much and why of the control they have. These records when systematically inherited and imposed upon others, like through declarations, revenue and land records, institution of laws, instructions, ideological memoranda, territorial records, maps, scriptures, inscriptions in monuments, etc., reproduce the system of control and structures of sovereign authority (Scott 2010). Max Weber (nd) argued that documenting has been the key technology of control for bureaucracy where writing (to keep records) and producing knowledge (to control minds/ideas played central role in the making of state. In India, the colonial British rulers were obsessively engaged with production and consumption of documentation, record creation and knowledge production. So much so that Martin Moir calls the British rule as *Kaghaji Raj* (cited from Ghuyot unpublished).

The government in Arunachal Pradesh, also known as North East Frontier Agency then, till 1950s and 1960s was considered as nomadic government. Restricted to foothill areas or very few political outposts inside the hills or inner line, such as in Kure outpost for Subansiri region or others in West Sian regions, where the administration was run by its touring officials (Ghuyot, unpublished). These officials were not only to constantly move but also to create documents of

what they see, understand and feel. It is through these subjective accounts in form of field diaries and reports, the government in Delhi gauged the region and its people. It is these dependence on the written accounts and its official authorization that these papers becomes the powerful tools of telling the ‘facts’ or stating the reality. Or conversely undoing them when they are not written about.

The main purpose of this chapter is, first, to account for all official written documents or texts on the Kure Chambyo or the conflict at Kure in 1949. These documents are the finding of archival research conducted during this study, hence is has not been reported, accessed or appeared in public domain yet. The only academic publication on the event by Stuart Blackburn who reported the event for the first time in 2003 and conducted an archival search claimed in his article ‘Colonial contact in the 'hidden land': Oral history among the Taniis of Arunachal Pradesh’ that there is no record of the event. The only document cited by him<sup>42</sup> which he finally managed to access from the Public Record Office, of Commonwealth Relations Office, London, he claims that had mis-reported the event or claimed that the event did not even take place. The main theme of the article was give space for oral history writing for historical writing in order to account for the wrong doings of colonial experiences. More than a decade later, the event was mentioned again in Sanjib Baruah’s article ‘Reading Fürer-Haimendorf in North-East India’ in 2015. Where the author unproblematically adopts the former’s claim and continues to build a narrative of colonial critique. They both concluded that unavailability of any official accounts was an attempt by the colonial British government to suppress the report of revolt or resistance by the locals.

The main premise of the chapter is that the written documents and accounts are as reliable as the oral accounts, or the vice versa. This chapter and the following

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<sup>1</sup> Public Record Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, DO 142/461. Fortnightly reports on the Assam Tribal Areas. Reports, second half of June 1948, Office of the Advisor to the Governor to Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi.

chapter will discuss on the reliability or unreliability of both the oral and written accounts.

This chapter will show that, though the claims made by aforementioned articles are wrong, yet the attempt to suppress the report or truth by mis-reporting and by tampering the documents which accounts for the event and can be accessed from National Archive of India in New Delhi under Ministry of External Affairs section, as of now, is true. Another important finding of this research is, against the claims made by both the esteemed scholars, that the event of Kure Chambyo occurred way past the colonial period, that is in post-independence period. It took place in June 1949, under independent Indian administration. Thus, contrary to the claims under the dominant discourse of tribal resistance as a resistance against the colonial rulers in line of the larger national freedom struggle against the Britishers, the resistance put up by the community(ies) in the hills was against the outsider, and alien authority. For the Taniis, the resentment was not only against their political interference but also against their competing presence in their valley, which belonged and owned only by the community since time immemorial.

Secondly, along with the documentation of these written accounts, a narrative and content analysis of these written documents is done to look at their historicity as historical statement/fact. The documents presented here are all primary data which can be grouped into two- first, all the official documents which are associated with the event, such as the reports, notes and communications between the offices; and second, all the written accounts in form of academic articles, books or writings published in local souvenirs and booklets. This chapter will collate and compare them to create the narrative of the event based on written or official accounts. This is to understand the contextual underpinnings of these documents in light of the larger background within which they were written. And to understand the stories it do not tell by systematically mis-reporting or withholding the documents. For instance, the

section ‘The after-story of histories’, and McCabe’s expedition to Tani country’ within the section tries to explain the framework within which the colonial relations and documentations were working. The subsection brings three comparative narratives on the first colonial visit to Tani valley- one written as post-colonial critic of official documentation by Stuart Blackburn, second, the actual report contents are put and third, oral narratives that is gathered from the field. The idea is to show how these three narratives of the same event tell different stories, while each of them being complete and rich in their own sense. One realized that as a simple history they cannot be competing of each other but exists as parallel planes of realities.

## **5.2. Data Sources**

The archival documents of both British and post-Independence period are collected from different sources and locations. The National Archive of India and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, the State Archives of Assam, Dispur and the State Archive of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, and at closer ground the Deputy Commissioner’s Record Room at Ziro, these are the sources from where the official documents are collected (see chapter two for detail description on data sources and experiences in different locations while looking for those documents). The data collection was started with little hope due to the impression created by Stuart Blackburn (2003) who doubted their existence based on his own archival surveys in National Archive of India, New Delhi and Public Record in British Library, London. He writes that while he could not access documents in India about the region as they were classified for research scholars but he managed to finally locate two documents in the Public Record in Bristish Library; and found those documents as misleading as they provided wrong information. However, during intervening archival searches across several months, some important documents were retrieved and reproduced here.

Another set of important documents could be located in from the Deputy Commissioner's office Record Room in Ziro. Though there was a rich collection of documents (though poorly maintained), I was disappointed after a weeklong search, as no relevant documents were coming forth. Then one day by a sudden chance I was shown the personal files collections in an iron cupboard, later I was informed that it was not supposed to be opened for general public. There I came across the files of Rajani Kanta Gogoi, who served as Political Jemadar under the Christosph Von Furer Haimendorf, Special Officer Subansiri Area, 1943-44, Captain Timothy Betts, the Political Officer, 1946-47 and then later as the Assistant Political Officer of Kimin under R. G. Menzies, the Political Officer Subansiri District 1948-54. His service dates back from 1921 to 1957<sup>43</sup> and he played a very crucial role in all the developments in the region. Though, the file mostly consists of piles of bills and applications for reimbursements, letters for supplies, and tour diaries, itinerary plan list, etc., few very important correspondence notes revealing crucial information which are no where found could be located there. These few scattered informations and document could be testified only through oral accounts. I was informed that most of the documents were destroyed few years back as part of regular dismantling of official documents.

### **5.3. The Formation of Subansiri Area**

By 1940s, it was more than a century since British administrators encountered hill communities in the region. The entire region was earlier governed under the North East Frontier of Bengal, under the direct rule of the British empire, for its further expansion. The expansion took place much faster than it was anticipated and the need for more autonomy to manage the administration and economic affairs in the region was realized (Bezbaruah 2010:63-64). As for the Hill states

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<sup>2</sup> PERS/1/56 Vol-III DC Office Record Room Ziro

of the upper regions in the Brahmaputra plains, their fate was mostly determined by the different rulers in the plains. This was despite the fact that the hill regions were always independent of the plains with miniscule interactions and exchanges with the plains through few determined corridors. Whereas, there were more interactions with civilizations and state system in the further uphill, i.e., with Tibetan rulers.

**3.3.1. The Hill-Plain relation.** There had been several formation and displacements of authorities and rulers in the plains. In terms of their relationship with the hills communities, after several failed attempts each ruler learned to form an amicable relation. The local plain rulers and Chieftains like Chutias and Kalitas in the bordering areas of the hills had evolved amicable relations with the adjoining hill communities such as Bhutias, Akas, Adis, etc. They acknowledged the ownership and rights of the hill communities over the plain areas in adjoining foothills. Such mutuality was required because there was extensive economic transactions going on between the two<sup>44</sup>. In the Darrang region, the Bhutia and Aka traders had their several traditional trade passes called the 'Duar' as well as annual fairs in Udalguri districts of Assam. In Sadiya, the Adis, Mishmis, Minyongs, etc., always enjoyed their traditional rights over the gold mining on the river flowing down to plains from their region. The foothill areas cultivated by farmers from plains paid their annual tributes to these communities. When in twelfth century, the Ahoms, a Sham tribe from Kingdom of Pong in Burma entered, over a short period they took over the Upper Assam, the upper areas of Brahmaputra plains and then the Chutias of north Lakhimpur. By fourteenth century it took over the entire mid region of Brahmaputra. It was then when the hill-plain relation once again went to an overhaul. However, unlike the dominant narratives of presenting Ahom kingdom as most tactful and visionary in resolving the hill-plains conflicts, what Ahom rulers actually did was merely

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<sup>3</sup> The transaction between Assam and Bhutan through these transactions in traditional markets in 1877-78 was recorded to be Rs. 1,47,334 import and Rs. 65, 408 export. (Frontier and Oversea Expeditions from India, Vol. 7. (1983) Compiled in the Intelligence Branch, Army Headquarter, India, Vol 4. North & North Eastern Frontier tribes. Delhi:Mittal Publication. Pp. 160)



giving the old system a formal recognition and naming it as Posa system. Under the Posa system, all the old hill claimant of the foothill areas will receive Posa from the ruler instead of the tenants itself. The tenants in return had to recognize the suzerainty of the Ahom rulers over them. Another institution called the *Paik* system, whereby the tenants had to provide annual free labor to the Hill communities when it was required. To understand such arrangement one has to understand the traditional slave and master relations common in earlier days. The runaway slaves or the slaves who wanted to start their own establishments were given the land for their subsistence in the foothills. In return they were expected to provide their labour whenever there was a requirement such as during the agricultural season. Now the Ahoms started settling populations from outside in those foothill areas with the arrangement that while the workers in *Paiks* will provide the labor to hill villages as usual, but it will not be free instead the rulers will pay them for the work. This was actually a very strategic move, one in holding back the hill people to their hills as now they no more needed to interact with the plains directly or enforce anything, secondly, the foothill communities now found a protectorate in Ahom rulers and soon they begun to shift their loyalty towards these rulers, started refusing to pay their traditional taxes and asserted their independence from hill villages. As a result, the hill villages started going back to their old ways- raids, taking prisoners and depredation in those villages in order to assert their claims. Soon the turbulences in foothill areas due to hill *Dafla* people started shaking the Ahom rule. Coincided with other internal political treacheries and revolts by old rulers and chiefs the Ahom rule became weaker. As the British rulers took over the region in another swift succession since nineteenth century onwards, they initially adopted the existing Ahom policy. However, it is to their colonial ingenuity and efficient and highly organized administrations that they used the system to their own advantage for asserting and 'blackmailing' (though they used the term 'blackmailing' against the Posa system instead) the communities to bring their compliance and under the conditions upon 'good behavior' (Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India, Vol. 7, *ibid.*:161).

Soon, the British ruler started implementing its imperialistic interests by controlling all traditional economic relations along the foothills (Sikdar 1982). It introduced the Inner Line system which was to draw a guiding juridical boundaries for the officials based around the foothills (Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India, Vol. 7, *ibid.*:159). In reality, it served all the purpose of physical boundary with concrete posts placed all through the lines, and moved further up the hill gradually as the officials found it impossible to contain their activities within the line as the populations around the lines could not acknowledge this new system. Any movement across these lines both from hills or plains were regulated.

All hill people had their own traditional and demarcated routes to reach the plains to visit areas where their friendly villages are located. All those routes were mapped out and outposts were set up in strategic places so that whenever it deemed necessary those routes were blockaded by British administrators. Gradually, all the traditional local fairs were also begun to be regulated and more such fairs are started, whereby to encourage hill people to visit plains (Sikdar 1882). These visitations were often chanced upon by local officials to gather information and form alliances or 'friendships' with the visitors from the hills (Sikdar 1982 & 1984).

The British government also established several *Mauzas*, a settlement areas around the foothills where new settlers either from plains or from Hills were allowed to be settled as refugees, to colonize and develop the dense forests in foothills. It led to complex chains of political and social entanglements. Most people settling in these *Mauzas* were very often were fugitives criminals or runaway slaves from the hills and brought several cases along with them. As a result the government interference and influences over the hill areas was ever increasing and affecting people's life and way of life.

**5.3.2. The merchants and tea planters.** Another important aspect to this ever increasing expansion of the British administration, willingly or unwillingly, was the ever extending market interests of private entrepreneurs. These private parties like the merchants (mostly *Marwaris*) and tea planters (both European and local Assamese), were termed as ‘adventurers’ (Guha 1977) who were not afraid of venturing in the hills and contacting and entering in business agreements. Before the establishment of the British Government in the region both French East India Company and British East India Company were competing in the region and had freehand in the business in the region. Both had their base in the then Ahom Kingdom’s capital Rangpoor. But in 1778, French East India Company were called back as the hostility between France and Britain broke (Bhuyan 2013). It was only under the British control and protection that direct contact between the merchants and the hill people was made possible. Timber, rubber, ivory, animal skins, wax, coals, elephants, gold, etc., were supplied by the hill people. Often they take permission from the different village chiefs to extricate these resources from their areas in hills on payment of certain amount. For the tea planters, it is the labor on which they were most dependent. Many labors were supplied from the *Paiks* and the *Mauzas*, but most of those labors constituted from the indentured labour brought from central India. To bring down labour from hills they appointed intermediaries and agents on various flexible terms of payments and working days. Like they will be visited only during certain season and payments were made often on salts and *Muga* fabrics, etc.. As a result these activities further brought complex and diverse range of cases related to hills (Bezbaruah 2010; Bhuyan 2013; Chakraborty, B.C. 1981; Chakraborty, L.N.1976 & Guha1977). However, as Guha points out that there was constant imperialistic interested that took better of British government. The wastelands were opened up for Englishmen for occupation and exploitation in any possible way. Francis Jenkins, then Governor, thought this would be the speediest way of colonizing and developing the area. Guha (1977:11) writes, ‘the Charter was granted to the East India Company in 1833 marked the ascendancy

of British industrial intent over mercenary intent'. The Government and Tea Planter were working hand in hand where the local Assam government drew its policies to appease the planters.

However, Guha fails to see another complicated relation that the local government and the Tea Planters shared. The planter's group had strong network and connections in London from where the instructions to the Viceroy and thence to the Assam Government were passed down. He notes down a case where there was a conflict due to inner line system between the local administrator (the administrators who are based in local areas) in one side and the planters and the workers on the other side, near the foothill of Naga region. The planters had extended its garden beyond the inner line after taking independent permissions from the community chief. In such situations, despite the warnings from the local administrators, the government acted and passed instruction on the side of the planter and granted permissions and ensured protections. Further, the inner line was abruptly and constantly getting extended further uphill inside the inner line to accommodate these plantations. (Guha 1977 & 1991)

#### **5.4. The Expansion of British Administration to the Hills: Subansiri Region**

The noticeable entry of British government into the Assam can be traced back from the ensuing conflicts and treacheries within the Ahom kingdom. The Ahom kingdom expanded fast as smaller kings and chiefs surrendered or fled to another areas. The country at large was divided among the King's commanders like Bura Gohain and Bura Phukon, the titles, while few powerful local kings like Chutias in Darrang and Khampti kings in eastern upper Assam were allowed to retain their rule on the condition of their acceptance of Ahom suzerainty. As the commanders became more and more powerful and acted independently they tried

to carve their autonomy from the king's rule. According to John F. Michel (1883, reprinted in 1973), it was during one of this power ascension quest in 1816, Bura Phukon invited the Burmese for help to suppress revolts. After the defeat of the enemy, Chandrakant, the Assamese king was installed, and Burmese returned. However, in 1818, as Bura Phukon was murdered and Chanrdakant fled, the Burmese were called again, who reinstalled Chandrakant. This time 2000 Burmese army men were left to defend the protégé. But soon the deployed Burmi General started assuming power and Chandrakant fled to Guwahati. Thus, the war between Burmese under Minghae Maha Bandoola and Chandrakant started in Assam front. On the other side, in Manipur, of three competing princes Marjit Singh fled to Burma as his brother Churajit Singh was enthroned. Marjit along with Burmese army invaded and won the Manipur. Then he invaded Cachar where his brother Churajit took shelter and occupied. Then the two brothers and Cachar king formed alliance and drove Marjit from both Cachar and Manipur. Then in 1820, the three brothers came together against the Cachar and took it. However, Burmese turned against the Marjit Singh and followed him to Cachar. The Cachar was under British protectorate at the time. Thus on February 24, 1824, the war between British and Burma broke out at several positions in the region. Finally on February 25, 1826, the treaty of Yandaboo was signed as Burmese armies surrendered and the Burmese control over Cachar, Jaintias and Assam was given up. Raja Purandar Sing was reinstalled as the king of Assam except for in Sadiya and Muttack area which were considered independent and under 'fierce' rule of the tribals.<sup>45</sup>

In another narrative, used mostly by colonial representations, the Assam was a province of Bengal and hence when Bengal was given to England by the Mughals under the Farman of 12<sup>th</sup> August 1765, it became part of British government (Frontier and Oversea Expeditions from India, Vol. 7., 1983). However, the Government was least interested in the region and the Governor

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<sup>4</sup> The most of the information are from the Michel, F.J (1883, re-printed on 1973) pp. 34-35, also see Chakravarty (1976:43)

General till 1819 spoke of it as a foreign state. Nevertheless, in 1792, during the time of *Maomaria* rebellion that was started by religious cult movement which soon spiraled into rebellion against the Ahoms, British was sought for help. Captain Welsh obliged and after the suppression of the rebellion left a troop in Rangpoor at Assamese expense for protection. However, he was called back on 1794 by new Governor General John Shore. However, during the invasion from Burmese army the British was called again in 1824. Ahom ruler was reinstated but he failed in retaining his rule and paying the due revenue amount hence in 1842, the British government took over (Chakravarty 1976:44). The region was termed as 'Frontier' and no more as a Province and its size was much reduced than the original treaty; nevertheless, gradually expanded due to the unique political economy of the region.

**5.4.1. An unwilling expansion.** Unlike the set of works by likes of Guha (1977) and Sikdar, (1982 & 1984) that argues the British expansion in the Brahmaputra valley and then to the adjoining hills as a part of calculated colonial and imperialistic mission, there is a set of arguments, as one can understand from the official documents and writings, which are forwarded mostly in colonial writings, that presents the British expansion to the region as of rather a compulsion or accidental, at least till the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Col. Francis Jenkins' report, villages in settlement areas in the foothills had stopped cultivating and started to move into jungles due to constant disturbances and wars, and poverty was growing acute. He thus proposed that to improve the condition there is immediate need of improving the roads and connectivity, encourage the Europeans to settle, etc. (Bhuyan 2013:42).

Through the official documents in archives one get a clear impression that there was a constant tension between the officials at the local fields and the higher authorities located in Delhi. The field officials who were engaging with multitude of issues in the field were constantly drawn into local politics, saw the necessity and opportunities to expand themselves further uphill. While on the

other hand the officials in higher authorities who were focused on the larger pictures of its imperial interests and also restrained by inhome situations in London, always pulled back the string to expansion. For instance, the inner line was drawn to provide a guiding directive to the officials' judicial authority. The officials were time and again restrained from getting involved in situations causing Government to bear unnecessary expense. In return, the officials in the local and then the regional levels would try to 'sellout' their area and missions for expansions by either romanticizing the hills and its 'exotic' people (Das 2010), or by highlighting the prospects of making good business from the resources. In 1833, two expeditions to the Aka hills were made after 'high' quality coal was discovered from there which were supposed to be lying in abundance.<sup>46</sup> The most successful of such propositions was that of the discovery of the Tea tree in the region.<sup>47</sup> Sudatta Sikdar (1982) presents a case how local officials and then the entire government took it upon to expand to the hills in order to find their way into the central China market. Then after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the impending socialist expansion and interest in China put another pressure on the government for more expedient expansion to the region (One can also observe that many of these urgencies were amplified by the local officials who constantly fed the stories about the presence of Tibetan officials in the bordering areas).

The expansion was made by step by step extending the range of judiciary and administrative influences towards nearer the foothills and then ultimately to hills.

Darrang area, named after the Darrang river, which at that time demarcated the entire western and half of the central region (where the Subansiri agency was carved out) in now Arunachal and the adjoining area of Bhutan till the Udalguri district of Assam, was under Daflas (Nyishi), Akas and Bhutias. In 1835, there was report of Nyishi raid in the plains and it was said that such occurrence was

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<sup>5</sup> For pol proceedings (India), 12 sep 1838, No.8) (93).

<sup>6</sup>Cultivation of Tea in Assam, India, Asiatic Journal vol XXX, 1839, pp.53-54.

common. Therefore, in order to have better control over the area a civil station was sited to Tezpur from Mangaldai which was very far, and three out posts were established in Baloo-Pong (Balukpung), Potasati and Balipara, the administrative Head Quarter was located in Mangaldai (Michell 1973:264). An important development took place with regards to definition of the boundary between the British and the Nyishis. In order to exert their power and authority, the administrators decided to impose a blockade on Nyishi. But since there has been no agreement signed between them and hence no demarcated boundary, the *Dafla Duar* (the trade passage of Nyishis) that runs along south-west to north-east was fixed as the boundary and which later became the inner line boundary in 1873 (Bezbarua 2010:10). Simultaneously another outcome of the event was the formal institutionalization of the Posa system with Nyishis. In 1836-37, a *Mel* (meet) was organized where all Nyishi villages who were involved in the raid and other 58 Nyishi heads agreed to not cause such raids in future again to get their due and instead they will be paid Posa by the British government (Bezbaruah opcit).

Wherever there was an organized form of governance system or institutionalized and identifiable power-authority, such as chieftainship or kingship among the Akas in the western or Darrang region, a strong organized councils of the Adis (then known as Abors) in the east or Sadiya region, or a sanctified divine kingship forms among the Khamptis in the extreme east; the annexation is much easier. In each of these cases, the head of the institutions or the councils were brought to sign treaty with the government and agree for the annual payment of the Posa. The treaties with Akas were signed as early as 1842<sup>48</sup>, with Adis (Abors) in 1860s<sup>49</sup> and with Singpho chiefs in 1826 and Khampti chiefs in

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<sup>7</sup> Agreement with the Tagi Raja of the Aka Purbat and Agreement with the Hazaree Khowah Aka chief, both signed by Frans Jenkins, Agent to Governor General.

<sup>8</sup> Agreement with Meyong Abors (1862), with Kebang Abors (1863), with Dehang Debang Abors (1862) and Bor Abors (1866)



1843<sup>50</sup>. The Khampti, Abor and Aka resistance against the British government ceased after few crushing military expeditions into their areas. The last of such conflict that took place was in Abor hills in 1911-12, a punitive expedition was carried out after the murder of the Political Officer, Mr. Williamson. which led to opening of government outposts unto areas demarcated by Tibetan and Chinese authorities. However, in the case of central region that lies between the Aka and the Abor area, with no unitary or unifying political system as every village or clan group was autonomous entity, the administrators faced unique challenge. They were sparsely populated and the villages were in constant move due to their Jhum cultivation system and unlike the Akas and Abors they maintained all political distance from the plains. It was being constantly mooted by the local officials and finally the proposal was accepted for the recognition of a separate area in 1912-13. However, administratively it was still kept under the Lakhimpur administration which also looked after the administrative of Darrang area as well.

Another factor that led to the formation of the region was the two consecutively passed regulatory judicial and administrative directives - The Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and Assam Frontier Tract Regulation 1874. Along with the establishment of administrative order, it also set territorial jurisdictions. A linear order of administration, the Chief Commissioner of Assam being the highest judiciary body, where the Deputy Commissioner assisted by an Assistant Commissioner was entrusted with judicial and administrative responsibility over the Frontier Tract. The Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur was to administer the Darrang area along with the Lakhimpur area which was located on the foothills of the Dafla hills. In 1914, the Indo-Tibetan border was delimited, whereby along with the delimitation of upper northern boundary the tribal areas of Darrang and Lakhimpur, its southern boundaries were also carved defined. The entire region itself was divided into two section, the western section known

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<sup>9</sup> Agreement with the Singpho Chiefs, 1826 and Khampti Chiefs, 1843

as Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and then the Central & Eastern section as Sadiya Frontier Tract. Political Officer (PO) and an Assistant Political Officer (APO) were appointed for the Sadiya Frontier Tract. Lakhimpur Frontier Tract still remained under the control of Deputy commissioner of Darrang. Mr. Needham was appointed as Special Advisor to Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur on matter related to these areas.

In 1937, under the Government of India Act 1935, the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts together came to be known as an excluded area. However, due to financial constraints and lack of imperialistic interest in the region the direct expansion and control of the region became restricted. Then suddenly in 1946, Balipara Frontier Tract was bifurcated into Sela-Sub Agency and Subansiri Area with their respective Political Officers for better administration of the each region. The move could be because of the constant skirmishes that the administrators were facing in the Darrang region involving Bhootia traders and Aka chiefs.

The Dafla hills represented a completely different set of issues before the administrators. It was also realized that to bring Daflas under proper control the Headquarter needs to be locate nearer to Dafla region. Thus, under the new administrative re-organization the headquarter for the area was established in North Lakhimpur with the base camp for the Subansiri area located at Kimin. With time the boundaries demarcations became more clearer and concrete and inter-boundary relations as the administrators started tightening the Inner Line Permit system that regulated the plain-hill intercourse. The administrators were instructed to avoid getting involved in cases beyond the Inner Line (Bezbaruah 2010). Soon it was realized that this was an impossible restraint to maintain. Going through various official reports and cases, there were always some fugitives coming down to plains to take refuge among their traditional allies in the plains, such settling often would lead to raids and counter raids. Apart from this, there were always plain merchants and tea planter who were settling near

the foothills, who would not keep from exploiting the hill people coming down to trade with them or to work in their fields during winter. Such transactions would culminate into raids and abductions within the Inner Line. Though administrators would always find hill people's cause more genuine at the end, yet it was becoming a constant nuisance.

During this period, through such various punitive expeditions or military 'promenade' carried out into the hills ( namely the 1874 Dafla Expedition and 1896 Cap. McCabe's Mission to Apatani Valley, the 1910 Dafla Punitive Promenade, etc.) the myth of 'fierce and warlike' people inhabiting the hills was waning. The report prepared on the Dafla Expedition of 1874 by a Political Officer notes: *'It was found that the expedition had been organized on a ridiculously large scale'* (emphasis added) (Mitchel 1973:169) Further in the footnote it says 'a thoroughly false idea of the strength of the Dafla tribe had gone abroad' (Mitchel, *ibid*). It was becoming clear that now the only constraints to control the hills were the terrain which was still unknown and difficult, lack of porters and possible resistance put by few villages in further up hills. Thus, as per the plan, each of such visit/expedition was accompanied with a survey team who would gather information about the area and the further interior areas. The officials would also use such opportunity to do emissary act and give deliberations on the benevolence, strength and justice of Queen's government to communities in the hills.

The military expeditions to these hills had unique styles for which they are called as the 'Military Promenade'. These military promenades were designed specifically for North Eastern hill tribes (Guha, 1977) where use of direct force and violence inadvisable, unviable and even unnecessary. The idea was to overawe the tribes with show and display of government's military strengths, to bring their submission without bloodshed. In words of Chief Commissioner Henry Cotton, gave his instruction to official incharge for the Dafla Expedition 1874, after the economic blockade of Inner Line failed:

A military promenade might be made in the hills of such strength as would “overawe” the hill men, or, in other words, that killing and burning be avoided, the hill-people should be frightened into giving up the captives held by them, and be made to submit to some moderate punishment in the shape of a fine, or otherwise. (p. 282)

Henry Cotton like Needham, were among few officials at the position of Chief Commissioners who advocated for more moderate and welfare driven policies in the administration and dealings with hill area. He was never favored among the field level officials and fiercely criticized among his colleagues. Finally he was transferred to Delhi when he resigned from his post of the Chief Commissioner of Assam Province. Nevertheless, during the Dafla Expedition there were further layers of conflict of leadership between the Military Officer and the Political Officer, who had different approach towards the dealing of the case. The Political Officer of Darrang, Cap. Boyd, tried negotiations by sending Political Jemadars to hills and tried economic blockades before launching the expedition. The Military Officer Cap. Cory, wanted a swift and more economic mission to the culprit villages who were responsible for raid in Amtolla village (1871-72), in plains killing and carrying away of property, to bring down the culprit and handover them to the magistrate. It was found that there was an outbreak of whooping cough in the plain villages which spread to hills killing many in there. Thus during the winter, the Tangsen village sent messengers to Gohpur and Kullungpur villages responsible for spreading it, to determine on the compensation. As the villager refused to come for the meeting, on 13<sup>th</sup> February the Tangan village raided the Amtolla village who are allies of the above villages. Capt. Boyd was replaced by Major Graham who continued the blockade for some time and removed it as several other innocent villages in the interior are reported to be suffering due to blockade. Finally, the decision to send the expedition was made.

Soon the military expedition which was planned against the Amtolla raid was accompanied with several past cases and complaints, and claims made by plain

Dafla villagers. Thus, the expedition was extended to several other villages (mostly consisted of five to twelve long houses) in the hills that were found to be deserted and while some others were either merely curious or surprised by such visit. The officer in charge, as he reports, did not lose any opportunity in creating a deep impact on people's mind by demonstrating the power they held. The villages were burned and fines they collected/ and captives were recovered. He notes the long deliberation he made to the crowd who had gathered there, 'the Queen would recover her ryots wherever she found them, without asking who had carried them off...' (Guha *ibid.*p274). After the meeting was over few rounds of fire from the guns were made "with the view of giving the Abors (Daflas) an idea as to what could have been done had we liked, and how easy it would have been for us to have destroyed their villages, even at a distance, had we chosen to do so' (Guha *ibid.*p274). All such long deliberations were made through translators in their Political Jemadars who belonged to plains and hardly speak the local language. It is still not clear if it was to add on sarcasm or an ironic humor to the situation when the report notes that "In the meantime the camp was full of Pakfi's people, bargaining for salt" (Guha *ibid.*:275). And as if to justify and validate the 'success' of the expedition for the cost that was borne by the expedition, the report engenders on more nuanced tone of its outcomes. Under the subheading 'Intended Effects' it notes :

The fines were also felt as disgrace for those who had to pay them, the occupation of the villages, as also the chiefs having had to come in, were likewise felt as indignities. The bells taken appear to be of Chinese manufacture and to be very old, they are of small size, and of little intrinsic value; but being looked on with veneration their loss is severely felt. (*ibid.* pp.282-283)

It was not that those officials dealing with hill people were blind or unaware of local cultural nuances. As we could see from above excerpt, they knew exactly about what they were doing and what were their effects, or 'intended effects' on the people. Both Major Graham and Captain Cory had served in the region for several years and they were appointed for their tactfulness in carefully securing

the imperial and colonial interests in the region. As an administrator they were patient to learn, and as politician they knew not to push too much beyond what the higher authority could not approve of or guarantee them. A Political Officer was in complete charge of their area, often autonomous in their decision making. They are in complete charge as long as they could justify their actions and decisions. Therefore, such reports are not only written in detailed description of objective planning and outcomes, but also covers very subjective notes on what one felt or thought about and how decisions are arrived at.

Another very important part of this report was the reporting on the ‘discovery’ of the Ranga valley inhabited by much fabled Tani people. As Lieutenant Harman, who headed the survey team noted ‘Ranga valley was almost discovered, it existed but was not known to be so populous and open.’

### **5.5. The after-stories of the first colonial contact of the Taniis:**

As Stuart Blackburn (2003) notes that, from the very beginning when Apa Tanis were reported for the first time by E. T. Dalton in 1845, they have been consistently described as ‘civilized’ and their valley as a haven of peace. Dalton gathered his information about Taniis from among Miris and Nyishis whose villages he had toured. He reported of Tani as being considered, ‘very superior’ to other tribes and very ‘peaceably disposed’ who make war only by openly announcing and attack only men (Dalton 1845). Since then there were constant report on Taniis but none of the European or any plain people could visit their valley and neither Tani seldom were ever reported to have visited the plain. Such prosperous and self-contained isolation created a fable like romance among the Europeans (Blackburn 2003.) However, it was the Dafla Expedition team who could go closest to the valley, reported as the Ranga valley, though they could only have a far view of the valley. Major Graham reports that:

To the North, far up the Ranga, could be seen the plains of the Apa Tanang Abor country, a race held in much dread by the Daflas of the Ranga valley. These Abors seldom or never visit the plains, and from the fact of their trading in rock salt and swords, such as are made by the Tibetians, are evidently in communication with Tibet. The people of the Ranga valley state that the Apa Tanang Abors have *bullocks* and ploughs, that they have made roads about 4 feet wide, and that they had at least one *stone building in which they place the skulls of their enemies*. They do not inter-marry with the Abor Daflas of the Ranga valley, and are evidently quite independent of the plains either as regards of food, clothing, iron or salt.... I think it will be found sooner or later that the Apa Tanang Abors, if not actually *subordinate to Tibet*, at least are in a measure under its influence. As regards their strength, all that can be said is that, the Ranga valley people fear them and describe them as a very powerful people.” (Emphasis added) (Mitchel opcit.)

Taniis were always presented as most dreaded people before the Britishers. The image of superiority and prosperity the Tanii society and richness of their land and its isolation continued to allude the government. The information regarding their communication with the Sath Rajas (of Tibet) and list of village names and persons named ‘Tame Raja’ cannot be verified. But the plans for colonizing the area was already born, as the document further says:

The land of Ranga valley would be capable of supporting a large population, and will probably be some day colonized from India or England. It appears probable that a force marching straight for the village of the north-west corner of the Ranga valley would find abundant supplies in the Apa Tanang villages; for we are told on reliable evidence, that they possess large stone-built granaries, and we know from actual observation that their country is highly cultivated. (Mitchel, opcit: 258)

**5.5.1. The Tea Planter’s Visit.** On 24<sup>th</sup> December 1889, Mr. H. M. Crowe, the Joyhing Tea Estate manager in Lakhimpur, made the first visit to the Tanii valley. He stated that it was out of his long standing curiosity to visit the land that he asked one of the Dafla friend from ‘Ghasi’ village to take him up to the Tanii valley. The European tea planters were not only entrepreneur but an avid adventurers who often would take up the touring into the interior hill tracks.

They had toughened up themselves while competing the local traders and even stood up against the colonial government on several occasions. As early as 1850s, the tea planters club and lobbies entered in conflict with the local British administrators, for instance in case of Naga foothill areas where the planters and hill people formed allies and fought against the government (Guha 1977). While sometimes, the Tea Planter's lobbies pressurized the government to introduce land policies and revenue systems that are conducive for tea planters to occupy land or even acquire and keep labor by force. The Joyhing Tea Estate extended well beyond the Inner Line boundary but Mr. Crowe had managed to eke out the allotment. There many Dafla men used to work for him during off-season in their villages. He became well acquainted with the area and must have learnt Assamese as well.

He was asked and prepared a report for the administrators on his visit to Tani valley which was published in April 1890, as official report titled 'Mr. Crowe's Account of a Journey to Apatanang Country'.<sup>51</sup> It was circulated and studied with great interests. He set out on the afternoon of December 16<sup>th</sup>, had met several Tani men and women in Nyishi villages on the way doing their trade, he also reports that indeed Taniis do visit plains using a particular route which could be used in future by the government. Finally, on 24<sup>th</sup> evening he reached the valley and visited Hong village but did not stay there because Taniis were not willing to allow Dafla coolies to stay in their houses. The report contained details about the routes, people, strength, temperament, attire and practices, their villages which were 'completely undefended' but covered with China Bamboo, about abundant agriculture fields, etc. He notes that Taniis are distinct from any other tribes in the hills they came across (ibid.:7) and most importantly, he notes that given a safe passage Taniis can come down to plains in large numbers for trade or work as seasonal labours. He reports that at present they are not allowed by the Dafla villages near the foothills who prefers to act as intermediary in order to

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<sup>10</sup> Assam Secretariate (1980) Mr. Crowe's Account of Journey to Apatani Country. General A, For. Prog. July 1980, No. 13-20.



make their profits. He concludes saying that ever since his visit to their valley a good number of Taniis have started visiting his garden to work but they come only in groups (ibid. pp 3). He suggests that the Posa being paid to Daflas can be used to this affect to provide safe passage for Taniis.

One can draw that this visit was not out of pure curiosity but to explore prospects of getting labour sources. He must have heard about the densely populated valley. In fact in 1890, there were few reports of Tanii people coming down to plains, they were dealt with utmost care and their movements, especially 1897 onwards, being carefully recorded in fortnightly, monthly and annual reports submitted to Chief Commissioner's office. However, it was only in 1897 when the next visit by any European was made to the Tanii valley and that too on a military expedition. By this time more and more Apatanis had started visiting the plains for small trades or to work in fields and tea gardens during the winter season when there is no agricultural activity in their own valley.

### **5.6. McCabe's Expedition to Tanii Country**

Here we will see the different versions of the event which Stuart Blackburn calls as the 'First Colonial Contact' (Blackburn, 2003). In various ways this was the first contact of Taniis with the outsider, the Halyang, and with the colonial authority. Mr. Crowe's visit was a half-day visit where he interacted with few people in Hangu village, and it was more on a personal affair. But McCabe's visit is a punitive expedition to affect some punishment for the 'crime' committed within the Inner Line.

First we will go through Stuart Blackburn's narrative on the event that compared both the official narratives and the oral narratives he collected in 2003. His is a rejection of the official narratives for its narrow and positivist focus, which he calls as a 'badly cropped photograph' (Blackburn, 2003: na). Secondly, we will

look at the ‘pre-text’, meaning trying to understand the background processes that went behind the decision making of the expedition, the stories behind the texts, and try to understand the texts itself. Third, the oral versions of the event from the field. Since, the event took place more than a century back, the stories I gathered are the after-stories of the stories (or memories of memories).

Nevertheless, it gives a very interesting view to the texts, to both generated by the officials and by Stuart Blackburn, part of self-righteous arrogant official narrative, and moralizing and romanticizing anthropological narrative of Stuart Blackburn. It is not a mere turnover of the mirror, like Stuart Blackburn does, but like standing on the other side of the glass and observing the other. There is a difference.

A telegram sent by the Deputy Commissioner of North Lakhimpur, reporting the raid committed by Taniis on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1896 on Podu’s house, a Tarbotia Miri, reached the Chief Commissioner on 16<sup>th</sup> November. Podu was working for Mr. Crowe in Kodom Tea garden. Two people, including the Podu himself, were murdered and five were taken for captive, where one succumbed to injuries on the way. Thus, after ascertaining that the raid was conducted by Taniis and trying to release the captives using Political Jemadars, it was decided to send a demonstrative expedition to Taniis. Cap. McCabe, the Inspector General of Lakhimpur headed the expedition team of 300 soldiers along with some 400 porters and another Military officer Cap. Row and a Medical Officer. The team arrived Taniis valley on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1897 and upon hearing the case, McCabe was satisfied that Taniis had a genuine grievance against Podu. Thus, no fine was imposed albeit all captives were released. The expedition was considered a success without any bloodshed and Cap. McCabe was even nominated for award.

In his article Stuart Blackburn writes that, though this first contact with colonialism, a punitive expedition, ‘appears in McCabe’s report as a successful police case: accusation received, suspects sought and apprehended, accused

heard, punishment served... For the Tanii, however, this first colonial contact was not a court case, open and shut, but only one event in a tangled web of relations with their neighbors'. (Blackburn 2003: na). In spring 2002, he went with an old photo of the expedition which he found from the British Library, to elicit any memory. Though he says, he had no much hope but he was surprised that many remembered the stories they heard from their grandfather's time. Following is the account he collected from interview with Hage Hiiba, which he had edited and augmented with details from other accounts:

I heard from my grandfather that before this (1897) Apatanis had been going to the plains to trade, mainly for salt; some also worked in tea plantations. Many died there, for various reasons. Anyway, many months before the sepoys arrived, there had been a murder in a nearby Nyishi village (Linia) and the murderer, a Nyishi himself, had sought and been given shelter by Apatani friend, here in Hari village. The Apatani man then sent the murderer to another Nyishi village close to the plains in secret to keep him safe. Someone in the second village, however, betrayed his whereabouts... and soon a party of the dead man's kinsmen captured and took him back. On the way, they passed through the Apatani country and stopped at the house of the man in Hari who had first given him shelter; but the captive now accused his Apatani friend of having betrayed him...The Apatani man set out on a raid to attack the village near the plains that had betrayed the hiding place...,if the murderer was himself killed believing, as he did, that the Apatani man had betrayed him, then his soul would take revenge against the betrayer. Angry at those who had actually revealed the whereabouts...the Apatani man from Hari gathered a small party and carried out the raid.

I don't know exactly what happened in the raid, but I think some people were killed. That's why those Nyishis asked the British for help in claiming compensation. When the British came with soldiers, they held a meeting on a little hill called Biirii between Hari and Hong village; the Apatanis were represented by Hage Dolyang, Tasso Gyayu, Hage Eppo and Tasso Kano. But the main speaker was Tasso Murchi, who wore a zilang (priest's shawl) and Kobyang (metal bracelets). Tasso Murchi used the bamboo sticks (Khotiir) as counters for each Apatani killed or stolen by Nyishis and Hill Miris. At the end, there were more sticks for dead Apatani than for those killed in the raid; so the case against the Apatanis was dismissed. Hari village was fined one mithun, which was given to the British, who promptly gave it back.

Stuart Blackburn argues that the official sources and oral accounts do not differ ‘in the essential details or even in the sequence of events, but more fundamentally, in their respective point of views’. While for British official the matter begins with a raid and killing of people in tea estate and hence, the trying of guilty party and imposition of reasonable punishment led to settlement of the dispute and the success of the expedition, without bloodshed. But for Taniis, the story begun with a murder committed several months before the raid, which was actually a revenge act for the betrayal. Thus, comparing both narratives, Blackburn point out, that like a ‘badly cropped photograph’ without its context and motivations, the raid looks like a criminal act while when seen in a wider context, the raid itself is justifiable. Secondly, he talks about the difference in genre, in terms of the ‘psychological depth’. By which he means the official documents only talks in fragments while Tanii oral account would embed it to larger cultural socio-historical context.

Without disagreeing much with him, for the emphasis he puts on the oral accounts as historically valid source. My main argument and insertion would be in terms of perspective on how both these narratives are to be treated. Instead of saying one is inadequate explanation of the other, the fact is that they both represent different contexts and background that needs to be seen as parallel realities and worldview. The events like this being the point of intersections where individuals shake hands with whole sets of complex backgrounds behind them. Those histories can be critiqued in terms of their interpretation of the other but cannot be questioned on their lived realities or histories.

**5.6.1. Official Documents:** There were two line of communication that was taking place during the course and aftermath. At the local level, there was daily communication between The Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur and the officials enquiring the case, and once the case was properly determined Mr. McCabe, the Inspector General of Police, who was appointed as Political Officer for the expedition got involved. During the expedition he was reporting to F. C.

Henniker, the Deputy Commissioner on daily basis through telegram and detailed letter report to the H. S. J. Cotton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The Deputy Commissioner Lakhimpur then forward the message to H.S.J. Cotton, the Chief Commissioner and Maj. Gen, R. M. Jenning, the General Officer Commanding and even to Principal Medical Officer and Sanitary Commissioner Assam. These reports are sent to W. J. Cunningham, the Secy. to the Government of India, Foreign Department.

On 16<sup>th</sup> November, through a telegram and then a detailed letter by Henniker to Cotton, the report of raid on Pudu Miri's house, whereby he himself and his step son were reported to be killed and five other members were carried away. The raid took place three miles within the Inner Line. The offenders were believed to be the Taniis as per the Sub-Divisional Officer and Mr. Crowe reported. Mr. Crowe said earlier two Taniis from Hari had warned Podu that Hangu men are planning to attack him which he ignored. They also found red chillies in Podu's house which were usually brought by hill men for trade. The motive seems to be that last winter some Taniis worked in Mr. Crowe's Kodom tea garden where Podu worked as Crowe's interpreter. Taniis had complained about the pay and cheating by Podu. He proposed sending of Political Jemadar to ascertain about the captives and awaits Cotton's views on steps to be taken. The secy.<sup>52</sup> to Cotton writes back saying that he awaits the result for further enquiry on 21<sup>st</sup> November. As lots of anxiety among the nearby villages are reported a non-commissioned officer and three sepoy were deputed on the Kodom Tea Estate and the Henniker himself on December visit the spot for enquiry as Cotton asked him to submit a full report on the matter.

**5.6.2. Mr. Crowe's Letter:** Meantime, an interesting letter, dated 17<sup>th</sup> November, written by Mr. Crowe, the tea planter, to Cotton urging him to make serious

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from F. C. Henniker, Deputy Commission, Lakhimpur to the Secy to the Chief Commissioner of Assam. No. 941-G, Dated Dibrigarh, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1896.

efforts in punishing Taniis. He evokes government's responsibility towards Podu who had faith on Sorkar to protect him, and also mentions that Podu was rumored to have cheated on Taniis. Podu was also working as go between for Chrities in Kakoi, where some got sick and four died. The raid must be to avenge the dead. He points that Taniis are becoming awfully bold:

‘The Apas are awfully feared, and by squashing them the whole hills would be settled at once and for ever. As they are settled in a small open space they are easy to punish, and a few military police entering the country would be the signal for the neighbouring hillmen to drop on them, and take all the paddy...I hope to goodness the Government will not let it slide, or *we will either have to book or fight for ourselves.*<sup>53</sup> (Emphasis added)

Mr. Crowe, a Tea Planters's, in this letter represented an invisible group of people (*‘we will either have to book or fight for ourselves*) who were actively engaged with people from hill coming down to plains and maybe work in their plantations. It is not know what kind of interactions they had except for that they worked in the plantation as labor during winter. During my field interview no one who used to visit plains in early days shared about them working in fields. Some said they worked in fields for Assamese farmers. Nevertheless, this letter does three things, first, it denies any possible blame directed to him for the cause of the raid by directing the blame entirely on Podu for cheating Taniis. Secondly, it plays on the fear of hill people by creating a distrust and violent image of the same community people whom he few years back described as peaceable and even weak after his visit to the Tanii valley. Third, it provides strategic inputs and hence suggest a severe punitive action, whatsoever maybe his grievance.

It is important to measure the amount of influence that Mr. Crowe exercised on the local authorities. So far, from all records it is clear that he had been in good touch with the administrators and held good esteem with them. He has many hill

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<sup>12</sup>Demi-Official letter from H. M. Crowe to J.C. Arbutnott, Sub-Division Officer. K-W. No.11. Foreign A-November 1897. Dated Kodom, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1896.

people working for him. Three havildars or sepoy were sanctioned to guard his estate. Moreover, the Kodom Tea Estate area actually extends beyond the Inner Line boundary and proposal has been sent to extend the boundary so to cover the estate within the Inner Line so as to secure the area with government protections (Guha, 1977). In his report on his visit to the Tani country, he suggests that Taniis and interior Daflas should be encouraged to visit the plains. In this regard the administrators can use the Posa to influence the Daflas, near the plains, to provide them safe passage. Here, he once again suggests how the government is responsible in addressing the matter and teach some lessons to the hill tribes. Going only by official documents and not trying to read between the line about the correspondences, proposals and reports, one might completely miss the existence and significant role he played in building administrative opinion and motivating their decision.

Finally, through a letter written on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1896, B.R.B. McCabe, Inspector General of Police, Assam, to Cotton, gets engaged with the case. He wrote a detailed letter covering his own inquiry on the case and his observations. He notes on the main cause behind the raid:

Last cold weather a batch of ApaTanangs worked at Kodom garden under Mr. Crowe, and Podu acted as interpreter and go-between. Five of these ApaTanangs died and Podu detained an Apa boy, Toppu (Toppo). During the rains four Ata Tanangs, among whom two were brother, Buru and Dolo, visited Podu and demanded the return of the boy. Podu apparently declined to let the boy go. Buru died on his return journey, and it is alleged that Dolo in revenge has murdered Podu<sup>54</sup>

Thus he proposes that first a messenger should be sent to them demanding the return of the captives and their complete. And in case of non-compliance, a punitive force of 200 Frontier Police to be sent. Fenniker suggested waiting for some more time for the Political Jemadar, Moni Ram, and one Tara who was taken captive by Taniis on another raid and now is released. While Tara

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<sup>13</sup> Assam Secretariate Proceedings. For. 35. ApaTanang Expedition, 1896-97. No.35.

confirmed that it was men from Hari village that raided Podu and Moni Ram came back with the information on hearing that Tara had gone down to Government to induce them to make war on Taniis, they are making preparations to fight. ApaTanangs seemed to have demanded 30 mithuns, 30 cows, 30 pigs, gongs, bells, silk cloths, silver bracelets, hoes and daos in exchange for the captives.

Finally, a compiled case summary was reported to Government of India on 6<sup>th</sup> January<sup>55</sup> with proposal put by McCabe. It said that, though Taniis is a small and unimportant community and even incapable to resist, yet it is important that the government do not let it slip 'The raid has created general sense of insecurity along the frontier, and unless steps are promptly taken to rescue the captives and punish the raiders there is a risk not only of the further aggressions on the part of the ApaTanangs, but also of a serious loss of prestige in the eyes of the Daflas and Miris'. It notes Cotton's feeling that, 'let the savages on our frontier know that the practice they are accustomed to within their own confines cannot be extended into British territory with impunity.' Though he feels that, there is no need to call the services of the Military.

As time passed further details on the incident was gathered and plan for action was hatched. On 16<sup>th</sup> January 1897, Government of India sanctioned arrangements on lines proposed to promptly punish Apa Tanang if they fail to make reparation.<sup>56</sup> On a letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1897, Secy. to Cotton informed McCabe that instead of 200 now 300 of Lakhimpur Military Battalion should be employed for the purpose of garrisoning and a stockade should be erected in each halting place. With 50 at Joyhing and 15 each at every halting

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<sup>14</sup> Letter from the Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, on tour, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign department. No. 32-T, Dated Camp Dibrugarh, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1897.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Secy. to the Government of India, Foreign Department, to the Inspector General of Police and General Officer Commanding. Telegram No. 68-T and 69-T, dated 17 January 1897



place so that around 150 men reaches the valley. Another European officer Lieut. Norie was to assist the command and a medical officer Surgeon Lieut. Leventon was attached. Thus accordingly arrangement for 10 days rations, transport, etc. were made. ‘The Political Officer, Mr. McCabe, has been cautioned not to exceed his instruction and keep the Chief Commissioner regularly informed’<sup>57</sup> Finally on February the expedition left.

However, throughout the entire expedition one thing that continuously troubled McCabe was the porter issue which was not planned during the proposal. In his telegram to Cotton on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1897, he writes: ‘Camp No.4. Tara left this morning, with 120 rifles for Silli marked Takha in the map. We have strongly stockade both this camp and camp No.1 Ranganadi Joyhing. I have had to reduce my striking force as I am entirely dependent on Daflas for carriage. The Hill Miris failed to turn up and the Kacharis are useless in the hills. Latest reports state that Apas have sent off their women and children, have combined with Abor villages behind them, and have panjied and fixed crossbows on road between Silli and Hong. I hope to be in Hong on 12<sup>th</sup>. All these telegrams were forwarded to Foreign Secy., Calcutta. In another instance: ‘At 7 am on the 13 we had all our baggage packed ready for an early start, but from that hour till 1 pm our patience was sorely tried, attempting to induce the Daflas to leave the village and take up the loads...declaring that they had come to fight and not to carry loads.’<sup>58</sup>

He reached the ‘enemy’s country’ on 14<sup>th</sup> February, found it panjied, but they were old ones, and found their camps in several places. However, despite all this, when he actually entered the valley at around 2 pm he writes:

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<sup>16</sup> Letter to the Secy. to the Government of India, For. Dept. from the Chief Commissioner, Assam. No. 108-T, Dated Brahmakund, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1897.

<sup>17</sup> Report of the Expedition against the Apa Tanang. To the Secy to the Chief Commissioner of Assam from R. B. McCabe, ICS, Inspector General of Police and Jails, Assam and Political Officer of the Apa Tanang Expedition. No. 17-T, dated Camp Goalundo, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1897.

The sight is one I shall never forget, as we suddenly emerged on a magnificent plateau some ten miles in length, laid out in highly cultivated and artificially irrigated terraces well watered by the Kali river, a sluggish stream some 45 to 60 feet in breadth, with low alluvial banks... Our hearts warmed at the sight of primroses, violets, wild currants, strawberries and raspberries, and I felt disposed to almost believe some of the wonderful stories we had heard of the fabulous wealth of this country. (ibid.)

Finally, when in Tani land, his narratives takes an interesting turn. Throughout his tour and till he reached the valley he made sarcastic observations about the communities he came across. In Tani country, Taniis were secure, while they (the troops) were not, and they were largely unaware of the strength of the British government and were least impressed by the promenade too. This must have put McCabe in strange irritation for not being able to inspire desired response of fear and awe. His voice had irritation while mixed with sarcastic humor. The oral accounts gathered during the field interview begin from here on. But it is important to first compare what McCabe thought was happening, and what Blackburn thought had happened.

The very first people he met before reaching the Hong village, McCabe reports, asked him 'What will you take to go away?' One should bear this in mind that all these conversations were translated in each case for both the parties. When the object of the expedition was told, he says it was 'met with the semi-insolence and procrastination characteristic of so many of the hill tribes'. He reports, as they told him, "'You need not be in a hurry, we'll call our headmen together in a day or two and discuss terms; meanwhile you may stay where you are, as we cannot let you enter our village, as any attempt on your part to do so will end in a row.'" I considered it essential as a mark of our strength to march into the village and to decide there whether it was advisable to occupy a portion of it or to form a camp outside'. Annoyed Taniis made every effort in short of the use of actual force to turn them back like blocking the paths with bamboos and hundreds of men armed with long spears hovering along. But McCabe ordered not to fire

unless actual attack was made. Though, after judging the sanitary condition, water availability and to avoid friction between his porters and Taniis he moved to an isolated hill. He summoned the headmen to a conference who told him that his village has nothing to do with the raid as captives are all in Hari. McCabe thought it was a lame excuse.

He reports that in his twenty years of serving in North East, he never exercised more patience or self-restraint. Next morning, the Hangu headmen came again asking what he will give them back in return for captives? He replied that they will get nothing but instead informed them to 'pay fine for the murder across the frontier and that disobedience would commence active hostilities, in which their village would be burned. This was greeted with an outburst of laughter and the remark- "Are you bird that you can fly away? If you burn our village we will surround you and keep you here as our slave forever."

Finally several Hari headman arrived. According to McCabe, a headman named "Moorchi" (Tasso Murchi) who admitted to have led the raid spoke for his party. 'His discourse lasted about two hours, and with its never ending heads far surpassed the "lastly", "now to conclude" and "one word more" of the longest drawn out Scotch sermon. He produced five bundles of sticks, each numbering from fifty to hundred, and each stick formed the subject of a separate grievances which led to the raid on Podu.' They accounted for each dead Tanii whom Podu had fleeced to work in Mr. Crowe's tea garden, several of whom died while with Podu and other on the journey way back; and that they know nothing about the Inner Line Regulation. McCabe notes that it complies with the information he had gathered and that in meeting the punishment he should consider these facts. All the captives were made over 'and finally, almost with tears, they returned Mr. Crowe's double-barreled gun.' He took a detailed statement from one of the captives Toppo. While they were there they helped themselves with cows, pigs and mithuns given by Taniis to feed the Sepoys and coolies. He writes 'The

women were too nervous to husk rice for us, and it was finally necessary to send a detachment into Hong village to collect paddy and punders in order to supply the coolies with rice.’

Then as per his final objective, to impose some fine that would prevent the recurrence of similar raid in the future; he decided to impose only one mithun as fine as Taniis were, in real, not aware that they were making war at the British not just on Podu. The mithun, which he feared would fall into Nyishis’ hand, who betrayed him on porter supply, he gave back to the Taniis.

Finally, he also makes some correction on the previous reports produced on Taniis during Dafla Expedition and Miri Mission. His final observation of Taniis are as : ‘I would describe the ApaTanangs generally as a timid, good-nature, industrious and locacious people far inferior in pluck and physique to the Hill Miris’. Re-draws the village map. Estimates their population to be 15,000 and believes they must have been in regular touch with Tibet.

On 16<sup>th</sup>, he called the Hangu headmen and told them that:

‘We wished them to maintain friendly relations with the neighbors, the Miris and Dafla, that any grievances they might have against tribes residing within the “Inner Line” would be enquired into by the Sub-Divisional Officer of North Lakhimpur, but that any raid across our frontier would meet with condign punishment, I also added that every encouragement and protection would be given to them in trading direct with the plains, and that if I found that the path to the Pangri river on my return journey was absolutely clear of all obstructions, I would release the two Apatanang captives on my arrival at that river.’

In a letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1897, sent to the Secy. to the Government of India, Foreign by E.A.Gait, Secy. to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, reports about the complete successful expedition led by McCabe, without a bloodshed. His Excellency the Viceroy and the Chief Commissioner had already congratulated him. It writes:

It is principally due to Mr. McCabe's experience of tribes on the North-East frontier, to his patience and judgment, combined with firmness and good temper, displayed at the most critical moment, that the object of the expedition were attained without bloodshed and without the burning of villages and destruction of property which are the usual accompaniments of these frontier forays... Mr. Cotton has no doubt that the strength of the British power has been sufficiently demonstrated to these primitive and ignorant people, and that the ensures taken in vindication of that power are adequate for enforcing the authority of the British Government and for ensuring the future protection of our frontier.

Punitive expeditions so far had been carried out by military personal to these hills and as the report mentions, it ended up with killing of people and burning of villages that would ravage and scatter the entire population by making them to take shelter in the forest. But in most of the cases such villages would be actually found empty. Most of the hill villages are not permanent settlement due to their shifting cultivation practices. The villages itself would be small one with five to thirty households. In Ranga valley, as the Major Graham's report describes the population concentration was more as villages were comparatively close to each other. However, Tanii valley presents different situation altogether. It was (at time of McCabe's visit) of six by one and half miles valley which was inhabited by around 15,000 as McCabe reports. The villages consisted of tightly packed individual houses and were formed in large village cluster. McCabe could have not anticipated of excluding and burning a specific village without burning down the entire village cluster, which would have then formed rapid reaction from the entire valley, especially Hangu being the largest and most populous village cluster in the valley even till today (by some estimates it is considered as the second largest village in Asia after Kohima). He did not enter into a typical hill village but a 'country' as always referred in the report. Haimendorf called Tanii valley as an 'insipid civilization in making'. However, what must have complicated McCabe's situation was the general ignorance and disdain among Taniis about the British Government and the settlements in the plain.

In many ways when Blackburn called this as the first colonial contact, he was not completely wrong; this was their first introduction to each other. Though it is not clear how and to what effect McCabe's message mentioned above had been conveyed to the Taniis, but it is only in after some forty five years later when British authority in the plains was approached by Taniis as we will see in next chapter.

During my field interviews among the elders in Tanii villages, the mention about this first colonial visit was never mentioned with the raid and expedition as the central theme. There is complete difference in the loci of the main story and the rationale for their existence in local memories. For instance, whenever I talked to people about the coming of the Halyangs to the valley by which, in common terms, meant the coming of the Haimendorf in 1943. People would animatedly talk about Laling and Yalu (name given to Haimendorf and his wife Betty). Most of the people I interviewed shared that they were young boys and girls when Haimendorf had visited. However, each time it would be only after the stories Laling-Yalu were over, few people would mention, 'But that was not the first time Halyang had come to the valley. There were two more visits by halyang as our elders used to tell us. Once they did not enter into the valley but they had viewed from far hills and returned back. And once they came and stayed in Biirii and broke into Hangu granaries'. The other visit mentioned could have been either about the during Major Graham's Dafla Expedition or during the Miri Mission in 1891 when a survey party claims to have visited few villages but the village names and descriptions seems like misnomers.

### **5.7. The Tanii Oral Account:**

Following is compilation of stories shared during the interviews in question and response format. They are stories as my interviewees call them, in a sense they are the stories of the history the past, not the history itself; the after-stories of the story itself, in the way they were narrated to me. They said the event took place

long past, in the time of their great grandfathers, hence, the story handed over to them by their elders who heard it from their elders. In a way they also state that they do not know the detail story. However, one remarkable similarity across the narrative was the mockery or a jocular narrative about Tanii wits.

*So why did the Halyangs come to Tanii land?*

- Many said they don't know why they came and guessed maybe to see Tanii land. Few mentioned that to see Punyo Tamer, the then richest man Among the Taniis. He treated them with rice from his granaries. One said Nyishis had called them to present their case on their behalf because some people in Hari had taken few of their people in captive.

Punyo Tamer, from Hangu village, had become a legendary name among Taniis for his wealth and the long age till he had survived. Many believe him to be gifted and few of my interviewee claims to have seen him themselves (He looked like a corpse, so old and white with cotton like white hair). Note in McCabe's report the first thing he did was to summon the 'village headman'. In Tanii society there is no concept of village headman. There are social elites like Bulyang who is a clan representative with/but not head, they function through traditional council consisting of other village elders. Then there are Priests (Nyibu and Gora), and few influential people in the village like influential rich men and advocates (Gondulunii). Nevertheless, none of them is endowed with autonomous or absolute authority. When McCabe asked for 'the village headman', it must have been translated into 'the biggest or the richest man' ('the king or Raja', as it is translated and interpreted to me by my respondent, however, what they meant was in terms of wealth not a sovereign). So Punyo Tamer was sent out without any agenda.

*What were they doing here then?*

- Aye, they started breaking Hangu granaries and carried their rice grains, they even killed our livestocks. That was too much so our people started talking that 'we cannot let this go happening, call all villages to talk'

*So how was the case settled?*

- Many wanted to fight and drive those Halyang out as it was an insult that they come up here and do such thing. Allies were being formed and called, rituals in Mudang-Tage were being performed to appease spirits for the war, and our men were getting ready. While there were some elders who said first let's talk to them and present our case, if matter can be solved without a bloodshed it is far good. So, Hari people called upon Tasso Murchi (written as Moorchi in McCabe's report and introduced as Hari headman) who is an expert speaker (GonduLunii).

Taniis have fooled Halyang big time. We prepared *Khotiir* (bamboo sticks) out of pine wood and roasted it in rife so that it look old. Then Murchi presented a long list of cases when Tanii men lost their life. He listed out all unrelated deaths in the jungle and claimed that they died in plains or because of their visit to plains. So Halyang was astonished at seeing so many sticks lied there and he counted with his stub one by one and asked in exasperation ‘These many people have died?!’ Murchi said yes. ‘Then it is Taniis who are actual victim’ he said. He returned the Mithun he had taken earlier, but he took Punyo Tamer’s gun. So as Halyang went back the conflict was avoided, but some who were preparing for the war on reaching the location found that the Halyangs were gone. They got angry at Hari and took a Mithun as fine for wasting their time and energy.’

*Was not that gun was brought during the raid?*

- No, it was his, he ordered it from plains and bought it with payment.

*Was not the case about the raid committed by Taniis on PoduMiri’s house?*

- While most of the people said they have no idea, others completely disagreed with this.

I tried to enquire about the story collected by Blackburn but no one had any inkling about it. They said it happened such a long time back that no one would remember such details. However, there were few markers in the entire story which had common resonance in all the narratives- Halyangs staying at Biirii, the breaking of Hangu’s granaries and especially the Tanii wits of burning the *Khotiir* to make it look old and authentic to bring more authority to the case, and how the Halyang was counting the sticks with his stick and with astonishment.

These are the after-stories or remnants of the stories which stayed with the people. Why it left such a mark in people’s memory while other important details are forgotten? Is it because they provides or re-presents their agency? All interviewers laughed while narrating the story, they would even lay down few sticks to demonstrate how *Khotiir* were laid down one by one and acted out how



Halyang was counting them out, as if it happened just in recent past or in their own experience.

One way of understanding could be because once such extraordinary moments or things become the memory index, the oral tropes, that become mnemonics; it is easier to remember and to be transferred or passed on. I am now pretty sure that this is exactly how the stories of the first Halyang coming- with enactment of counting the sticks- must have been told to them. Adding humor and wit could be also a way of making the memory more remarkable. Such memory indexes are important for people who do not have writing practices. (The subject if discussed in further detail in Chapter Five) They make it memorable by bringing emphasis on its meaning or simply by enacting them. I do not see such expression of physical enactment in present forms of conversations while I observed them more among the elderly people in the village who would walk me down to things to show and enact how it was used, what they did in the story, to explain the visuals without words.

McCabe's report too use the similar style, by keeping the narrative filled with humor, filling it with visual description or sometimes describing his feelings about what he saw. In various ways it is a rich report. Drawn from another plane of experience and history, it is complete in its own terms. Blackburn tried to compare it with another plane of experience, history, and reality, and while doing so he was unfair in terming those reports as incomplete. However, it is true that it do not explain the other side or the other plane i.e. the Tanii reality, with whom they are interacting in this event and whom they are narrating in the report. The Tanii reality do not begin or end with the event, it was just a moment, though an extraordinary moment which could have thrown the event into another direction (thus the wit saved the situation in an extraordinary way).

This is the amazing and even bizarre quality of history discovery and writing which gives this ability and power to gaze back on the past to see those moments and their paradoxes. However, it is a real tragedy to history, and maybe not as much as to other disciplines, if events were not written down or efforts were not put to mark them in memories, they are not history, as we will see in the case of the Kure Chambyo, forgotten, as if it was never there.

### **5.8. The Kure Chambyo**

The Akas in the western frontier and Abors (Adis) in the eastern frontier had long history of resistance conflict against the Britishers during the later part of the nineteenth century and in early twentieth century. Both the resistances were mostly against the growing control of the British administration in the foothills which were conversely restricting their control over those bordering areas. These large scale conflicts can be traced along with the drawing and re-drawing of Inner Line systems which were introduced to determine the administrative boundaries for active control and influence. However, as time passed the need for expansion to the hills for exploiting its resources such as timber, coal, elephants, land for tea garden, etc. grew; and on the other hand the necessity for extending its administrative control and influence over the bordering hill communities beyond the Inner Line, frequenting the plains, grew. As a result apart from constant re-drawing of Inner Lines to demarcate constant extension to hills, an Outer Line also was drawn to great confusion of the local officials. The Outer Line was to demarcate the boundaries to which the administrators can exercise their control and influence, however, it came along with the instructions that this line is not to be treated as the outer limit of British territory but merely as an indicate demarcation till proper and direct control can be established.

Before, the Inner Line and Outer Line could reach its conclusive definition India attained its independence and took over the charge from the British

administrators. The British administrators like Timothy Betts, who were unwillingly deported from the country, tried their best to negotiate their retention in the posts (Ursula Graham, 1953:199). The first temporary outpost established at the Tanii valley in 1943 by Haimendorf was shifted down to Kure in 1946 by the new Political Officer Captain Timoty Betts. The location was selected and proposed by the previous Political Officer Captain Davy who had accompanied the Special Officer Haimendorf. He cited unsuitability of the Tanii valley for the outpost due to lack of open barren land which was not under cultivation, chilling weather in winter, lack of water supply and hostile people who disliked the presence of outsiders in their valley. The Kure site at the Taloh area was found most suitable for its warmer weather, free land and water supply. An officer's quarter and a meeting hall, which Ursula Graham calls as 'Durbar' (maybe in the fashion of Durbars in the kingly states). It had a kitchen, a small store room from where items were bartered with people coming from nearby villages, servant's quarter along with porters barrack, quarter room for Political Interpreters and military barracks for Assam Rifles. A "Queen's Jack" was furled. This became a regular visiting place for many visitors from nearby Nyishi and Tanii villages, either for small barter or with cases when they are not satisfied with resolutions by traditional means. All these soon drew the outpost in the middle of complex political maze drawing ire from all corners. The Political Officers were instructed to act according to their own discretion but avoid getting involved in local politics muddle and use of military. Their responsibility was to gather more understanding of the communities, gaining their trust, more information about the region and look for any Tibetan influence. Most of the local matters were looked after by the Political Interpreter called Kupe Tanyang and respective Kotokis from different villages. Post independence, R. G. Menzie, an Anglo-Indian serving British administration took over the charge of Political Officer. The third and most important thing about the entire episode is that despite the significant role this event played there is hardly any official document on the matter except for few passing report in the fortnightly reports and a five page report.

**3.8.1. Official documents and narratives** At present in total there are only eleven pages of official document that exists on the event. The documents retrieved from the National Archive of India, New Delhi, consist of all the correspondence and reporting on the event minus two pages that has been removed. It is interesting and important to note that this was the first of ever such attempt when an organized and large scale attack on the political post by a local community in the Subansiri Division; and despite its such significance to the administrative motives in the area, this event is scarcely reported. It was through the further gathering and analysis of more information about the whole situation, the situations before the actual event and the developments aftermath, that it can be assumed that there had been clear and conscious attempt of suppressing the reporting or documenting the event. This assumption is further drawn even from the closer analysis and interpretation of the available documents as well.

The following documents were located only in National Archive of India, New Delhi. These documents were found one single file titled 'Tanii Trouble'. The documents are compiled from several Forth Nightly Reports submitted by the Political Officer to the Chief Commissioners for the district which are then further compiled into a report for the entire NEFA region and sent to Shillong Governor's office. The existence of this single compiled file indicates that somebody had put them together and there must have been some attention. However, the entire file consisted only of twelve pages of communications, with alternative pages missing/removed, sent to and forth between the Governor's office in Shillong to Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. It also must be noted that no separate Forth Nightly Reports are available in any of the archives on the subject.

These documents shows that the first report was sent on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1949, three days after the event. There had been serious enquiries followed by to find out the

culprits, they finally managed to get the details. Subsequent reports shows that the matter was resolved as the community has agreed to co-operate. The decision to move the outpost to the Tanii valley from Kure was also taken. These reports are the only sources to learn about the region and developments for the policy makers, whatever views reported or presented by the Political Officers about the field they had to accept unless they themselves makes an effort to visit the field. On the other hand the Political Officers had to depend on the army of his translators, local government agents, local intelligence, etc. as the source of his information. Thus, there was layers and levels of information and interpretations in these reports, and important policy decisions were taken based on these reports and the political demands at each level.

Here all seven documents are presented, as there are only eleven pages, and they are chronologically arranged according to their dates of appearance:

1. The first document to report the event was a single paragraphed report section with sub-heading ‘Subansiri Area’. It is an ‘Extract from Fortnightly Report on the Tribal Area on the North-East Frontier Agency for the period ending 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1949’.

The full extract of the section:

##### 5. Subansiri Area

On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1949, the Political Officer received information that Apa Tanis of Hari and Kalong villages had burnt down the Government building at Dutta and were planning an attack on the Kore (sic) outpost as also the destruction of the cane suspension bridge across the Paniorriver. It was subsequently learnt that the Panior bridge was destroyed on the night of 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1949. Following this incident, in the early hours of 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1949, about 1500 Apa Tanis, armed with spears and arrows, launched an attack on the Kore outpost. One Assam Rifles sentry was seriously injured. The Assam Rifles were compelled to open fire, and the Apa Tanis immediately dispersed. 2 Apa Tanis were wounded as a result of the firing, one of

whom subsequently succumbed to his injuries. The Political Officer has proceeded to Kore with 2 sections of Assam Rifles to bring the situation under control.

We will see later through oral histories that the attack was not merely planned by Hari and Kalong but by the entire Tani valley involving all villages except for Hiija and Reru who allied with the 'outsider'. Such mass, combined and organized attack culminated by the entire community to express their hostility and resistance against the government was down played in the report and even in the subsequent reports. This was the first of its kind event in the region when the government was faced with straight hostility and uprising where 'about 1500' armed people attacked their outpost. Yet the incident gets reported only in a Fortnightly Report in one small para. A 'brief account'<sup>59</sup> of the event was prepared only after there was an 'incorrect'<sup>60</sup> report of killing of 30 people, burning down of Hari and Kalong village, prompting an instruction from Advisor to Political Officer to submit detailed report.<sup>61</sup>(see no. 3) Few important points that need to be noted- the Political Officer was not present at Kure at the time of the attack. Two people are reported to be wounded due to open fire by Assam Rifle of which one subsequently died. The Political Officer was aware of the impending plan of attack and destruction of Panior bridge.

2. 'Extract from Fortnightly Report on the Tribal Area on the North-East Frontier Agency, for the 1<sup>st</sup> half of July 1949:

### **5. Subansiri Area**

The situation in the Apa Tani plateau has quieted considerably; but there is still an undercurrent of distrust amongst the Apa Tanis as to Government's intentions. The Political Officer personally visited the

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<sup>18</sup> Letter to the Under Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, by R. V. Subramanian, Esqr., Deputy Advisor to the Governor, dated 10<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1949, Shillong.

<sup>19</sup> Fortnightly Report on the Tribal Area of the North East Frontier Agency for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of July 1949.

<sup>20</sup> Telegram to Foreign, New Delhi from SECGA, Shillong. DTO July 1949

area in an endeavor to bring about happier relations between the local people and the administration.

The Political Officer, Menzie's 'endeavor to bring about happier relations between the local people and the administration' by building the trust among the Tani only meant further killings, village burning, forced labour and harassments of the people for coming years.

3. This is a telegram copy stamped with 'Restricted' and 'Immediate' over it. It was sent by Secretary of Government of Assam, Shillong to Foreign Affairs, New Delhi. Dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 1949.

**IMMEDIATE**

No. CGA6/48. Following from Advisor Government of Assam. APA TANI tribesmen reported to have destroyed Government Inspection Bungalow at DUTA and also showed hostility at KORE. Political Officer proceeded to locality personally with Assam Rifles. Report just\* (\*By ch.) received that on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1949\* fire was opened at Hari village under orders of Political Officer and about 30 men killed. Hari and KALONG villages burn down and 4 prisoners taken. Political Officer has been instructed to submit detailed report which will be forwarded on receipt.'

The telegraph was copied to PPS to PM, PS to PM, APS to PM (3), Dy. Minister, SG, FS, Addl Secy, DHR, JSN, DS(FEA), US(NEF) and NEF Br (4). It is not clear from any of the document that how the Advisor to Government of Assam received such report? And where are those reports. I was informed at State Archive, Itanagar, that all the official documents concerning then North East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh) in Shillong Secretariat were transferred to Itanagar after the establishment of Itanagar Secretariat. The State Archive at Itanagar of Arunachal Pradesh, the State Archive at Dispur of Assam and the National Archive of India, New Delhi, did not have any report regarding the entire event except for the documents presents here.

4. A report or note that was circulated by the Ministry of External Affairs, marked as 'Secret' and under file name Dy. No. 5254-NEF/49 informs about the telegraph.

'The Advisor to the Governor of Assam has reported that the Apa Tani tribesmen have destroyed Government Inspection Bungalow and have also showed hostility at Kore. The traceable village mentioned in the telegram are marked on the maps\* (\*since removed) placed below. The area inhabited by the Apa Tani tribesmen is in the Balipara Frontier Tract of the Tribal Areas of Assam. As mentioned by the Advisor, the Political Officer has personally proceeded to the locality concerned and has been instructed by the Advisor to submit detailed report which will be forwarded to us in due course. Receipt of that report may be awaited.'

It was this note along with which all the seven documents were attached. The note was extensively circulated on 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1949 as per the signatures indicate. The page 2 has signature indicating the circulation of final compiled file with reports on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> August 1949 and 9<sup>th</sup> September 1949.

5. Extract from Fortnightly Report in the Tribal Areas of the North East Frontier Agency for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of July 1949.

#### **5.Subansiri Area.**

The situation in the Apa Tani plateau has eased, and the Political Officer has succeeded in enlisting the aid of Apa Tanis in re-erecting the building burnt down during the recent trouble.

x                      x                      x

#### **General**

*The previous report that 30 persons had been killed during the course of the Apa Tani incident has been found to be incorrect. The actual number is 3.* (emphasis added in italic)



The reports presents a very smooth and efficiency of the Political Officer. Till now it did not report on the retaliatory and punitive actions taken by Political Officer and the army. The reports also present the Political Officers as the main, if not the only, actor. It has no space for the people, and entire 'success' of the process being understood only in terms of what administration's interests are. Re-erecting the building with aid from the very people who burned them was a success. And, this entire resistance and hostility being represented as a mere some local disturbance or skirmish.

The second section of the report is confusing as it is not clear which report it is talking about or trying to refute? If there was a report then where are they now? Also note that in this report there are three people who are killed rather than one who died and one wounded in previous report.

6. It was after three months when a report was submitted by the R. V. Subramanian, Deputy Advisor to the Governor to the Under-Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. No. CGA.6/48/48. Dated Shillong, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1949.

It should be noted that alternate pages of this report are missing. Thus, out of total five pages with pages numbered on the paper head, page no. 2 and 4 are missing. This is not the actual report sent by the Political Officer. During the period of this study it could not be located.

**Subject: - APATANI TROUBLE**

Sir,

Further to the Advisor's telegram No. CGA/48, dated 19-7-49, I am desired to append herewith a brief account of the recent trouble in the Apatani plateau. *The Apatanis are usually of secretive temperament* and it has, therefore, been a most difficult task to *pump* reliable information out of them. However, the information collected from different sources has been carefully checked and compiled and an attempt made to trace the origin of the uprising.

On the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1949, Talyang Geati and Subu Khoda of Kalong village, who had managed to acquire a hold over their

villagers through *threats and other ill devices*, invoked the aid of evil spirits by performing their

-(page no. 2 is missing)-

Superintendent the previous night's occurrence at Duta. By then rumors were current about an impending attack on the Kore out-post and the local officers, therefore, decided to keep the Assam Rifle Force ready at Kore to defend the out-post, should the rumored attack materialize.

On the evening of the *12<sup>th</sup> June*, Talyang Geati and Subu Khoda, encouraged by their successful performances at Duta, once again collected their followers, and after duly feeding them on rice and millet beer, and holding the usual sacrificial rites according to customs to ensure the success of their next mission, proceeded towards Kore. At the same time, Taso Talu of Hari village collected his followers and after enlisting the co-operation of the villagers of Mudang Tage and Michi Bamin and also a part of Duta village, proceeded to Kore. The women and children of these villages were also instructed to be near the scene so as to be readily available to carry the spoils back to their homes, in the event of the attack proving successful. The mob of tribal villagers, armed with arrows and spears, split into two and marched towards their respective targets, the base Superintendent's Bungalow and the Assam Rifles out-post. On approaching the out-post, *the mob was challenged by the Guard on duty* [emphasis added], and to this, the villagers replied by throwing their spears and firing their arrows in the direction of the Guard. One of the spears entered the neck of the Rifle man on duty wounding him seriously. Seeing the situation assuming

-( page no. 4 is missing)-

As laborers to put up new buildings at Duta. The Political Officer has recommended that with view to prevent a recurrence of the trouble, the Assam rifle out-post, now located at Kore, be immediately be shifted to Apatani plateau. His Excellency has already issued orders for the shifting of the out-post, and temporary building for housing the Assam Rifles on the plateau are under construction.' (Emphasis added)

The impression being given here is that the account given here is authentic.

7. After the report above, the Ministry of External Affairs circulated a note with file no. Dy. No. 7025-NEF/49

'Dy.No.7025-NEF/49

S. no. (1) and notes on page 1 ante may please be seen in this connection. The Deputy Advisor has now forwarded detailed report regarding the trouble in the Apa Tani area in the Balipara Frontier

Tract. As stated by the Deputy Advisor certain influential persons of Kalong village gathered their tribesmen and attacked and burnt the Government Bungalow at Duta on the night of 11/12<sup>th</sup> June. Assam Rifles post at Kore was also attacked on the 12<sup>th</sup> June. The fire was opened on the mob by the guard at the post and the mob retreated. *Three* Apa Tanis were wounded by the bullets, *two* of whom succumbed to their injuries later.

2. The Deputy Advisor has stated that there have been no further troubles since the fire was opened by Assam Rifles on 12/13<sup>th</sup> night. The Political Officer of the areas has visited the place for investigation. The main reason for the incident was that the tribal people were instigated by certain influential persons to make trouble against the government, giving them wrong ideas regarding the introduction of the *educational development schemes* in these areas. The Political Officer has explained to the tribal people the intention of the Government to raise their standard of living by developments which are in no way to interfere with their manners and customs. A severe warning has also been administered to these tribal people against any such action in future. The principal instigators have also been arrested and *peace restored* in the area. *The tribal people have also offered voluntarily labour in connection with the construction of the new buildings.*

3. It appears that all the necessary precautionary and administrative steps have been taken by the local authorities concerned and there seems to be no danger of such recurrence in future. No further action appears to be called for on our part in the matter.

The document was once again widely circulated on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October 1949 as seen from the number of undersigned. The document seems to be a summary report of another more detailed report which could not be located as per my search. The second page has a hand written remark saying: "*The local authorities appear to have handled the situation with tact and firmness*" on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1949. Undersigned is not clear. This was further circulated on 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> October 1949. Finally the report was recorded and filed under North East Frontier on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1950 as per the remark note on the right corner of the paper. It means there had been no further communication on the subject. As per the para 3 suggest that 'necessary precautionary and administrative steps have been taken by the local authorities' without describing what were those measure. 'No further action appears to be called for on our part' suggest that the

authorities at top are satisfied and are ratifying the actions of the local authorities or are not inclined or interest to deal with the matter. There seems to be a tendency to hushing or brushing aside the matter as a case resolved already. The remark note on the second page continues to show support and approve of the local authorities, it has vindictive tone to the dealing with people who uprise against the authority.

However, what is more important to note here is the tone of moral justness and uprightness on the part of the authorities who were only trying to educate people for their own welfare and development; and foolishness and wickedness on the part of locals (few local leaders) to misunderstand authorities goodwill to plan attack on the out-post. The firing on the people was earlier in previous report was justified on the basis of self-defence. In this note it is justified in order to prevent reoccurrence of such incidence.

In terms of historical documents these documents have all required information and arguments. It has chronology of the events when the attack was made and when the bridge was burned, and also when the reporting of the events took place. It explains the causality of the event and then identifies the actors. Few local leaders Talyang Gyati and Subu Khoda of Kalung villages and Tasso Talu of Hari village who misguided the locals against the authority. It also details that when they could not convince people they threatened people and performed rituals to bring people along. Though, initially it reported only against Hari and Kalung in the document no. 6 above, it names almost all the villages who took part in it. It describes the actual event, the number of people who were killed (2) or wounded (1), the actions taken, the outcome of the event, final resolution as administration's trust upon people was restored and people volunteered their free labour for building administrative buildings. The reports seem to give a complete picture, a holistic story with happy ending.

The impression these documents and reports narrating the event gives is that of a complete, authentic and authoritative account. The document no.6 refers about the efforts put on to 'pump out' the information from people to determine the origin or the cause for such uprising. It states that 'different sources has been carefully checked' to compile the whole story. This, does not clarifies or describes what were the methods used to gather ('pump-out') information and who were the informants or the sources of those information. It leaves for reader's assumption that the information were gathered from the local community members, and most probably the people who co-operated with the government to give 'authentic' and 'true' facts. Or maybe the information were gathered through the use of intelligence sources that were gathering information from different locations and reported to people. Nevertheless, the officer believes that the report so prepared is very much complete and authentic. However, this is apart from the fact that the pages of the report are now missing and thus one cannot verify the information shared originally. The document no. 7, implicitly declares the report as complete which require no further inquiry and commending on the way local authority dealt with the matter sign off the subject as resolved and over. This implies that this official version of the story is final version of the narrative of the event and thus the history of the event.

Another, important thing this reporting has done is by treating the event or rather say by treating the reporting of the event as a mere 'uprising' by a 'mob' is problematic. It shifts the question of conflict of interests and resistance by people, which culminated into the attack.

If one had to completely depend on these official documents and their narratives without gathering local information a very different picture would have emerged as Blackburn talks about 'a half cooked' meal (Blackburn 2003) However, then one also has to see the intentionality of the historian, the narrator or the one who is writing it.

### 5.9. Stating by not saying: Underpinnings of official narratives

The official documents states that the main reason behind the uprising was the education scheme introduced by the government and that ‘few wicked leaders’ misguided (and even forced) the rest to join the attack against the government (see document no.6 & 7). Though, at first thought this seems a complete explanation, also because there was no further attempt to enquire. The note circulated by the Ministry of External Affairs seems to circumvent the entire subject as if to say that there is no further necessity of any further query on the matter and neither it is going to be entertained if there is any (see document 7, section 3 above). Questions like why people were against the educational programs?, Why those leaders were instigating people against the government?, Were never questioned. However, saying it was the educational developmental schemes<sup>62</sup> that people were opposing seems to round off the arguments by implying people were unjustified in opposing such a well meaning program which were meant for their own good. This also played with the stereotypical biases against tribal communities as backward, uneducated and irrational people who are incapable of appreciating the benefits of education; and therefore this resistance. The leaders who influenced the people against the government also seemed to be kind of people were superstitious who uses ill devices such as ‘invoking the aid of evil spirits’ and intoxicated the participants with ‘rice and millet beer’.<sup>63</sup> Thus, people being irrational (for they refused education) and superstitious (for invoking evil spirits to fight army) is a reason good enough to assume that they have unjustified reasons which need no further investigation or understanding. The final report prepared at the Ministry of External Affairs level seems to play along with the tone of the report and readily accepts the report and seems to defend it by saying: ‘It appears that all the necessary precautionary and

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<sup>21</sup> R. V. Subramanian, Deputy Advisor to the Governor to the Under-Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. No. CGA.6/48/48. Dated Shillong, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1949.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

administrative steps have been taken by the local authorities concerned and there seems to be no danger of such recurrence in future. No further action appears to be called for on our part in the matter.’<sup>64</sup>

There seems to be a complete disinterest among the higher authority to understand what was happening in this region or to the event. The only reason that this matter was discussed to this extent could possibly be because of the ‘false’ alarm raised by the local authority, that is, the Advisor to the Government of Assam on matter relating to Tribal Affairs in the area, who asked for a detailed report from the Political Officer<sup>65</sup> and thought of sending a telegram to the Ministry of External Affairs to keep them in loop, an administrative procedure (see document no. 3). The note circulated by the Ministry in relation to this telegram underplays the alarm or concern highlighted in the telegram. It ignored the report of 30 people been killed, two villages burnt down and prisoners taken under the order of the Political Officer. It rather devoted itself in introducing and marking the ‘village’ in the map. Though, this looks like a careful effort put forth by attaching the map along with the report but on the other hand this only indicates towards the distantness and insignificance that this place and event holds for the offices in Delhi.

Yet, very paradoxically, all the reports and documents mentioning the event are missing. They are at least not available in the local or regional level.

### **5.10. The allurement of colonial critique and Stuart Blackburn: Furthering ambiguity and biases**

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<sup>23</sup> The Ministry of External Affairs circulated a note with file no. Dy. No. 7025-NEF/49. Section 3.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram sent by Secretary of Government of Assam, Shillong to Foreign Affairs, New Delhi. Dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 1949. No. CGA6/48.

Certain trends in history, such as colonial critique has only become trendy in post-colonial critique but has become easier to write for the same reason i.e. already written accounts. It is necessary call for every historian to re-look and re-write any such hegemonic and biased writings. But then one should be able to see the inherent biases in all writing and all forms rather than creating another one. Stuart Blackburn can be the classic example of such biases, though against the colonial writings, Stuart Blackburn, a senior research associate in SOAS, London, conducted his field work among the Taniis in 2001-02. While collecting oral literatures and folk stories he stumbled upon these narratives of early encounter of this community with the outsider. The main paper where he specifically talks about the Kure Chambyo titled 'Colonial Contact in the 'hidden land': Oral history among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh' published in 2003 the first researched and academic mention of the event. He collected the oral stories from Hari village and did his archival search. He writes about the unavailability of official documents. He writes that people's narratives and collective memories of the first coming of an outsider and the conflict against the Halyang was still very alive unlike what he had assumed about it as a lost memory and story. He argues that these narratives were much richer in its factual details than the official documents. He indicated towards an attempt by the government to suppress the documents of such events. His narrative begins with the colonial rule and policy that rudely brought the peaceful Tanii valley under its ambit and he finds Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf as the colonial agent who fooled the Taniis by befriending them. One of the main proposition in his paper is that the event of Kure Chambyo culminated due to British appointed political officers who enforced forceful portrage and failure of which led to arrests; and interference in the local affairs by outside administrators. Then he accuses both Haimendorf and Ursula Graham Bower for not mentioning the event in their works which were published after the event (Ursula's in 1953 and Haimendorf's in 1955, 1962, 1983 and 1987). However, invariantly both their works records and provides ample evidences for the causes of the event. In fact he notes that Haimendorf had omitted few pages from his first publication on



Taniis in 1955 ‘Himalayang Barbary’ in his edited version titled ‘Himalayan Adventure’ published in 1983.

‘Government documents are even more baffling. Political Officers wrote fortnightly reports, which were sent of the Governor’s office in Shillong, where they were collated and summarized in an official report sent to the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. Although the volume containing those reports from 1948 has been declared ‘missing’ at the British Library (Footnote: British Library, OIOC, L/P & S/12/3118), a copy is held at the Public Record Office in London. The report for the Subansiri Area for *the first half of June* reads:

‘It is reported that there was recent plan to attack the Assam Rifles outpost at Kore (Kure) the reason being that the Tribal resent the stopping of their inter village feuds by the administration. The Political Officer has been instructed to hold a personal enquiry into the full circumstances at once’

(Footnote: Public Record Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, DO 142/461. Fortnightly report on the Assam Tribal Areas. Report, second half of June 1948, Office of the Advisor to the Governor to Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi)

The next report state that the ‘main instigator of the conspiracy’ was arrested and put in jail, and the next concluded that ‘the disturbances amongst the Taniis have been settled’ (Footnote: Public Record Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, DO 142/461. Fortnightly report on the Assam Tribal Areas. Report, second half of June 1948, Office of the Advisor to the Governor to Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi). There is no further mention of the ‘disturbances’; no mention at all of the attack, deaths or burning. And there is no record of the Political Officer’s enquiry requested by the Governor’s office. That report may be in the Government of India Archives in New Delhi (see document no. 6), but all documents relating to northeast India since 1913 are ‘closed’ to researchers. Notice that the official version, presented in these reports, is that the raid did not

happen; it was planned but nipped in the bud by decisive action taken by the authorities.’ (Footnote: *The official version may have been fabricated in order to deflect any potential criticism of those responsible for maintaining peace and calm in the valley.* That the raid did, in fact, occur is proved by the internal consistency of details in the oral accounts from a wide spectrum of people.)’ (Blackburn, 2003: pages are not numbered) (Emphasis added)

This long excerpt from his article narrating the difficulty in accessing official documents on the subject, and the misrepresentation of actual event in those documents has been put here for **two** purposes. First, to highlight on what Stuart Blackburn has point out as a conscious attempt in suppressing the documents and records. Secondly, to show how he himself missed the target in his enthusiasm of weaving a colonial critique against the British administrator, he presented a wrong interpretation and even given wrong information, if not himself fabricated the documents. According to him the event took place in late May 1948, i.e. just two months after the departure of the British Political Officer F. N. Betts and his wife Ursula. In his attempt to describe and build the narrative of colonial exigencies, he thus transports the event a year backward while the official documents I came across clearly shows that the event took place on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1949 i.e. more than a year after they had left. However, other details as per the oral narratives are as true, though still incomplete, and thus their interpretations have few problems as well.

### **5.11. Conclusion**

The problem is still not with wrong dates but with what it signifies in terms of kind of relation the Indian Government held with communities in the hill, and the re-verse biases that Blackburn had reproduced. He did not only lie but by suppressing such facts he had in-fact allowed the continuation of that historical injustice. There are several books and research based academic works on the historical evolution of the Arunachal Pradesh. They have fixed formula

narrative- the identification of the region in Hindu mythological narratives, then Ahom and Posa system, imperialistic interests of British and their military expeditions to hills, Inner Line and McMahon line formulation and then Indian independence after which administrative and territorial development took place and finally the state achieve its rightful status as a State in the union of India. Blackburn's work is an attempt to feed into this nationalist narrative where British government was nothing but arrogant, rude and cunning colonialist, an enemy. It has become general trend to draw critique, which is not at all wrong as an academic exercise, of all works during colonial period especially if they were done under the auspices of the colonial government. However, more careful and serious reading of Blackburn would render his work fall on various grounds. He can be cornered for providing wrong information and for hiding the fact.

During my field interview the more remarkable and larger portion of narrative related to Kure Chambyo was the aftermath exigencies caused by the government and army over several years upon the people in re-payment or punishment for the Kure attack on the entire village. Blackburn himself did not mention about them. He stops at mere mention of killing of four people and the burning of the Hari village, which is in a way presented as a repercussion of the attack. What went beyond the justification was the aftermath of the attack which was done by Indian government without any remorse- in the way the documentation was done and no further enquiry was made- and silence was maintained as if to hide the facts, and let lies be grown and produced and reproduced.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **THE ORAL HISTORIES OF KURE CHAMBYO**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

Like many other traditional oral communities, Taniis also depend on their oral transmission of their indigenous and traditional knowledge. For the purpose, they have different genres/categories of oral traditions serving different purposes of their social life and social systems. Therefore, these different genres of oral traditions, depending on the purposes they serve, are hierarchically organized and follows/guided by different conventions and norms in their performances- in public or in private. This, thus, inevitably delimits or determines their access to both the performer and the audiences. For instance, the sacred genres of oral traditions such as certain or most of the ritualistic chanting are not allowed for women to learn or perform, or discussions or sharing of certain part of 'difficult' histories are not allowed for general audiences.

This chapter will give more detailed discussion on the subject with their various implications and aspects to the historicity in the Tanii oral traditions. This chapter, first, like the previous chapter, is to document down the accounts of the Kure Chambyo through the oral history of remaining survivors who had the first hand experience of the event and aftermath. These narratives now exists only in oral form and in the memory of its bearers, some had shared these stories for the first time and hence could not tell their stories in an organized form while others had narrated it several times so much so that they have a pre-determined narrative format in their oration, the following chapter will present detailed discussion on the

narrative structures and tropes/mnemonics used by the speakers. Second, to discuss the narrative contexts of these oral histories and hence, trying to understand various socio-political and cultural nuances to underline and understand these narratives. A particular emphasis and discussions on women's voices and understand the past through their unique experiences and perspectives are presented. Though women's narratives did not diverge away much from the content and frame of the entire event narrative yet they shed a different and crucial light to the events which sometimes are tones down in men's narratives. This therefore provided another tool for analyzing the narratives of the event.

## **6.2. The Narratives of Kure Chambyo**

Kure is a small forest which was carved out to establish the first political outpost of Indian government in 1946 by the then Political Officer Timothy Betts. It is located in the south-west of the valley at lower altitude and has warmer temperature. It is some six miles away from the Tanii valley and falls under the Talo area. The location was actually proposed by the earlier Political Officer Cap. Davy in 1944, who accompanied Haimendorf, in his visit to Apatani valley. In his report<sup>66</sup>, and also in Timothy Bett's proposal, he mentions that Tanii valley is already highly crowded and with every inch of the land under utilization there will be hardly any space for the establishment and expansion of the outpost. The cold weather and drinking water shortage made it difficult to function properly. Also, he mentions that politically locating themselves among the Tanii would diminish the prospects of establishing good terms with other neighboring tribes who always had some or other ensuing issues with Taniis. It is also possible that Betts found

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<sup>1</sup>Captain Davy's Tour Diary.D 2718- CA/45 Camp Duta. 13<sup>th</sup> March 1945. National Archive of India, New Delhi.

it little uncomfortable and dangerous to house itself in the middle of the Tanii villages who could eliminate them anytime if they wanted to just by the sheer size of their population.

The Kure Chambyo or also known as the Halyang Chambyo has varying impact on different groups- the age group, social class, gender, relations with the outsider and village associations. Thus, the narratives of the event have their respective nuances, descriptive deftness, and socio-political meanings.

### **6.3. Voices in the background**

In terms of gender, due to the nature of social roles assigned to male and female members in the society, both men and women had different access and experiences of the event. While men have dominant representation in the interviews gathered, there is always a female voice persistently inserting itself from behind during the interviews. They are voices of a wife, neighbour, sister or a mother. However, when approached for a separate interview they refused from giving any interview. As a result, there was an ethical dilemma to use their insertions without their permission or to use their names as a specific data informant. These insertions often acted like important memory aids or pointers to the narratives of the main narrator, as it would trigger newer remembering or lead to newer discussions inducing newer details.

At the time of transcription, one also realizes that these voices in the background were persistent voices that wanted their stories to be represented or registered in the narratives. Often the husband or the main narrators would tell them to keep quite but they would still interject and interrupt, and even question them ‘why they are not telling?’ There were a kind of urgencies or insistence to be heard. In another words they did not want certain names,

stories and visual images in their minds be missed out from the main narratives- which were often a 'balanced-out' narratives- forcing the main speakers to speak about them. Thus, these voices in the background often worked like the light that shed light on the silences and exposed the absences in the narratives.

These voices were more rebellious in nature than the normative. Maybe being in the background, not being the main narrator who is taking responsibility of their spoken words, made it more convenient to speak out and hold no restraint in expressing their views. The main narrators were always conscious about being recorded, to be documented and being 'heard'. They were conversing with me but knew that it is for much larger unknown audiences. The voices in background were conversing with the narrators, who were either their husband, friend or close acquaintance. My interviews benefitted tremendously from these voices in background.

However, when the case was reverse, when the main narrator was female and the voice in background was male the results were quite opposite. The voices in the background in these cases became censoring and monitoring, in an extreme cases they took upon the role of the main narrator relegating the main narrator to background.

The social groups played important role in polarizing Halyang-Tanii relations. The pre-existent social classes and structures were re-organized with the introduction of a new power centre, in the form of the government authority in the valley. Throughout my field work no one recalled anything in particular about what government was doing at the time except for the fact that they became instruments in the hands of few Taniis to sort out their scores with others. This as a result polarized their relation with opposing party. As with the case with British Political Officers, post independence the

Indian Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers also found itself entangled in the local dynamics. It is not known if it was a conscious and willing engagement for there is no official record available. The last descriptions and reports were provided by the British Political Officer Timothy Betts in 1947, till when he left the Kure outpost. The official record in the area exists only since and in the context of the Kure Chambyo in 1949. There is nothing known about it between. It was through few oral accounts that one gets to know that there was a small grocery shop, a dispensary, officer's quarter, few Assam Rifle barracks, rooms for Kotokis and store rooms at Kure. There was a school building established in 1949 at the Duta Papii with a school teacher. Nothing is known about the teacher and the school except for when it was burned down by Taniis before they proceeded to Kure. While the official record that says, the culmination of the Kure attack was made in resistance against the government's effort to educate the local people and that the retaliatory action against the Taniis were done because they 'burned the school building'. During the field interviews none of the interviewees who mentioned about the burning of a structure in Papii said that it was a school building. They either had no idea about what it was or said it was a store house that too an empty one. However, only one interviewee from Hiiija village mentioned about removal of goods from the store house as they got to know about the plan of burning this house.

Hiiija, and Reru in Billa village abstained from joining the attack. They had powerful leaders who were appointed by the first Special Officer Cristoph Von Furer Haimendorf in 1943 as the first Kotokis among the villages. Kotokis are the government agents to the villages with few political powers as they are involved in any political matters as an advisor. However, in practice their exercise of power and authority within the village community always extended beyond their actual power. Also these are the people who are considered as the most influential people in the village and were wealthy



enough to carry out government activities or provide supplies to the government. They maintained their loyalties. Hiija said, ‘we are the one who ‘invited’ Halyang and now why should we drive them out?’ On the other hand while all the village clusters- Hari, Hangu, Biila, Diibo and Duta- joined the attack, it was only Hari which was later separated out and were burned down to ashes.

#### **6.4. The Oral Histories**

There are few tenets of history narratives. First is the authenticity of the information and the facts; secondly, it should be able to give the details of the causation; thirdly, it should have a sense of coherent time order or chronology of the event; fourthly, it should have the actors and their social, material physical base; finally, it should give the context. The *Tanii Migung*, by its design and purpose tries to maintain these tenets and system.

The Kure Chambyo history thus has been gathered from different accounts. The first group is the people who had first hand personal experiences of the event. Second, are the people who had personal experience but did not take part in the event. They had witnessed the other important developments that involved the event or the aftermath. These two groups are going to be covered in this chapter. The third group is the group of people who are considered as the expert on the history subject of Taniis. They are going to be presented and discussed in following chapters.

Oral history consists of the historical accounts narrated by individuals with their experiences and memories as the resource. The narrative is mediated by the narrator and intertwined with nuances that throw light on the perceptions and perspectives of contexts and realities. Unlike the traditional academic

history writings that is focused on the larger pictures, oral history represents shades of experiences, simple personal life stories, where the narrators have the agencies in determining the story they want to tell.

### **6.5. Oral History of Kure Chambyo**

Unfortunately, not many are surviving who either took part or had close firsthand experience of the actual event on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1949 at Kure. I met only four people, in their 80s, who could share their account of the event. Two others I met had become too weak due to their advanced age, to even have a conversation. Otherwise, I met few more people who did not take part in the event but were subjected to repercussions of the event and shared their views and experiences.

The entire episode was very traumatic for everyone in the valley. The event, the culmination of the attack, has a very culture specific social environment and environmental base and context. But the shock of the utter defeat, the military actions and its terror, death of many whom they had known personally and constant man hunt carried out by army, forced labour, sexual harassments and presence of so many outsiders with guns in their villages had created tremendous fear, distress and unrest among the villagers. Further, the centralization of power and creation of several agents within the community who were working for the government had further distrust and cynicism. There was a complete surrender by the locals and complete domination by the outsider as many started allying with the government out of fear and self-interest. But at the same time, within few years people seemed to be overawed by the sudden developments and invasion of modernity in their valley which was till then safely nestled in their isolated traditional homeland. Within the first decade after the event an airfield was constructed, military base established, roads were constructed, a township

with market, co-operative shops, administrative buildings came up in the valley, schools and hospital opened up.

I experienced uneasiness among the people while talking about the subject. Few turned hostile and refused to discuss on the matter. The fear and skepticism and the memories of those oppressive days had such a deep impact on them that even today they believed that the government was carrying out some secret enquiry. However, other factors that was affecting their sharing and narrations was the traditional norms and conventions that restricts one from speaking about past, especially the one involves deaths and conflicts to be not narrated without proper knowledge of the subject. One would refuse to go in details or even engage with such subjects if they feel they do not have the proper knowledge about the subject. They generally called these subjects as '*Arr*' or '*Yachu*' (evil) subjects which when not carefully narrated cause the harm to narrator. All the informants were very elderly people in the village and for them these beliefs had strong influence. At least two informants reported to have bad dreams like seeing the dead people after they had started discussing these subjects. As they felt susceptible and vulnerable the further discussion on the subject had to be stopped with them as well.

Here I personally feel important to mention to show regards and honor to my informants who were at very advanced age, they shared their life when they agreed to speak. Now some of them whom I interviewed are no more. Some of them passed away as I was transcribing their interviews back in Hyderabad. It was painful and I also felt grateful to each of them whose stories and voices I have recorded. They all shared their stories, some for the first time.

**Oral History 1:****Late BulloBuga, male, age 90+****Hangu village**

The interviews with Bulo Buga were done in two sessions, on 24<sup>th</sup> April and 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014 respectively. Interviews were done in his home. His wife participated in the interview from time to time as she kept on joining and moving out in between. Bullo Buga was in his late 90s or in early 100s by age<sup>67</sup>. He died on August 2014.

He was a spirited person who spoke animatedly; the only one who was most vocal about the attack and took pride in his participation. I realized that as he had been re-telling the story so many times, he has developed a fixed narrative format with its dramatic moments, imageries he drew and verbal exclamations he used to add emphasis. With very few digressions of details and sequences he repeated the stories in the same style few times during the interview. There was a performance and drama in his narration. Such fixation of narrative content and dramatization of the narrative worked as mnemonics which helped in recalling and in telling the story. All my interviewees expressed their concern about their weakening memory due to old age as well as due to the distant event memory. At such advances age when memories start degenerating, memorizing memories in story form really helps them in recalling. Another interviewee in her 90s expressing her situation, ‘It is strange that sometimes I cannot remember what happened yesterday but certain memories like of my childhood becomes so vivid as if it is about just yesterday.’

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<sup>2</sup>Traditionally, a father would construct a separate house for his son after the son starts taking responsibilities or attain age of 20s. At the time of Kure Chambyo that took place in 1949, he was already married to his second wife and his father had provided him with a separate house. He already had a son who had just started walking.

My friend Doging Rinya (Guddi), who introduced me to him, told me that he is used to receiving tourists and foreign tourists who are interested in listening to his story and he would even dress up in his traditional attires for photograph. It was only after our long discussions when he finished the main body of standardized story, he shared more about his own life and experiences. He was a brave man with many feats and loved to talk about them. He was also vocal about his disliking of Halyang and their coming to Tanii land. His wife showed her displeasure whenever he speak about the *Chambyo* stories for she felt his poor health was because of narrations of these stories. He was physically fragile due to advanced age, had hearing difficulty and his mobility was also limited due to his weak bones; but spoke animatedly and whenever I tried to end the interview, thinking he much be getting tired, he would start a new topic. Despite her disapproval, his wife was the one who assisted me by repeating my questions to him loudly. Interestingly, he could hear her better and she would give her inputs time to time which would help Buga in triggering memories.

The oral history by Bullo Buga here is audio recorded, transcribed and is minimally edited. It is edited to remove the Q&A format, to remove few non-relevant personal conversations and information, removing in-audible words, repetitions and for sentence formation, as done with all other interviews. It is minimally edited in the sense that the narrative style, subject content and speaker's agency is maintained intact, which are characteristically unique to him are maintained.

The next chapter would deal with the analysis and information segments that would help in understanding the context. Other necessary information and descriptions goes to the footnotes.

***BulloBuga:***

The Halyang (non-tribals) Chambyo was started by few Tanii itself. Tasso Talu had ambushed and captured Taku Kiime in order to get repayment of the loss caused by him. He was released after the payment of ransoms. However, Taku Kiime felt humiliated and went to Halyang and reported them about his capture. He brought Halyang *sipaie* (sepoys) and destructed Tasso Talu's house. Similarly, Talyang Gyati took Koj Khoda as his captive and Koj Khoda too brought *sipai* to destroy Tanyang Gyati's house. This caused great distraught among influential people like Tasso Talu and Talyang Gyati who felt that they could not settle their affairs according to traditional norms/customs because this constant reporting to Halyang.

Then Mudang Panii, wealthy Mudang Dimper Tunu's daughter, was married to Tapi Jorang, another wealthy man Tapi Kojing's son. But she could not like Jorang, maybe because he was ugly, and instead she started having affair with Punyo Kojee and started living with him as his wife. [Panii did not like Jorang because he was much younger in age to her. Punyo Millo started meeting her and as they liked each other he took her out from Tapi to his village (Tilling Yami, 06/05/2014)] Tapi Kojing who was an influential man in village felt Mudang Panii's act affected his honor. So he tried to bring her back which she refused. Finally, he brought the case before the village elders and to Dimper Tunu saying he did all the required ceremonies and organized even *Myoko* festival for him, even after this she left his son. Dimper Tunu and his relatives tried to reconcile with Kojin by saying how should they now force Panii to go back to her old husband? They instead offered him a Sampo necklace. However, for Tapi Kojee it was matter of his honor so he refused it, and asked for the compensation for the humiliation caused to him. Seeing that now she does not have any chance she ran to Halyangs.

*Maa!!* Now the matter became complicated as Halyang were supporting her.

All this led Taniis to talk that as long as Halyang are here we will never be able to solve our cases. Those people depending on Halyang power are doing as they wish. ‘So lets first drive the Halyangs out and then we Taniis will settle our matters among ourselves’. So they started mobilizing people and all the villages Diibo-Duta, Hari-Biila joined and agreed. Except the Hiija and Reru villages of Biila, they said we are the one who invited them here, how can we attack them. Now accordingly every villages started their war ceremonies called Tamu Barnii for *Khasang* spirits (the spirits of war). First we burned down the big house at Papii. It was empty. [Somebody had already informed about this plan therefore before the night itself the house was emptied, there were some rations which was brought to our house. (Nending Manu, 15/06/2013)]. Thus, when they went to Kure to drive Halyang out, *limbyohh!!* (Goodness!) our Duyu Koyang was shot down. Tasso Koji was killed and Tasso Pilya was killed. Without realizing that Halyang might retaliate like this, Taniis were *okora* (*Okora* means dumb in Assamese). It led to great loss to us....

*(‘Did you too join the attack?’)*

*Ayiii..!!* If it was not for my father, I must have been among the dead people now. *Aaye!*..they carried bows and arrows, spears, *Siiting* (shield made of animal skin), sword and all that. But I did not wanted to carry all those stuffs I simply wore my *Jilya* (a cloth made of Eri cotton cloth and worn by wrapping it around) and took my *Ilyo* (traditional machete). I was so confident that I thought I will just kick in one of the room and kill at least ten of them. The halyang have killed all those who were brave and tough like me, who reached there first.

If it was not for my father I would have been in another world by now. That morning as I was getting ready and about to leave my father came to my house, as he had built me a separate house. It was big before but pushed back for road construction by Halyang and land was taken for free. Father said, 'Hold it a moment! consult the liver omens first', I replied '*Aba*, those Halyangs are tender and soft like young boys of these days, I can finish them off even with my stick. What liver omen to check for that' '*Tehh!!*this boy, don't talk like this, do it immediately'. That DengyaTalang's grandfather, Apo was a priest. He lived across the street facing my house. I called him '*Apo!!*' 'What is it?' 'Come here once'. As he came I gave him a chick and said, 'Okay, just see once *Apo*'. He said few chants in the backyard and brought the slit chick, 'Take it, see it yourself,' from my childhood days I could read liver. When I saw it I thought, '*Ebyohh!!ajiamu je tepyotese dado du*' (Goodness!! It was like the paddy that was all laid down to the ground by storm). '*Ayih!!* Apo and *Aba*, how am I to go now? What should I do?' It was a terrible sign. My father said, 'Aye... when you go you should either be in the middle or in the last, do not be in the front'. If it was not for him I would have never checked the liver and would have been shot down due to my excitement and confidence. It was those like me, who ran in front were gunned down- Pong!Pong!

Those who do not know how to fight, the one who are old, weak and young, the ones who are unsure and confused only they remained. All *Miha* (youths) went. The earth and the sky gods are the most powerful. The whole day it was terribly hot. I had drained our rice field canals for the whole day's work with my *Patang* (labor group) and worked in the field. At night, the moonlight was so bright that it felt like day. We all started moving doing our war-dance from our respective villages. We moved towards the Biiying well, then went to SiikerGabu through Talo route. Then, the Hari joined, then Biila



came down and finally Aba Diibo also came. Only Hiija did not join, KagoBida their Kotoki did not let them.

But as we started there suddenly the rain started pouring bo-bo, this Cha-do spirit of rain is a powerful god, and drenched us completely. Wiping our eyes to see properly we finally reached the Kure. The rain stopped and there was light when we came out in open...(silence)... So we ran down there shouting ho-ho!, ho-ho! and started cutting the walls tuk-tuk! Halyangs have those holes in their walls (windows), one Halyang looked out from the hole, as soon as he took his head out, Aku (uncle) DuyuKoyang, speared him on his neck. In those days we did not know about the injection and medicines, nothing happened to him as the spear only pierced through between his bronchi and the spinal cord, so he survived. However, DuyuKoyang, the one who speared him died instead. As Halyang fell back inside another Halyang took the gun and shot at DuyuKoyang Pong! He jumped to Kure ditch and died in the jungle. His body decayed there we could not even see his dead body.

*(‘Did you see it by yourself?’)*

*Maa...!* How could we see where he was shot. There was only a terrible noise of pong! that is all we heard. And then the second pong! it was Tasso Koji, and then another pong! it was Tasso Pilya.

*Imbyo!!* then like the wild moss spreads itself we people fell back and ran hither-thither to the forest. Not a single person could be seen now. I was at the Tapi hilltop from where I could see the outpost- that sepoy line was on the left and Saab line was on the right. They took out the gun which looked like this (gathering his fingers together to show gun nozzles)and had garland like bullets belt, it could fire 40-50 bullets at once like dada-dada-dada! They pointed it towards us and tried to shoot at us but it did not work. It was Tilling Ribya who did

the *Khasang* ritual to stop enemies' weapons. When I tell today's children they say 'Yeah, of course', they don't believe me. If it was not for Tilling Ribya many Taniis must have lost their lives that day. He was one of the most powerful priests.

That is all. That was the Tanii-Halyang *Yalu* (conflict). We all retreated and ran back to our villages immediately. Some of them, who ran towards the forest reached back villages only after the sunset because of the *Siiting* (animal skin shields) they were wearing which made their running difficult in the jungle (laughs). Me and brother Tanyo ran through the regular path so we reached back straight away in the morning itself. Yagyang my wife and sister Santii (Tanyo's wife), both were in the verandah when we reached back.

After coming back we said let us eat *Siimi* (the feast before the death). I tried to eat *Hulyi* (smoked pork fat, highly valued delicacy among Taniis) but I could not swallow it. I tried to eat eggs steam cooked in fresh bamboo pole but could not get it down my throat. I was so devastated. I could not enjoy any food. Whenever somebody shouted 'Halyang is coming' we would just dash to the bamboo garden. I tried to gulp down the rice beer but as if there was a hole from which it would just flow out, I could not feel it, there was not even smell on my mouth or stomach... (silence).

Tanii Chambyo took place in *Myoko* season and Halyang Chambyo took place in *Milo Pullo* season. ...(another long silence)

This is the spear that I made during the Tanii Chambyo to fight the *Nyibo* (other villages). It was smeared with poison. Was I like a

fearful man? No! Not like those rich men who would be so lousy and lazy full with their self-importance. They used to say, when they see the bear skin that I had killed, 'Tehh!! Friend Buga, I thought you were like other rich men, lazy and weak *tehh!!*but you go to forest for hunting and even killed a bear! You are an expert and strong.' I went where others could not go, did what others could not do. Rich man like Kago Takhii Hanya, were so lazy that they would not even help their father. That Punyo Saru, who has two wives, was physically well built but when asked to pull a Mithuns he would say "No". *Teh!* Was I like them? I was always busy, I would come home only to sleep, and then suddenly the rooster would cry and I would jump-up "*Uyuh!* I slept too much". I was so alert in getting up that I would even walk in sleep. Once I had to go to Hari village, I got up and rushed so early that I had to walk back while feeling and holding things with my hands because it was so dark. I was not like them wealthy, lazy and arrogant people...(silence)

They did not think that guns can fire; they saw that Halyang carried guns but they did not know that it fires to kill. Instead of driving Halyang out they have chased us. If we had killed even one of them they must have burned our villages till the Siirang area, just like one plough the earth they would have finished us.

Bullo Buga is from Hangu village, the largest village group in the valley, which in oral literary tradition is also called as *Niichi-Niit*. They form a very strong force and played important role during the process when the plan for attack was being made. However, according to Tilling Tani, not everyone like himself had joined the attack. Unlike what is generally known, a division occurred even among Hangu. The kins, the clans and the relatives who were associated with Dimper Tunu refused to join the attack. In fact, they were

preparing themselves for the combats if the group who went for the attack comes back and attacks them too. He says though the group that joined the attack was bigger and more popular. His father had stopped him from joining the attack by saying, ‘*Why would you risk your life for those rich people’s ego wars? Don’t go.*’ (Interview with Tiilling Tani on 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014. He said he was elder to Bullo Buga by few years. He passed away on September 2014).

Buga’s story is remarkable in several ways. He highlighted or added the emphasis on his experiences not only with exclamations but also through unique allegories he drew to express or to give agencies to his feelings. For instance his tragic attempt and then inability to relish the food which was his favorite delicacy. This was not part of his fixed narrative format. And then after a long drawn silence he tried to catch hold of his narrative trail- ‘Tanii Chambyo took place in *Myoko* season and Halyang Chambyo took place in *Milo Pullo* (rainy) season.’ – but again, as if to re-establish his narrative image of a strong and courageous man, which he might have disqualified by speaking about his fears and terror he had experienced, he returns back to talk about his achievements like bear hunting. During the interview he managed to get up and walk upto the place where his spears were kept and pointed them to me.

Re-reading and deeper analysis of the transcript narratives revealed that these brief shifts in narrative reflects on something more about their experience which he, and others, were not or were not able to articulate. The sudden realization of telling such personal experience which could be unflattering to his image as a brave and strong man made him to jump to sudden display of his stories of bravery and hardworking man. Even while telling this story he had to re-assert who he was. All these experience and the years that followed

were traumatic and constantly humiliating, it must have been devastating for the male ego.

Another important point that emerged in his story is how traditional mind and attitude was deeply rooted and embedded in the traditional belief system. The belief in the spirits and omens, and their strengths in changing and foretelling the fate are very evident. In their Tanii world this was the only way of understanding and stood true for whatever life they have lived; now challenged. The sudden appearance of an outsider, who became a power center and a competing authority, breached their belief in the traditional justice and law and the norms. The party who did not go to them for resolving their case felt aggrieved and even betrayed by their own country men, who also betrayed the traditional means. Therefore it was important for many to challenge and remove this new and very powerful authority. Hence, it required a united force to defeat them. The feeling across the valley was the same, as we will see in next chapter that.

However, what has not been clearly expressed in any of the narratives is that they already had the estimation of the strength and power of the Halyang. They knew that a small group of people based in Kure are more powerful; therefore, the entire valley has to form the force. The other two villages that had not joined the attack had been persuading them about the inevitability of their defeat. And somewhat, somewhere, there was an anticipation of the defeat as well because of which the moment there was a retaliatory action, the entire force fell apart and everyone retreated immediately running for their life. Thus, in all the narratives either the firsthand accounts of the second hand accounts presents this fall back in a self mocking cowardly description (give example). And more targeted mockery is on even for trying this attempt to attack on *Surkar* (Sarkar/Government). In another word this attack was a wild card and even half hearted attempt.

**Oral History 2:****Hage Tane, female, age 80+,****Hari village**

Hage Tane was introduced to me through a friend, Tane is her maternal grandaunt. My friend told me that she likes to talk and hold good amount of knowledge about Tanii oral literature. When I met her and told her that I want to interview her, she immediately started narrating traditional story behind the origin of a certain motif of Tanii fabric and was disappointed when I told her that I am interested in her life experiences. Like other men and women her age, she has difficulty in hearing and has poor vision. Her mobility was limited within the house after a minor accident. She lives with her husband and misses working in field. She despises the idea that her husband has to do all the works in the field. She says her only daughter had passed away long time back, now her grandchildren visits her. We used to sit in bamboo backyard which opens to green rice fields, basking under the sun. She enjoyed drinking alcohol while talking she would ask me or her husband to mix black tea with whisky or traditional 'O' (rice beer). Her husband, Hage Taping, joined in two of our interview sessions. Whenever he starts speaking she would withdraw to background and join in time to time or occasionally. There is a tendency or biases among men to think that women are not good in speaking the oral traditions or even in engaging with the subjects of village level consequences. Thus, I carefully arranged took specific time to have a separate meeting with both. She used to be hesitant initially to talk without her husband but would become easy afterward. Sometimes moody and mostly friendly and frank; her style of narration was ironic. And like any Tanii person with good knowledge of oral literature and with practice of narrating it, she too places emphasis on precision/accuracy and detailing. She is the only person (male or female) surviving who was

inside the Kure outpost at the time of the attack. The interviews were done on 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013, and 14<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

***Hage Tane:***

When Laling Yalu<sup>68</sup> (Haimendorf and his wife Betty) came I was young and had just started wearing my skirts. All my elder brothers and sisters went to see them when they came at Papii. But when Kure Chambyo took place I was a young girl. I was married to Hage Tabyo, this one, Taping, is my second husband much younger than me. Tabyo got a job in Kure to work as a *Sukidar* (guard), so he and my in-laws asked me to join him. So I went with him. Apart from us there were two more Tanii couples- Tiinyo Bida and his wife Sai, and Kago Tamo and his wife Dumi both from Hangu. From Hiija, Nada Riika and Kago Bida were there but their wives did not join them, they were older than us. From Hari it was only me and Tabyo. Then there were other people.

Very soon after I went there, one afternoon Millo Piisang and Padi Lalyang from Biila had come. I was wondering why they have come? They were my husband's maternal uncle. They had come to warn Halyangs that Taniis are going to attack the outpost tonight. They said there in the Hari village people have tied a female Mithun at the Dokang Lapang where they are organizing the *Tamu* ceremony (ritual performed before the war to appease spirits for support). They were saying that 'Today evening we will finish the *Pilya Chantu* ritual and

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<sup>3</sup>It is said that it was KojKaru who named Haminendorf as Laling, and honorable name. In another sense it also means the one who has hundred servants/slaves. Yalu means beautiful or someone who is sophisticated. This is in contrary to what Ursula Graham and her husband Timothy Betts were named as- Soping- Yaper. Soping for Timothy, which means lizard. It is said he was tall and thin like lizard and Yaper for Ursula, which means pounding wood because it is said that she had a big back. However, such naming can also be associated with the kind of relation and reputation they held among the locals. These names and the persons are immortalized through such naming.

tonight we will go to attack the Kure, let us kill all the Halyangs off.’ They informed Saab that the bridge at Pei river was cut off by Tasso Tallu and Ko jKaru (?) so that there is no way for Halyang to escape. After getting the information the *sipais* (sepoys) and Saab started their preparations, there was so much rush and noise as they were practicing (*Rii’pii! dado miinyo la da*). They prepared their guns, dug up the bunkers to get in and to shoot from their guns. They were all ready.

Then suddenly when it was about to be dark, my mother-in-law came running quietly, ‘My dear, come back to village... they are going to attack Halyang, they have done the *Pilya Chantung* rituals, come back now, hurry’. But my husband Tabyo thought that Halyangs can never be defeated by Taniis besides he thought even if we go back they (Taniis) would kill us too for being with Halyang. So he said we will not go back to the village but he told his mother to take his younger brother Tatung who was staying with us at Kure, and take both the brothers Tatung and Tagya to Billa village to our maternal relatives. Then he told me to go and stay at Mikhii Khopi’s (a NyishiKotoki) house in Talo village, a *Missang* (Nyishi) village. I reached Talo when it was almost dark and went to Mikhii Khopi’s wife Mikhii Yaya’s house. I was at loss and uncomfortable staying in a Missang house. It started raining very heavy and I could not sleep. So I ran back up towards Kure. When I was reaching Kure’s entrance, Au Babu, an Assamese, my husband’s friend called me ‘Don’t come, don’t come! Why have you come? Taniis are going to attack’ in Assamese. His house was in between the Kure and Talo. I ignored him as it was raining heavy. So he ran out and pulled me to his house. We all were kept there and it was guarded. When rain stopped, it was bright night again.



The whole night went when we were expecting them but no one showed up, instead early morning when the light was about to come they too came out at Kure top (laughs). We were already up by that time and some had put fire in the fire heart. Then finally Taniis came down making the war cry Ho-ho, Ho-ho! We thought 'So they have come'. Then one of the guards who was standing outside guarding the house we were in was speared. The spear went in-between the bronchi and the spine. He survived but he could not speak properly later. As he was rushed to the dispensary others started firing pung-pung! Tasso Koji and Tasso Pilya was shot when they were running back up. When Koji was shot Pilya, the younger brother, turned for him and he was also shot in his leg.

Then in the morning, after the attack, it was all quite again and sun was up. We were not allowed to move out of the room. Myobya Tatum, Myobya Tadu's son who was working in Au Babu's house, shouted 'Hage Tabyo! Tabyo! Many Haris are dead'. Tabyo ran up to see. Tasso Koji was brought dead by sepy into the room. Then they took him out to bushes, must have buried him there. Later we heard that his body was taken back by his relatives when tension got settled. Tasso Pilya was brought badly injured but he was still alive. Hewas badly shot in his leg and he was taken to a mud hut, there was a bed where he was put. He was there for almost a month till his infection in leg spread and decayed. I was told to bring him food so I used to take *Pila* (Rice stew) for him. His tongue was not working and hence made it difficult to talk. When I put water in his mouth it would flow out from the other side. There was no treatment given to him as they wanted to torture him. They said ' why should we not harass a 'Rondo' man?' They used to stop and scold me when I brought water for him.

There was nobody to take care of him. All intercourse between villages and Kure was stopped by Halyang. His sister once managed to run down towards here to see him but she was caught and taken back by her relatives saying 'Your one brother is already dead and now you too want to die too?' She cried so much.

Then we heard that at nights there used to be some sounds of search teams looking for dead people or who were lost in the forest after attack. But there were no sound in the day time. It was actually a Missang man called Ligung Tacho, who was paid by Taniis for search. But Halyang thought, as they have heard that one Duyu Koyang had not returned to his village, it must be him. It was only years later that his skeletons could be found at Kure ditch, that is how they used to say. They collected all the spears that were left by Taniis on their retreat. The whole room was filled with it.

That Halyang guard who was speared survived instead. Then the Halyang divided the Tanii villagers and turned some into their informer who gave away the name of Dusu Iku (Riku), who reached here first and speared the guard. Poor Iku, he was arrested much later when everything was already settled, villages were already burned down and people had come back to re-build their houses; it was his own people who betrayed him. He was tied and taken all around the village to much of our terror. Iku was jailed for three years, he died after coming back. Among those who were arrested for cutting down the Pei bridge, Koj Karu (none of the other informers took Koj Karu's name on this) and uncle Tasso Talu were arrested. Karu was brought back dead, maybe he was sick therefore they released him. Uncle Tasso Talu lived for two-three years after his return and died. It was the Tanii who first attacked and a spear was pierced through a neck of

a guard. It was after this that the Halyang retaliated and shot at Koji-Pilya. If they had not hurt the guard, even Halyang would have not shot.

Then we were not allowed to go back to our village or let them come to us for almost a year. Around 8000 sepoys had come from Halyang to attack Tanii, they were called through phone. It took them eight days to reach Kure as they had to come on foot march. On 9<sup>th</sup> day they reached Kure in a large group, then the next day they went to Jiro, crowded it completely and permanently. They settled in Jiro to raid on Taniis. *Cho!!* my father was very old and deft, Tadi and Tagya, my brothers were too young and my mother was no more, ‘What will they do?’ I tried to run but Tabyo caught and pulled me back. He said, ‘Halyang will kill you too, they won’t recognize you.’ I was terrified and worried but later I heard that my brothers were taken into Tage, in my sister-in-law's relatives place. My father was taken to my father's maternal village at Rubu, at uncle Rubu Biitang’s house by Radhe Tajang. Finally, more than a year later when things calmed down I went and searched for them, and found them there. Those years were terrible; I don’t even want to remember it. Hage was set on fire from Siigang Lenting and it burned everything. But at Pato, a small area of Gyati Nako remained. (Hage) Tamin Dolley was shot during village burning. Dusu Tayu, Tasso and Karu were brought down to Kure and put them in prison. My father’s house which is now my brother’s house is in the top of the Nending hill. Our house was taken over by the Sepoys as their camp and used it as their watch tower to watch over the village.

After the impasse was over people started reconstructing their houses. Tabyo and me were the first to come. It was Tabyo’s house which

was constructed first. He claimed Tara's land at Bara Lenku as his. He was with Halyang so he won the case. Then gradually everyone came back to re-construct their houses. Two-three families were living in one house.

Unlike what other narratives of the Kure Chambyo shared about, this testimony reveals that officials were already aware of the impending attack (also see Chapter Three). There were full preparation for the counter attack and if the attackers had not retreated immediately there would have been massive death toll as Bullo Buga estimates. Apart from her it was only Mudang Pai (interviewed on 17. 04. 2014) who mentions about the fact that the mother of Tabyo and Tatung had gone down to Kure to inform about the attack. While others have mentioned that ‘there were few who betrayed us and reported about the attack’. Now we know that Kure was already warned by many other people who were loyal to them.

Her account also falls true for the sequence of events and things that happened with all the other narratives, which were from the other side of the attack. Another important information which is missing from any other accounts is about the Tasso Pilya who was still alive in Kure for nearly a month. The people in his village must have come to know about it through some source as his sister was trying to visit him. Unlike all other accounts presents the tragic death of Tasso Pilya along with two others at Kure, her account is more tragic in the sense that how he was made to die slowly and painfully. Everybody else thought he died immediately. Regarding the dead body of Duyu Koyang, there is another story narrated by his niece:

Duyu Koyang’s brother Duyu Talu had hired and paid a *Maji* (Tibetan prayer bell) to Ligung Tacho, his *Manyang* (a friend

founded with people from another tribe through ceremonial sanctification), who knew about the area and took risk in locating Duyu Koyang's body. However, it was only after two years when things came back to normalcy that his body was brought back and proper funeral ceremonies was done. After the attack when he did not return for long his family were sure that he must have died somewhere, but since his body could not be found therefore a ritual ceremony called Byum Riidu. Here a dummy is prepared in the likeness of the dead person with *Kiira* leaves (in order to house the soul of the person) and kept in the house till the dead body is recovered and proper funeral is given. The officials got to know about this thus they came and arrested Duyu Talu on the same day. Fearing him as a threat against the government for he might seek to avenge his brother's death. He was taken to Jiro, then to Kimin and then to Tezpur. It was Talyang Obing, his friend, who finally located him, got him released and brought him back (Habung Nana's mother, interviewed on 10/09/2014).

Another revelation from her account comes is about the advantages the few locals who were with the government took of their position. Her husband occupied the house plot of another person and he could not be challenged merely because he was with the government. Such abuses and excesses were not hidden from the government officials. They allowed the exercise of their absolute power and control through such these carriers or agents. They could be any appointed authorities such as the Kotokis, the Political Interpreter (PI) or Jemadar (Kupe Tanyang was the sole PI for several years), the Gaon Buras, the hundreds of sepoy's deployed there, smaller in charges such as the Sardars (one who mobilize and lead the porters) and literally everyone who walked along or had good terms with the officials or above in charges. They represented the government before the public and acted as the mediator for

the public before the government. These excesses were enforced upon every Tanii indiscriminately, therefore the memories were common (social memory), fresh and everyone had their personal stories to share. But there is no record of these happenings in official documents.

### **Oral History 3**

**Hage Bath, male, age 90+**

**Hari Village**

Hage Bath belongs to Hari village which, which everyone claims, took the most active part and therefore it was severely targeted by the government and later even blamed by their own countrymen. The interviews with Hage Bath were conducted on 19<sup>th</sup> March and 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2015. His name was given by Stuart Blackburn, a retired Senior Research Associate in SOAS, London. Stuart Blackburn had previously interviewed Hage Bath in 2001, and he mentions in his paper that he had met many during his field work who spoke about the Kure Chambyo (see Blackburn, 2003). Though, he did not mention if they were the ones who actually took part in the conflict, or knew about it. Hage Bath had initially refused about talking on the subject as he refused to fix the next meeting. I had to meet his son Hage Komo, a senior School Teacher, to convince him to share his experience. Finally, Hage Bath agreed for the interview. He said, he did not trust people to share or talk about such subjects because they may manipulate his words. He feels the subject is very volatile one and it involves people who are dead now and cannot defend themselves. Like Bullo Buga, he also feared about his deteriorating memory so he feared giving only half information.

Despite his age he is known for his hard work. He goes to jungle to get firewood or to bring bamboo from bamboo garden to repair his garden fences on his own. He is also known as one of the oldest man in the village and also

for his vast historical knowledge. Therefore, he is often consulted or interviewed, which also made him become more wary about speaking to everyone. He said, 'It is difficult to trust people these days, I do not know with what motive they come to consult me. I tell them like this (showing his palm upside) and they would turn it the other side (turning his palm down). I have become old too and hence even my memories and what I say tends to digress.' 'When we tell the stories of clash and conflicts, we should know the whole detail and tell is completely, finish it as we start it'.

***Hage Bath:***

Kure Chambyo happened because of Tanii's own internal conflicts. After Halyang came some people started taking Halyang's help which made the other party to think of Halyang as meddlesome. Hence they said 'Until unless we remove Halyangs from here, we will never be able to win our case so let us drive them out first.'

The first time when Halyang Laling-Yalu came I was still a young boy, though I always made friends with older boys. I had just started collecting firewood from jungles when I heard my elder brothers saying 'Laling-Yalu has come to Yayin Pu! Lets go and see.' They all ran jumping across the bunds and fences and I ran after my brother crying and running. We went from Hiiija village to Pyagang Nending, took small turn from Siilang side and there was it, this giant *Yayin Piisa* (the Yaying pine tree), magnificent and terrifying. Then we saw Lalying-Yalu for the first time. Their heads were all white and eyes full with cataract (laughs). I got terrified and thought, 'These are not human' I was so confused (laughs). They were sitting on a bed holding a very furry cat. When we gave them eggs they ate it raw-making us chat on our way back 'they eat raw eggs!' Then there was

Kago Bida, Nada Riika and Koj Karu who were watching over them, pushing people back with their sticks. 'There was one Koj Karu, one Kago Bida and one Nada Riika', we talked all our way back on the Pige road.

Kure Chambyo is an *Arr Migung* (bloody history), thus the one who cannot finish it should not mention it. The one who can say the whole story should say about it. I remember my uncle Tak saying 'Don't go' 'Halyangs are as populous as ants and flies; they can never be wiped off' during Dokang Lapang meeting. I remember people shouting 'Keep Tak away from here'. I heard a bit about them saying, 'Halyang are interfering with us'. Many have started going to Halyang for each and every reason. When they are unable to pay their debts they would go to Halyang and get themselves relieved of the claims. Many were angry because of the arrests made by Halyang for not carrying their loads. They had arrested Epo Tatung and Tasso Tasser who were wealthy and influential people. Tasser was Abyung's elder brother, his wife was Tumpi's whose child was Sai. Epo Tatung was released by Mihin Olyang in return for some ten porters.

I joined the attack without any particular reason. I was young and ran ahead of all. All elders were saying 'look at him being smart'. After doing *Nyima* (ambush) dance we went down to Biila via Tajang where Biila joined us as they were ready. When we reached Mudang Tage entrance brother Mudang Lali came and said 'Our Tamu chant is still going on' (*Ngunukii Tamu Bardoran keaa*). So we were sitting and waiting on Mudang Tage for so long that some even went back. When their Mudang Tage's *Tamu Barnii* got over we realized that Hangu are yet to come. I saw the priest taking out the *Gyambo* (war)



eggs. Then Hangu came; the one who came last was leading us in front.

It was moonlit night and we could see the path. All those who had joined the attack are all dead now. I was young lad, not even married, I just ran along to carry *Sehe* (?). There was no fear, I was running happily (smiles). Then it started raining and path became slippery, we got hold of whatever tree or branches for climbing. Then, as all were wearing *Kentii* cloth, our cloth became heavy as it was drenched in rain. Then all Hangu ran behind the trees to relieve themselves, actually they did not wanted to be the one to attack first. Thus, Hari-Biila group who were in the last became the front. We did not know this, we thought the one who were ahead must have already begun the attack. Thus, we ran towards the post shouting. The Hangu, became the last, the one who was in the front. The one who was in the last, Hari, reached straight to Saab's house and sepoy's house.

I moved towards the Sepoy line. We were trying to cut the wall like this (showing). Then the Hazarika Saab who looked out of the *Khirki* was speared causing him to make noise like 'kho-Kho'. If there was no barracking and piling of woods we would have easily broke it through. Then they started their counter firing on us. As we ran towards the *Tai Pabu* (cliff) their gun fires followed us making sounds like *riisang-riisang!* while it passed through the leaves. There was such an offensive smell of gun fire. But they did not follow us to the hill top. Some had run towards the cliff, others to hill and some towards the Kure. There was firing like raining, it ran here and there (showing between his legs).

After the attack, I was always running among the Bamboo gardens and forests. Later, I thought 'No, I will give ten mithuns to Tanyang (the PI Kupe Tanyang) instead to reconcile as others were doing than running like this'. Everyone who took part in the meeting for attack was arrested. Talu's younger brother Tasso Pai, who ran to Biila, was captured from Reru and was jailed in Jiro. Subu Khoda was taken to Nakura, then Dusu Riku was also arrested. He died in jail.

When they were coming to burn the village, people saw from the Nending hill top and shouted 'they are coming to burn our village'. So, villagers sent Hage Dolley and DusuTayu to talk to the Saab as they were appointed as Gaon Bura by Halyang. But sepoys tried to arrest them on approaching. Seeing this Hage Doley tried to run but he was shot with gun. Dusu Tayu did not run, he was kept captive and then later he was appointed as Kotoki instead. The fire was set first in Ate Tak's house and then it went all over. Out of fear everybody ran away leaving the village empty. But the Pato side, it was protected by spirits, the fire did not reach that side.

The fire was so high and strong that it was ten times brighter than the Sun. People ran from backdoor and front door. It was not clear if it was sound of fire or the gunfire- '*buter- buter!*'. I thought '*Mahh!!*they must have killed everyone'. My father was a mentally challenged man. I wonder how he must have run for his life. He fell to the ground and as everybody was running for their life no one helped him. When I saw him he was muddied. In one hand he held his mug and on the other the meat piece. I pulled him up and carried to the bamboos.

Then I hurried to our granaries and I managed to fill two baskets of rice when the fire caught up. I called my younger brother Tangu to come and help. Aye.. I thought it would have been better to go in jail than deal with this terror. After hearing the fire shots I took my father and brother and went further inside the forest. We were there for four nights and then like creepers we came out to Lampung house...(long silence).

***The Dolyang -Tanyang Agreement:*** Life continued like this for days, many were living in jungles and many had run to their relatives. There was so much uncertainties and fear. We could not work in field. There was no food and those whosoever came near the granaries were shot at. There was no means to breakthrough this impasse or to bring any solution. It was unbearable distress. Then finally Kupe Tanyang, who was the Kotoki started asking about our elder brother Dolyang, 'Is Hage Dolyang still alive?' 'Yes he is' 'Dolyang used to carry me on his back when I was kid in Hari, bring him to me'. Thus, we sent *Ate* (elder brother) Dolyang to him and told him to request Tanyang to talk to Halyang on our behalf. Tanyang said 'Of course I will, who else will do it?'. Thus, from our village Gyati Neha Tadu, Hage Dolyang, Dimper *Ate* Diibo went to him to make the negotiation. After the *haat-mila* (handshake) we agreed to whatever Kupe Tanyang demanded. Thus through the Dolyang - Tanyang agreement the new solution was arrived at.

We agreed to work for Halyang for free and construct their houses. When they said they will open an airfield and demanded the land we gave it. The line of Mithuns which was given to them started from Hari village reached till the Jiro hill. Then Tanyang asked 'Hari village's most valued *Maji* (Tibetan prayer bells) called *Laji-bo*,

whose is it? Bring it'. So all said, 'Okay'. From the Diibo side their most valued Maji called *Pungo-bo* of Tage Tagyung was demanded. Michi Tacho's ivory was demanded. The Diibo people exchanged 20 Mithuns and a plot of land to Tage Tagyung for his Maji, and three Mithuns to the broker. Even I was there at Tagyung's house on the day when the exchange took place. He was my close relative. All was paid in order to not let them burn other villages. This was apart from the Mithuns given by all who participated in the attack. When they came here they started chasing and harassing us. Thus, all drove herds of Mithuns and cattle to Halyang. Then Ya Tadii's *Maji* was also given.

While all paid the amount, it was the Hari and Tajang which were targeted the most. They were the main sufferer. That old house in Nending hill where fire could not reach, the sepoy occupied it and from there looked over us. They shot dead one man who was coming from Pato side. Even from this side they had killed. Landi Halley was killed at Buru Taki's bamboo garden. Then Oda near the Siiker Subu of Hangu. Brother Yonku was shot in his leg. They shot him from Doging Lapang when he was walking here. He paid huge fine after this. He used to laugh 'I was shot by gun once and even a tree fell over me, I am undieable' (laughs) he was brought almost dead when the tree fell on him.

At the time when we went for attack the cucumber were of this size (showing little finger). We had just put the supporting sticks and went for attack. Since then we were on run, the cucumber were of our thumb size then. The sepoy were always walking around with their guns. They casually walk in groups in the village and would get in

any of the house and kill their pigs and fowls, eat and enjoys themselves.

Our women were also harassed. Those who were working in their dry fields were chased by sepoys. We saw from our tree hiding when they were chased like hen and chicks. They would catch and rape them there.

Our granaries were looted. But gradually after the negotiation people were allowed to come back to re-construct their house gradually and were allowed to work in their field. However, they had to show papers to work in their own fields. They had to collect the paper from Jiro and put it up on a stick while working in their fields. If we did not have the paper the sepoys would chase us away. We collected the paper from Menzie Boro, the main Saab who harassed us. [During the interview his son who was present there and tried to correct/interpret what was being said, 'No, that was actually... that was just actually to maintain a register, that is all.] The Kago-Byara bamboos were completely cut down and taken to Jiro to construct Halyang buildings. Our grains from granaries were taken to Jiro in lines by people. And to pound the rice our people were kept as captive. We had just planted our paddy saplings so that was our only stored grains so there was no grain left for us.

The Jiro hillock used to be very tall and pointed, empty and only ferns; it was cut and leveled down. We were working and cutting the earth with plough. We broke the rocks by making holes with *Genti*. From our village to Jiro, a road was constructed. And while we were working we were humiliated by sepoys. They would, with their

sticks, curl our *Ahu* (an appendage made of cane and coloured in red to cover male behind) and play with their sticks in between our legs (laugh) and say '*Rundkoribole tan kore, kaamkoribolemissa-missi*' (Assamese 'Hard while having sex but weak while working'). All Hari was there, then Reru, Tajang, Kalung, entire *aku* Diibo was there, and some Hangu people were there. They would beat with their stick till it breaks and beat them till swollen. But I was never beaten! They would beat the one on my one side and beat the one on my other side, but would not beat me. I remember once my friend's old father was mercilessly beaten, he lost his senses. There was no hope in those days.

To me later they told me to get ten people to carry load from Kure. I was terrified and thought that they actually want to arrest me. I pleaded people to join but they pleaded me in return. Hibu Khoda said, '*Ahye!* Who will go with Nako Gyati' (Nako Gyati was a Kotoki). All started crying. I said 'Friends, this must be our fate now let us go. If I die you all will die, if you die I will die too, I will not come back alone if they arrest you'. Throughout the way they were scolding and cursing. We were told to carry 25 kilos of rice each, and then they gave us two rupees each, now everyone was smiled. 'Hiija Uja is this what you were crying for?' (laugh). That was my first load carrying experience. When I reached Jiro top the Saab patted me saying it was a good job. He said for doing this job he will make me a Kotoki. 'Oh my goodness!' I put Lod Olyang for the Kotoki instead. But as they were impressed by my work they appointed me as *Surdar* (Sardar of porters). Then we went to Nyapin, Kimin and Passi. Then afterwards Genda Saab called me again and said 'Today I will not let you refuse the Kotoki post', I said 'I have my ailing father, there are three young children from my elder brother to look after'. He said 'We

*Surkara* will take care of that; we will provide your father with ration.' As there was no excuse left with me I thought, 'Now I am completely caught' so I ran while they were still talking. Kotokis were the most hated people and thus even got killed. I did not wanted to get killed, like Biida.

Then once they said many *Sipais* were killed in Tagin Mara area (Nyishi area), now they are going to raid them, so they came to our village to get porters, 'Aye who will go there among Tagin Missang to get killed', everyone refused. But the next morning as soon as the rooster cried they came and forcefully rounded us to the Lapang. Many started crying, even elderly men were crying with their heads down. I thought, 'If it is the fate then nothing will help us'. Some like me went to Hage Lapang to carry loads and rest were kept in Jiro jail till they submitted to carry load.

Our elders used to tell us that we should not talk much about such clash and wars, that is why I am little concerned. My heart is clear with it but I am hesitant about telling it. (smiles).

There are no official records on the aftermath of the event. Few official proposal and letters were written by Menzie Boro, the Political Officer Subansiri Area, to the Secretariat at Shillong to sanction for the airfield construction in the valley. Once he was complaining about the delay in sanctions while the locals are demanding the airfield and even have volunteered their labour and land for the same.

Apart from clear articulation of the loss incurred by people in terms of their resources both material and natural resources, his narrative is also rich in terms of human emotions. His narrative manifests some common and

prominent feelings, such as pain, shame, humiliation, fear and hopelessness and also more complex emotions which can be understood better only within the socio-traditional and ethos context, such as the experience of coercion and the sense of guilt. Despite the predominance and overarching existence of traditions, customs, norms and environment that controlled the day to day human behavior and construction of world view- at individual level, Taniis maintained high sense of individuality and independence. A good example could be the lack of control of household patriarch (Tanii society being a patriarchal society). As soon as a son brings his wife, the father build another house and either he himself move out or will give the house to the son, along with his share of land. Thus they become a separate household unit and the son attains his independent membership in the community. People work only in their own fields or work only in exchange for labour or other item. Same standard is maintained even for the 'slaves' or servants who own their own property and work only in exchange for something. The wealthy men could excuse themselves from physical labour by paying something (but at the cost of being jeered for this), though there was no excuse for women, rich or poor. Thus, the experience of defeat and being forced to work and being ruled under coercion or tyranny was difficult for people.

Another important experience was of getting co-opted. Many locals found their opportunities to come in good terms with the government. Organizing labour was difficult task, even use of military was not helping and most of the men were absconding. Therefore, appointing an insider was a better idea. I was told till 1970s there was no salary for Gaon Buras, Kotokis and Sardars. These appointed agents either worked for government out of compulsion or were able to extract various benefits through unscrupulous means such as playing the role of mediator or middlemen, etc. These positions were not only un/popular but also seen as a traitor for taking part with outsiders. While most had maintained their disdainful distance and



managed to maintain their distance. However, gradually all significant individuals in the villages were cajoled into the position of Gaon Buras and Kotokis and were adorned with coveted red coat and name badge, gifts and beneficiary schemes were awarded to them at the time of pompous official visit cum official ceremonies or during official days such as Independence Day celebration. However, what held most significance in the mind of the appointed Gaon Buras and Kotokis I interviewed was that, due to their role as the village councilor they are consulted and invited in discussing cases or resolving issues, for their words will be respected by the Deputy Commissioner, and that the later would consult them on cases related to traditional matters.

Hage Bath also gives an interesting trope '*The Dolyang-Tanyang Agreement*' which was concluded by '*haat mila*' a handshake. It presents a very formal impression to the entire episode where the parties had a very satisfactory deliberation, bargaining/negotiation and agreement. The Taniis had nothing to lose as the coming of the Halyang had become a fact of life for them. Therefore, the only way left with them was to offer their submission at any cost. That was the only way forward left for them. In their understanding they were the party who were in the guilty, for attacking on Halyang without any overt provocation. They were willing to reconcile at any cost. But despite this realization the language barrier became the real hindrance. Thus, Kupe Tanyang was the only hope they were left with who took advantage of the situation (as we will in the next chapter). This one accord led to years of harassment and suffering to general public. And unintentionally drew a new course in the Tanii history, and the state itself.

#### **Oral History 4:**

**Late Tage Dollo, male, age 90+**

**Mudang Tage village**

Tage Dollo is known for telling the stories of his participation in the Kure attack. He now lives with his son a Deputy Commissioner of Police in Itanagar. He had been blind for few years past few years and had hearing problem. Due to his age he was mobile only within the house. He is a person with cheerful disposition and is famous for his basketry skills which he makes with cane despite his blindness. He was also known for his sharp memory.

I did my interview with him on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2013, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 and then on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2014. As his family members informed me about his memory getting distorted and becoming weak, he was very vulnerable when we met. Despite this, he was very interested to talk. When I met him after a year gap in late 2014, on our second, third and fourth meeting he was stuck on certain imagery from his memory which he repeated several times during our talk. Each day there was a particular memory he would share. On the second day he vividly remembered red hairy caterpillar eating a dead body, on third day it was about his visit to Jiro carrying basket full of rice and on the fourth day he spoke about an old man crawling down to a burning granary. He was frank in sharing about how he negotiated his position with Halyang in order to preserve himself. However, he strongly retorted while talking about conflicts for it reminded him of dead people. He believed, when we talk about such subjects we attract the attention of the evil spirits, who listens and get angry (often incomplete sentences). In tanii belief when someone dies an unnatural death, particularly the ones who dies violently, and their souls turns into evil spirits and cause disturbances. They would trouble one through nightmares.

***Tage Dollo:***

I was the one joined the Kure Attack (laughs). When the whole *Supung* were forming allies and preparing to go to fight *Nyibo* I just joined them without any reason. We had even performed the *Tamu* ceremony in the village. There was this big altar prepared in there around which we did our war dance. Taniis went on its own without any good reason. *Ayii*..a lot of people went. We were a big group. Many people were killed including Halyang. Tasso Koji was killed, Hage Doley was killed, Tasso Pilya was killed, Duyu..was arrested, Habung Kani was arrested. Halyang had already shifted down to Kure, but by attacking on them we brought them closer instead.

At Kure jungle I remember, I saw Tasso Pilya's body eaten by big and red hairy caterpillars. It had entered his body from all over. They were big with swollen stomach. Nobody collected his body. Who would dare to go and collect the body... aah! when I think about these things I feel suffocating, even now I get confused and frustrating.

When Halyang started firing we all were running away saving our lives and did not see much. If there was a hole I would have even went down there. After coming back from Kure we were always running and hiding in the forest. Sometimes we would manage to get back in the house to get some food. We ran everywhere in the jungle. We went to Missang places and then came back to Tanii land. And from here again run to Missang land. Those Halyang were not after every Tanii but few selective ones like us who were strong, important and considering our age group. After capturing us physically they would demand for ransom from our families

After Kure attack, Hari was set in fire by Halyang. *Ayiyiihh*... there was sepoys all over as they surrounded the village. And then set Hari

on fire starting from Hage Siigang Nenti till far as Pato. They shot like Pong! Pong! Tanii instead of stopping the fire would silently watch it burning the whole day. *Piiter-Piiter* it was burning. We could only watch from far as sepoys had surrounded it. There was one old man from Landi who could not see, he crawled beneath the granary without knowing that the granary itself caught fire and died there as they were saying. Landi what it was...his granary was near the bamboo garden. The Hage Dolley was killed when he was trying to run away near the bamboos. The Halyangs were secretly looking at them and shot him with gun. Chiging Nyime was Gram Bura and Koj Karu was Kotoki, they were arrested because they could not stop the Tanii from attacking....*Aahh* .. in those days when we were growing, there was no hope....

I myself have never carried the load. But in those days every household had to send one men to carry loads turn wise so when my turn came I had to go to Jiro. But on the way I met Liigang Tade Koyang, who was my servant. He said to me 'You don't go, let me go instead and let me have your food and eatables.' So I gave my *lyera* (cane backpack carried by men) and all the food and cloth I was taking with me. Then once I was arrested and sent to jail for sometime. I was released when I agreed to call people to carry loads and acted like *Sordar*. The whole village had to do *Mein myala* (collect food donation) for those who were carrying loads. Halyang gave money (not food). But when Jiro hill was opened and airfield was opened it was done for free.

We *Giira Bulyang* (*Bulyang* responsible for the clan) were asked to collect and take rice and food from village (*Mie myagii la*) and give to the Bor Saab at Jiro. Rice in this big bamboo basket full I carried for them. We were giving it for free where they will give any money.

Once I went carrying a big basket full of rice to Jiro hill office. There was one Halyang Baje (means servant in Assamese) who was cleaning rice and by mistake I moved his plate, he slapped me on my face. Acho Biida had asked me to suck the blood out from gums where I was hit, when I did blood came. So he said when Bor Saab comes you show your blood okay. So when Saab came I showed the blood by spitting it and told him that your servant had hit me (laughs). 'Aye is this how you hit the one who is bringing food for you?' and he beaten the Halyang with a bamboo stick Taa! Taa! The Halyang sat down and nothing was done to me (laughs). Our Acho Biidang knew Halyang language a bit as they used to go down to Halyang before. In those days lots of poorer Taniis used to go down to Halyang to work during winter. I went there once to buy a cow and a plate from Kanko. Bor Saab really loved us Taniis, the one who were bring rice or ones who brings people to carry loads. I was became Sordar. We worked for free., then later, I was made the GB by putting red cloth on me. A big red cloth, which one could wear as a shawl. Initially I did not wanted to be but I was scared that I might get arrested due to my involvement in the conflict, but later I enjoyed it as it was good thing.

Halyang, they were mistreating us. They would just arrest us. We said we cannot bear this, we cannot have them here, lets drive them out from here that is why we attacked them. They would tie ropes in our hands and take us to arrest..... So Tanii attacked them saying 'how you are going to let them do this while in our land' , instead they overpowered and attacked us in worse ways, Taniis were completely subjugated and devalued, even dogs had more value then. silence. We became their servant, we thought what to do, now they want to live here and they don't have anything or anyone to work for them. ... I was chased so

much. I had to run and hide all over the forests and bamboos. And hiding in below the house. ...*Aiiyahh*..did not feel like human, never thought we would be living like this ever. It continued till two or three years.

It was sad to hear these stories about harassments they went through in those days. I found that they wanted to share about it. But it is tragic that nobody talks about the event and the oppression, as if to deny this experience as a legitimate viewing of the past as history. The present Tanii population has made very smooth moved on and adapted itself at the cost of such repressed memories, experiences, beliefs, stories and histories. Maybe this is the sacrifice that is demanded by the Tanii oral tradition which prevents one from talking about painful and 'bloody' past for the sake of the posterity and peace.

This sharp contrast is particularly evident in the narratives where time and again people spoke about what they went through, and then why they do not speak about it, i.e. because the tradition do not allow them to do so. However, when finally they spoke about it I did feel that they wanted to die along with this 'secret' (open secret) with them. However, I found clear irony in Hage Bath's narrative as he spoke in so much extend about what happened aftermath of the Kure Chambyo (that too when he earlier refused to talk about it), and there was even a revolt in his voice to continue with his narrative even when his son tried to 'intervene' by trying to interpret what he was saying and what it meant and justify by explaining what the government was actually trying to do, as in example mentioned above. His son was visibly uncomfortable and agitated about the presentation and was pained hearing all what had happened. Though this was not the first time he heard

about it. This I observed in other instances as well, when there were other people around during the interview and heard about what had happened. They would randomly drop in sometimes comments and go back.

For most of present generation Tanii, it is like talking about a myth of a lost battle or guided by some foolish and primitive way of thinking. An attempt of no relevance and significance today. There cannot be any hero or heroine in this story but only villains who fought against the government. The history writing and their narratives in India (or at least in educational curriculums till lower studied) have created a permanent narrative fixture for people, if at anyone is interested in reviving such local histories, where one cannot have or celebrate a hero or heroin who fought against its own country. In this case tradition, State and social realities are working towards a systematic suppression of history/ past.

How do one record the voices/things/feelings that are not spoken, sounds with meanings (like hmm, ayeh, cho') and hence also not recorded? They are observations and intuitive feelings about the people and random observers who were around during the interview. All this collectively gives meaning to this entire narration or story telling about the past, at present.

### **6.6. Analysis:**

It is their own stories: In all the oral histories, one observation that came across is that, all stories or everything started from the very location of their valley and their way of life around it. It gives a very different narrative context to people and their very indigene logic and perspective for interpreting the past and their experience. There is a reversing of the story from official stories in practice among 'historians'. It did not start from the attack by Tanii on Kure outpost as in the official report. The report pushes it

back to the time when the planning was made and people who were instigating the attack. Neither does it start from little more beyond in past when the 'Podu Miri' of Joyhing Tea Estate was raided by Taniis, causing the expedition led by McCabe in 1896. His report takes the pains to take account of the first ever visit by another European- to Tanii valley and earlier reports about Taniis (as ApaTena) by Dalton in 1820s. It begins and spoken within the premise of the Tanii and their neighboring Nyishi's complex relation which was socio-economically at synergy but politico-economically at constraints all the time. It begins with the tradition of close and ritual alliance- Many Baro, between Tanii and Nyishis. Like the Oral History told by Hage Bath , it speaks about few LichaNyishis who were in habit of stealing Tanii Mithuns, their connecting forest, who went to Halyangs for resolving their case and how Taniis of Hiija and Biila came to know about it as they were in friendly terms with them. This lead to the coming of Halyang upon the Tanii invitation. Those villages who invited them hosted them and took the responsibility. The story of first coming of Halyang are told as another story not in continuation of the Kure Chambyo narrative as that story had reached its satisfactory end.

Many people I interviewed remembered hearing or witnessing the processes of the KC attack. And they vividly remembered and shared the stories of aftermath when the entire valley was under the siege and the entire community was made to pay and suffer due to the coming of Halyang, and the KC. Most of them do not remember what was Halyang doing in the intermittent period between the Halyang coming and the KC event. They were up with their own daily life which had nothing to do with Halyang, except for few who worked with Halyang as guards, cooks or porters. Some women carried some barter trade with them. Many were dismissive about those people who were in touch with Halyangs. Thus, in their narratives the cause of KC event was also a very Tanii cause where few independent conflicts between few individuals led to culmination of the attack. However,



and maybe therefore, no one could answer exactly when asked ‘Why the entire villages within the valley agreed upon the attack and took part if it was just a personal matter between few individuals?’ The usual response was that people were misled by those individuals. The four persons whom I interviewed, who actually took part in the attack said that they joined because they were too ‘energetic and arrogant’ and young to think of better. They tend to legitimize the military action against the Tani, though they speak about the unbearable sufferings they had to face yet they tend to say that they deserved it.

These local stories provide the stories of their own, the logic, reasoning, narratives styles, the choice of contents, details and even the interpretation and analysis of their own. They do not see Halyangs with any prominent role but rather as a passive or just a complementary background. In their narratives Taniis were the main protagonists. It is entirely their history.

**6.6.1. *Historicity.*** The only things that was lacking in these narratives are the markings of corresponding times to their narratives. Each of my speakers, including the OH I have recorded here, had the event sequence, names of individuals, the material items and places engraved in their memories. It was as they had follow a norm of naming those people and things correctly. Some speakers were more well versed while some had started loosing their grip from memories due to their advanced age. However, I was not surprised to hear same narratives and details repeatedly from each village. I was expecting some variations from different villages, among different class, political and social affiliations, age groups and gender. However, except for naming of details, there were variations around these factors in terms of their experiences and perspective for interpreting the past. Each speakers were conscious of giving their detail and took their pride in it. However, there were few exceptions like in case of Bullo Buga (OH no.) who felt the responsibility to speak and tell the stories of past. He even enjoyed the

attention his story draws.

**6.6.2. *Telling and keeping alive the painful memories:*** While many admit of not having any direct or personal involvement with the KC attack, but all had very personal narratives and witnessing of the sufferings they went through. For years and years, no one had asked them to narrate their experience. They never had the opportunity to commemorate their experience. Yet it was a common experience of all the Taniis belonging to a certain generation. Perhaps the humiliation, indignity, suffering and pains they had to bear left a scar which was too ugly that no one wishes to recount them or remember them. The younger generations do not seem to know about that past, even though they might have some knowledge about the KC event. However, ironically when I asked them about the KC event, it was the stories of those atrocities that was recounted the most. The persons who were killed, every names were recounted by every individual I interviewed as if they were lamenting the loss and cursing the murderers for the injustice. Those deaths were not avenged. People, their family and relatives were too suppressed that they could not do anything and it (and its humiliation) haunted them. In another narrative in Duyu village. The brother of one murdered man had performed a mourning ritual without the dead body for he could not perform the funeral without the dead body. They could not even search for the body out of fear. His sister recounted during the interview with how his brother was arrested from his house while he was still in the middle of the ritual ceremony and taken by armies fearing the retaliation to avenge his brother's murder. The Political Interpreter and the Kotokis who were familiar with the customs had warned the authority when they heard about the ritual being performed.

### **6.6.3. *Women***

There were fewer women in compare to men who could be interviewed. It is important to note that there was clear qualitative difference in their narratives

as well in terms of voicing the self, the female protagonist, perspectives, etc. Especially, in terms of their positioning. Men, who being in public and being the target for all political process had to go through various political pressures and transformations. They were exposed to all political pressures and manipulations/ orchestrations, they had ally or were forced to submit to the government and all their representatives. They faced the repercussions for their, if any, rebellious attitude. Thus their opinion, narratives, and contents of their memories, were re-moulded. Women, who due to their gendered role, consumed themselves only to their agricultural work, household economy and family social life. Their sphere of interaction with Halyang was highly limited or mostly mediated. Their halyang subjugation was mediated. Thus, their memories were mostly intact and thus their narratives, subjectivities and expressions were undiluted comparatively.

Men spoke about the forced portaging and labour (discussed in more detail in Chapter Five) and not all but many also spoke about sexual harassment and rape of many women by soldiers. Most of the women recounted about how their livestock- fowls, eggs and pigs, were hunted by army groups who would just walk around the village. One women (also see in Chapter Five) spoke about how sepoys would touch her chicken with a stick end one by one and the chicken would fall dead. Many women spoke about how they used to avoid or run back from the path whenever they saw soldiers coming from the other side. They only said they were scared and shy but never explained why. While few women, though very few, spoke about how soldiers used to chase their women in gardens and from their rice fields and take them away to do 'wrong things' (*Miisa Manii*). These testimonies when not asked were not shared or commemorated. One, because it was never redressed by anybody as no-one could dare challenge or complaint against Halyang, all traditional institutions were completely surpassed. Secondly, the experience was too traumatic and disturbing that people decided to keep not speak about them and remain silent. Third, because the present time has turned them irrelevant

and useless as the community and their life is completely assimilated to the new nation-state and governance system.

**6.6.4. *Narrativity:*** Trying to mediate, responsibility of ‘speaking’ morality: Despite, the conflict, injustice, sufferings, etc. It is interesting to note that speakers constantly maintained that whatever had happened was legitimate. The government was in right to have punished the people and the people were in who misunderstood the intention of the government were in wrong for attacking at the outpost. People spoke about the atrocities but instead of focusing or highlighting on the narratives of injustice and redresses, the emphasis was on how they finally resolved the case and situation was normalised, and brought the friendly terms with the government. They gave free labour, complied and surrendered to the Halyang authority and paid heavily. They bought back their peace and security. They even take pleasure in telling the what kind of price they paid, a price that was honorable enough, as if in the paying they are buying back the honor.

There was also a constant to and fro between the narrative of pain and oppression as if they are trying to voice out the unjust oppression and treatment they went through, and the narratives that are attempting to clear the government officials, the Halyangs, or even in justifying their actions towards the Taniis. They had rather blame on the local government agents such as the Kotokis and Gaon Buras. Such incoherent narratives tells about the lingering fear and confusion that is the outcome of the hegemonic power the officials had and the benevolence the officials expressed in later period. There is also a desire to let those memories die its natural death by remaining silent about it.

There were few exceptions, like Bullo Buga (OH no.1), his narratives were so fixed that it was difficult to interject queries on different tract. However, what was the most unique and significant about his narrative was that he was

the only speaker, except for few women speakers (see OH no. 2) who took pride in the attack and do not lament the event and calls Halyangs as wrong instead. The pride comes from the desire to fight for their land and for the autonomy. Such narrative was extremely rare in the indoctrinated and sanitized narratives of many others, who spoke out only when coaxed or after long engagement with them when they gained enough trust. His pride could also be misplaced in the sense that he also seemed to take pride in his brevity. When looked from this point of view one could also interpret his narrative as nothing but a possible self-praising auto-story and can be questioned for its authenticity. But then by looking at the intention, all the other narratives can be questioned for their authenticity for they too are trying to give a specific message or giving a historical account for a certain moral cause.

Important point to note is that not many speakers of his contemporary are alive now with whom the narrative could have been compared and tested with. Nevertheless, at least he answered my question and spoke with clarity about his personal interest (i.e. to fight for his people, to fight for his land and to fight to drive Halyang's out). He owned all these reasons as his own. Others used the word 'they' instead of 'I', they did not own any of these causes as their own view. There is disowning and distance.

It shows how the community narrative or individual narratives had criminalized their own people for leading the attack and causing the hardship to their own people. In the next chapter I have discussed in detail about various domains within which these narratives emerged which affected the interpretation of past.

## CHAPTER 7:

# READING HISTORY, READING POWER: TANGIBLE TROPES AND CAPRICIOUS CONTEXT

*When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.*

**ETHIOPIAN PROVERB**

*The powerful, as we have seen, have a vital interest in keeping up the appearances appropriate to their form of domination. Subordinates, for their part, ordinarily have good reasons to help sustain those appearances or, at least, not openly to contradict them. (James C. Scott's *Domination and Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*)*

### **7.1. Introduction**

When experiences and their memories become unspeakable or it becomes impossible to articulate those experiences, they take the forms of stories, metaphors and myths. Created in a certain context they carry their diexic meanings and messages which can be decoded only by the audience who share the same experiences. For subalterns, subjugated and invisible minorities this becomes an important way to preserve their stories and memories where their meanings are hidden and are accessible only to their kinds. James Scott (1990) calls this as the 'hidden transcripts' of the oppressed. Thus, even when these narrative texts exist in public domain, where both the oppressor and the oppressed co-habit, it is only in a more private domain that their meanings are deciphered.

However, the problem arises when they are superficially transported to another context or adopted by the dominant without their deixes and semantic meanings associated with them being carried along. These stories survive and are passed on but without their original meanings being realized; and constantly being reinterpreted by their new speakers. As a result those stories devoid of their 'original function' (Nair, 2002:52) or 'originating context' (Labov & Waletzky, 1966:32) lose their connections and relevance within the present realities, and hence become myths and rituals. In oral communities like Tanii, the survival of such narratives from complete redundancy and disappearance thus depends either on the sacredness attributed to them so that they are least disturbed and continued to be performed from generation to generation, or by using verbal ornaments and tropes embedded into them which acts like memory aid so that they can be easily recollected.

Nevertheless, the distance between the original narration and the textualized narration continues to grow. This has been the case with the oral traditions of Tanii communities as well. Their mythologies of origins of human and non-human kinds, traditional practices and belief systems and migration stories, have been passed on from generation after generation- intact but not beyond the means of deciphering their actual meanings.

It is this character of oral traditions and texts where both the boon and bane for historians lies. On one hand one can celebrate the existence and continuation of numerous numbers of oral texts yet on the other hand their meanings are beyond the reach of any meaningful interpretation. One has ample number of oral texts, with details describing the community past and their present and yet there is a complete dislocation to their spatial reality and time distinction.

This chapter will problematize the orality as text for history by discussing various aspects of socio-political, environmental and cognitive elements that mould/cast the narratives. Having, laid down these problems in understanding and analyzing these oral narratives, and not depending on the face value of the narratives, but for more critical unfolding, dissection, confrontation and analysis of these narratives to pull together their meanings. It is these meanings that would bring the value to their historicity. The second half of the chapter, shows how meanings are interposed in narratives and how apart from the formal or more standardized narratives, other or diverse forms of narratives such as rhetoric, more personal narratives, anecdotes, gossips, and dig deeper can be an important source of information and meaning pool by developing our understanding on nuanced subjectivities and silences.

## **7.2. Locating Kure Chambyo Narratives**

The narratives of the Kure Chambyo was formed in a very unique historical moment. Unlike many other historical stories of resistance movements across the country, either by national mass or by a small community against the colonial government or the ruling national government in tribal regions which are commemorated by the people, if not included in history narratives; the narratives of Kure Chambyo do not popularly exists in people's memory or narratives. On the other hand by this non-retelling of the event narrative this memory of past is left for its gradual demise by dislocation and forgetting. It was formed around and along the period of mass oppressions followed after the Kure Chambyo by the government and their appointed local agents. They assumed complete control and power over the entire valley with military supports. Every form of resistance was to be severely dealt and any culprit identified was arrested. This period of seize created utter fear and confusion and as the entire community was punished irrespective of who were the actual participants in the attack, as a result people started blaming each other. There



was distrust and insecurity within the community. It soon became pervasive over people's articulation and expressions, at least in public telling of the story. Thus, when I collected the narratives of Kure Chambyo, it was more of undoing the event rather than of re-calling and re-telling the event and their experiences. The stories people were sharing were more of expressions and comments used as disclaimer and disowning their personal involvement. Each informant expressed uneasiness initially in sharing their stories. Many asked me if I was sent by the government (*Surkara*) to enquire with them? What will the government do with it? Especially the older people, they always had their own set of queries before sharing their stories. It is difficult to ascertain that despite one's best efforts how much did they actually share?

These experiences directed me to ask a newer set of questions. Therefore, I started studying and analysing the narratives and the narrations itself rather than looking only at the event and its facts. It is only after this exercise that various layers of meanings emerged. It also broadened the scope of sources of information which otherwise was hidden behind various contingents of meanings.

The Kure Chambyo narratives, thus, has two supra contexts or premises of meanings within which the primary context narratives Kure Chambyo is formed (See figure 1). While the primary context is the entire event of Kure Chambyo including the event narrative and post-events narratives for at least another decade. These narratives were directly related to Kure Chambyo. These primary narratives are actually a byproduct of a unique cognitive consolidation of two Supra Contexts- the internal context and the external context. These two contexts either delimited or provided scopes for interpretations and articulations depending on the from which Supra Context the informant is speaking from, or which context is more dominant.

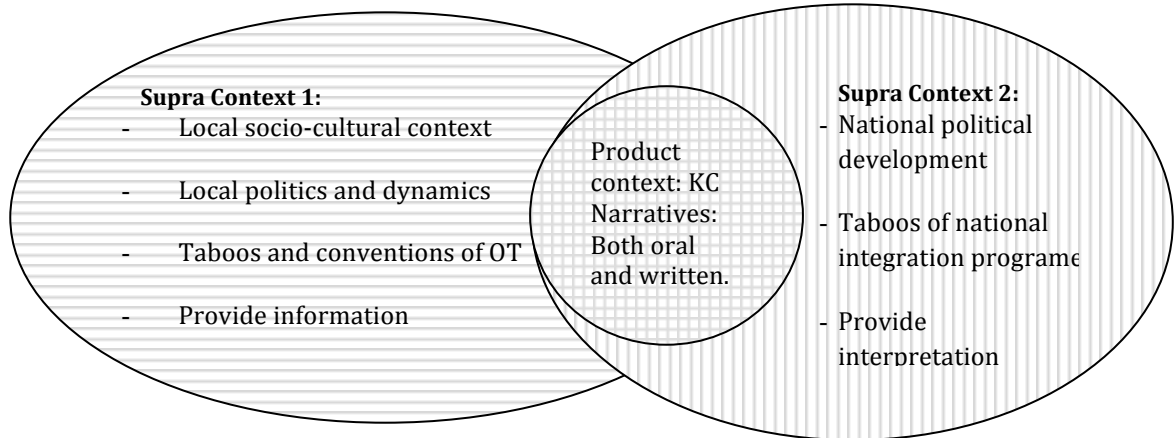


Figure 1. Narrative premise or context diagram of Kure Chambyo in public domain

The Expert narratives: **The Supra Context 1** is the socio-cultural context within which the event took place. The informants had their own specific relation, position and interests in the community and in the event specifically. Their perspective is very much shaped by their location within the community and thus their narrative are about the associated events and various internal conflicts and dynamics that culminated the event. Another important aspect that dominated the articulation and amount of information sharing was the traditional taboos, conventions and beliefs of oral traditions (OT). The Tanii oral tradition conventions do not allow public or careless narration of stories of conflict or any violent events. If one does, then one has to follow the conventions which requires one to tell the complete story which tells the story of a ‘happy ending’ where no party is left grudging or the ones which is in line with the public/customary opinion of justice. Such system requires one to have the complete knowledge of the story. If not, then the story is yet not ready for public, formal or commonplace narration. Or they are left for its gradual demise and waning. Here the meaning, interpretations and information are drawn from social and traditional contexts.

Thus, the narrators are very much concerned and careful about their alignment or ‘correctness’ with ‘dominant’ narratives. It is for the same reason that not everybody would like to talk comfortably about the event and rather suggest to speak to so and so expert or knowledgeable people in the village, someone who is well versed on *Tanii Miji* and *Migung*. Most of these experts are either the village priests or the Gaon Bura or both. They are well experienced in public speaking and hence, are also burdened with the responsibility of speaking what is ‘good’ and ‘right’ over what is the truth (in certain cases). They speak with authority and show their dexterity in the extent of their knowledge they have. Yet they would speak with a disclaimer: ‘This is what I have heard from my elders and father, you may go speak with others (they would provide the names) as well to see if I am wrong or if they have something more to add before taking it as the whole story’. As they might have told the story several times, their narratives are clear and organized, and well bound by traditional conventions. They would not speak on problematic questions, especially involving deaths, ‘*Si arr agung kuke, yachu giiri kuke, simi luku make*’ (This is evil talks and involves evil spirits called *Yachu*, this is no more spoken off). The belief being that discussion of such matters are often directed by the *Yachu* spirit which re-invokes the ill feelings among the people/relatives who might have well forgotten the matter or are not aware of it. There is also a danger of misinterpretation which would ultimately cause the speakers various troubles. Many feared being misquoted hence they either did not want to talk about certain aspects or would tell me not to mention it in my writings, despite it being recorded.

Taniis believe that talking about dead people, especially those who met with violent or unnatural death and had turned into an *Igii* (evil), attract their attentions to themselves. In two separate cases two of my informant turned hostile after speaking for an extent on the subject. They said they had started seeing nightmares and dead people in their dreams after talking with me. While this could be because of their memory recollection exercise during the

narrations but they felt very vulnerable and I had to stop immediately. Nevertheless, these conventions do have several tacit effects on the narrations. The narratives of Kure Chambyo thus has been influenced, delimited and interpreted by these traditional cultural contexts.

**The Supra Context 2**, is the larger and broader socio-political process such as the influences of national consolidation processes in post independence period launched in the entire country. The region of North East and particularly this region which was then known as North East Frontier Tract and then later renamed as North East Frontier Agency drew special attention due to its unique territorial and strategic location. The rapid expansion and military and administrative consolidation was the main modus operandi of the government in the region, this was despite the constant caution to not to alarm China. Any form of resistance against Indian nation-state presented in other Northeastern region would be detrimental to India's interest in the region. Gaining people's trust and loyalty was the principal objective of the national integration policy in the state. As a result after military occupation of the region several trust building and allegiance building activities were organized with a very clear streak of Hinduizing mission in the state. Tanii valley was no different. In fact because of the Kure Chambyo the fear and terror among the local towards the *Halyang* made the process of consolidation much easier. The people could see their valley and following generation of Tanii getting overhauled and transformed in line with '*Halyang* ways'. The coming of *Halyang* brought changes both visual and spatial as well as at experiential level. The construction of concrete buildings, roads, airfield and aircrafts, clothing of body, shaming of their own way living, medical facilities, schooling of children, benevolence of VIP who would organize pompous ceremonies for gift distribution in public, young girls grouped to perform 'cultural' dance before them, new weaving methods, newer languages, etc., for most of the Tanii living in 1950s what they witnessed were beyond their imagination. It is difficult to say if they were actually impressed by these

changes or they had just accepted it as their fate, they just decided to not speak about the past.

Few photographs I came across in the Information and Public Relation office at Naharlagun provides very vivid and interesting occasion of seeing the process of socializations and disciplining that was happening in the valley. Most of these photos were taken by official photographer to capture the visits of important VIP visits, to mark important occasions such as opening of roads, inauguration of a water tank in certain village, or to record the expeditions carried out in remote areas. However, unwittingly they vividly captured and demonstrated the mental, emotional, physical, social and power distance.<sup>69</sup> People huddled and seated on grounds while officials sitting on elevated platforms, young girls uncomfortably dancing with their heads and face to ground, an opening ceremony of a bathing ghat where, to demonstrate to officials and their families and children, young boys and girls were being bathed naked, an old woman standing clasping her hands and eyes to the ground again, the local political agents instructing the crowd, or *Kupe Tanyang* showing picture of Radhakrisnan to children on children's day. The texts alone- oral or written, do not speak enough.

In all the formal narratives about the Kure Chambyo and in discourses about the *Halyang*, the *Halyang* or the officials, were actively protected from any accusation. In fact there will be explanations to prove their innocence or justness in doing what they did. The narrations would mostly focus on blaming the locals themselves, and their ignorance and arrogance, for having caused the conflict and the sufferings in post Kure Chambyo. Gaon Buras and Kotokis were accused of taking bribes and manipulating relations between the common people and the *Halyang* officers. As a result the entire Kure

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<sup>69</sup> Some photos were still non-understandable as what had been the purpose of taking those photos, for instance a couple were sitting in intimate embrace. Those photos clearly demonstrate that they were staged and taken in a private space.

Chambyo episode became an internal community affair and thus denied a space in its historical narratives. The narratives thus reduced the event as a comical event where an army of overzealous people with their primitive weapons made an attack on well guarded army base with modern weapons. Then the narrative further tells about the cowardice and hasty retreat, the ‘punishment’ by the government, and corrupt local government agents like Kotokis, Gaon Buras, Surdars, etc., the peace negotiations, the story would end praising prosperity and modernity introduced by the *Halyangs*.

Therefore, there is a clear incoherence and irony in the narratives of the Kure Chambyo as it exists in the community. While the more formal narratives about the Kure Chambyo narrated by the ‘experts’ condemns Taniis themselves for causing the Kure Chambyo and praises *Halyang* for their justness, yet a more private and informal conversation about the event brings out more uncomfortable truths about the atrocities committed by the *Halyang*. Thus the history of Kure Chambyo suffers from both side- First, almost non-existent written record about the event in official documents or in other literatures, and Secondly non-telling (or telling in a way that distorts it) of the event in local narratives. However, it is not to say that people are not aware of the event. Especially among the elderly members of the communities both male and female, the memories and the experience and the stories they heard from their elders are still fresh and vivid. It is just that this story is not part of common conversation and there has been no effort of commemorating it. It is for this reason that unlike other oral texts or narratives in oral tradition among Tanii, there are diversions, variations, incoherencies and differences in Kure Chambyo narratives. And inversely, it is these variations that keep the narrative a volatile subject which is considered better not to be discussed in public space for any debate or discourse- which is otherwise the hallmark of oral communities. Thus, there was a systematic filtering by an invisible

processor that churns out formal and traditional oral narratives which can be safely told and re-told in public.

### **7.3. Narrative themes: The context as the cause and commemoration**

Commemoration is a powerful tool where the entire community takes part in preserving an event through an act of active remembering. These stories or narratives are then told and retold several times till it becomes a formula narrative. What goes unnoticed is an invisible process that simultaneously does the filtering and weaving of a story out of memories. Here facts and stories are embedded and formally structured in a way that there are less or lesser possibilities of internal variations or contradictions in the narratives and interpretations over the time. Stuart Blackburn (2008) was impressed by this precision and repetition of names of people without any contradiction and calls it as an act of commemoration of the event by the people. He also sees it as an act of defiance against what had been done to them by commemorating them in their oral stories.

In the narratives of Kure Chambyo three distinct content themes emerged. All informers could account the precise names of people and their ensuing feuds and event with remarkable uniformity.

**7.3.1. The event narratives.** The most prominent theme that every one spoke about was the descriptions about the actual event of *Kure* attack. While there were only four persons who had the first hand account of the attack (see oral histories in Chapter Four), most of the other informants spoke from what they heard from others about the actual event. The descriptions given by the

secondary informants were mostly about how Taniis went down to attack at the outpost, the spearing of an army man on his neck, then the retaliatory gun fires killing three Taniis on the spot, and then the abrupt retreat by Taniis. The three people who were killed- Tasso Pilya, Tasso Kojee and Duyu Koyang, were named by every informant. There were few variations regarding the spearing of the army man. Some said it was a *Sepoy* or a guard while some said it was an officer but everyone knew and described that he survived because the spear went in between the skin and the bronchi. The point reiterated is that Taniis did not kill any *Halyang* but three Taniis were killed. And immediately next sentence (as if to rectify what was said) is added saying that it was the Tanii who initiated the attack. This retreating and back-and-forth balancing statements visibly happened with every informant.

Another important component of these narrative was the self-mockery and humor as Stuart Blackburn (2003) also points out. The humour in narratives are used sometimes for the sake of adding humour and sometimes to hide the obvious painful emotions. In case of Kure Chambyo narrative the humor is added in form of mockery against the people who went for the attack with their simple preparations against the military army with modern sophisticated weapons. Such mockery could emerge only in retrospection knowing the inevitability of the defeat after considering actually how ill prepared and ill witted were the Tanii attackers. The war preparations not only consisted of gathering people and preparing their bows and arrows but also several tedious performances of rituals and taboos to appease spirits to render enemy weapons ineffective. Stuart Blackburn (2003:na) notes an anecdotes recounted to him, ‘If they use fire-power we will use water on our bodies’. The story that Taniis thought the guns carried by army men were wooden sticks, how most of the men who joined the attack were not warriors but merely interested in the loot and told their children that they are going to bring utensils that make ‘*tlang-tlang*’ sound, how the party got delayed because of their over careful rituals and hence instead of night they went down in daybreak, and that instead of



making quite and sudden attack they ran down making war call ‘Ho! Ho!’ and how like cowards everybody retreated on first retaliatory firing. The entire event, thus, actually gets narrated like a comical episode.

Despite the dominant self-mocking elements in this narrative of attack, the tone would suddenly change as the names people who were killed were taken by male and female narrators. People remember their death with pain and sense of loss. This is a clear act of commemoration where without actually articulating it as such people have marked their stories with the violence and act of injustice where their fellow Tanii were killed. In these articulations the dead people are never presented as rebellious or a foolish people which is otherwise a common expression used for the whole group who went for the attack. All three names Duyu Koyang, Tasso Pilya and Tasso Kojee who were killed at Kure, Hage Dolley who was killed before the Hari burning are named by each speaker without missing. Another name that figures along with above three names was that of the Dusu Riku, who speared the army man on the neck. What was more tragic for people narrating the story was the fact that none of their dead bodies could be brought back for proper burial. Their bodies were thrown away or buried by Sepoys. Only Duyu Koyang’s body could be brought back after a year. His family had performed a ritual called ‘*Byu Ganii*’, where a human figure made of ‘*Kiira*’ leaves were used to represent the dead person and kept aside to host the dead person’s soul till his or her body is recovered and given a proper burial. His family had paid a *Maji* (see Glossary) to their Nyishi friend from Talo area to search for the body.

However, one thing that is very clear is that the attack was carried out in full seriousness. It is possible that they underestimated the strength and capability of the army and overestimated their own strength. There was only four informants who actually admitted to have joined the attack and one woman who was present at the Kure Outpost at the time of the attack (See Chapter

Four for oral histories). Careful listening of these self-mockery narratives show that they are not about ‘self’ but about people in past. To Stuart Blackburn what seems like a homogenous group of people who are talking about themselves are actually talking about the ‘other’ within the community. And there is a clear distancing from this projected ‘other’, who committed a rebellion, a mistake, a crime against the country. These mockeries always carried the damage controlling intention to not antagonize with the government. The stories always followed damage controlling explanations praising government for bringing all goddesses of development, law and order, and rationalistic governance and education.

These event narratives are value-laden narratives that should be read within and in relation to the larger political context in which they are situated. As a result the narratives of this event is rarely spoken about and even when it is done, it is done with great deal of care and hedged in with disclaimers.

**7.3.2. *The causal narratives.*** The second theme in the narratives that emerged is about the responsible individuals and events that lead to the event. In every narrative of the Kure Chambyo or *Tanii-Halyang Chambyo* the main causes were attributed to few private feuds between some influential and rich members in the villages, particularly in Hari and Hangu village. The following excerpt is taken from the interview with Late Nani Tabing,. He was considered as one of the most regarded priest and an expert in *Miji* and *Migung* oral traditions of Tanii:

In each of the villages there were separate feuds going on. In Kalung, a village section of Reru-Tajang, the feud was between Nako Gyati and Koj Khoda (of Duta village). Latter had some debt to pay to former. In order to recover his debt Nako Gyati captured Koj Khoda, and took ten mithuns for his release. However, Nako Gyati was afraid that Koj Khoda might ally with *Halyang* to take his revenge. Then, in another case Subu Delyang’s sister Yadii was married to Hage Tagang (of Hari

village) in child marriage but Hage Tagang refused to take her as wife and sent her back as he wanted to marry Tasso Murtii's daughter Yalyo. Subu Khoda to avenge this humiliation captured Tasso Murtii who had to pay ten mithun as ransom. Now Subu Khoda feared that Tasso Murtii might report it to Halyang. These are the two Kalung cases.

Then in Hari village, the *Bienii Talo* (Tibetan brass plate) of Kago Gyati of Hangu village was missing. In meantime one day Nending Tami (of Hangu village) was returning back to his village after his visit to Hari village. He was suddenly called back by Tasso Tallu. Tallu asked him to see if there will be any buyer for *Bienii Talo* in Hangu village? Tami said *Missang* (Nyishi) are looking for one and asked whose is it? Tallu told him it is Dani Pilya's. So on a set day Tasso Tallu was taking the *Talo* to Nending Tami's house for sale. However, one Hage Pillang saw Tasso Tallu carrying that *Talo* so he informed Kago Gyati to quickly collect people to ambush him. Thus, at Takhe Pudu, they blocked him on his way and took back the *Talo*.

But later, Taku Kiime, Kago Gyati's relative, suspected that Dani Pilya's was the actual culprit who stole the *Talo* as Tasso Tallu took his name, captured his daughter Dani Yager. Pilya clarified his innocence before Tasso Tallu. So Tasso Tallu captured Taku Kiime from *Supyu Sukung* and took him to *Tanyang Yangang* as captive. Taku Kiime paid sixty mithuns for his release. Now since Kiime was Kago Gyati's relative who was friend with Halyang, Tasso Tallu began fearing Halyang and turned against them.

At Hangu village, my relative Kago Dempyo-Tunu's daughter Nadii, also known as Pane, was married to Tapi Kojing's son Tapi Jorang. But Punyo Kojing started an affair with her, so she went with Kojing's house. This was a humiliation for Tapi Kojing and he wanted the Chie (fine imposed as compensation for humiliation). But Kago Dempyo-Tunu went to Halyang for help and Halyang said to let Pane stay where she wants. So, Tapi Kojing became the fourth person who turned against the Halyang. They are the one who started the instigation to attack on Kure. (interviewed on 28.04.2015, Biila village)

All the speakers believed that the main cause behind the attack was recklessness, arrogance and stubbornness of few rich people and past

traditional practices such as the capturing of people to coerce ransom money. Some saw class conflicts in it. They said the entire matter was caused due class interests of the few rich and powerful people. They ruled the villages and did whatever they wanted to do and hence, they were unhappy with the coming of the Halyangs. On the other hand others argued that sometimes many people who did not want to pay their debts, or whenever they had some personal issues against somebody they would go to Halyang and put false cases. They would use their connections and enticements to get favorable judgment. In the case of Tasso Tallu and Taku Kiime, Taku Kiime went to administrators and brought Sepoys to arrest Tasso Tallu and his house was allegedly destroyed. Similarly in cases of Nako Gyati and Subu Delyang their houses were brought down too. In case of Tapi Kojing, the Halyang was involved who blocked any exchange between the quarrelling parties. Tapi Kojin and his relatives were left completely distraught and felt public humiliation in one hand and on the other hand felt injustice being done on them against the customary laws.

Then there were other aspects which are not emphasized in common commemorated narratives. Few informants, especially women, when asked shared that people in general were not happy with the coming of outsider into their valley. For ages Taniis had fought many battles against different group of people to preserve their land. They feared that outsiders would take over their valley. Halyangs, who they initially thought had just come to see their place and would eventually go back, continued living and lead several uneasy developments such as use of army men and unusual power concentration that challenged and interfered with traditional systems and norms. People were agitated in general against the Halyang. Ever since the coming of Halyang they had been interfering in the matters and feuds which Taniis considered as very personal matter. Also, the creation of government agents among the locals who started assuming control over the people had started creating new

power dynamics within the valley. Kupe Tanyang, a Nyishi man, was appointed as the Head Gaon Bura, many Tanii found this unacceptable.

Another set of narratives spoke about the unhappiness among the Taniis due to forceful portage imposed by the outsiders. According to Stuart Blackburn (2003:na) this was the main cause of disgruntle among the Taniis. He cites Haimendorf's account where he arrested two rich and important Tanii men and kept them as ransom to force people to provide porters. In Haimendorf's second edition of the book, not only he changed the title of the book from 'Himalayan Barbary' (1955) to 'Himalayan Adventure: Early travels in North East India' (1983) but also removed this particular section (page 111-113). Unlike the glossy picture drawn by Haimendorf between him (the administrators) and the locals, Ursula Graham Bower in her 'The Hidden Land' (1953) is more frank where she mentions about the troubled relations which was growing more difficult because of the local politics and roles played by locals agents appointed by administration.

While there are others who talks about it with some distaste- '*Ah...Nyim piigo pasu keh*' meaning 'Ah...Its all for women's cause'. In their narratives Kago Dempyo and her daughter Pane, Subu Yadii and Tasso Yalyo became the archetype of evils (*Yachu*) because of whom the matter got blown out of proportion and the whole valley was drawn into the conflict.

### **7.3.3. Women's Narratives:**

Narratives presented by women do not deviate distinctively from the formats presented by men but there were definite set of details, information, perceptions, tones and nuances to stories that makes their narratives little different and even more organic. They opened up other domains of experiences and meanings which were otherwise not of concern male

narratives and hence never get recorded when only men were asked to tell stories or histories. An excerpt from interview with Tage Dumi:

When we were working in fields we used to hear this saying by Kago Dempyo: ‘*Asan lyenke yambi bimbyo ho lyecho pere acha dato nii, Aha lyanko ho aha biimpyo lyecho pere alo dato nii.*’

(Translation: I threw a bell towards *Asang Yambi* and a bell down to *Aha Lyanko*, I got what I desired. *Lyecho* is a small bell worn by small girls on her waist, here it signifies ‘a girl’.)

I used to wonder what does that mean? Then we heard the story that Dempyo’s daughter Pane was married to Tapi village but she did not want to go there. But when Tapi people started demanding their daughter-in-law, the mother got so distressed, her child was refusing the marriage and her in-laws were asking for her. So she ran all over the village to get help to resolve the issue in her favour. That is what the saying was about that she got what she desired by seeking help from upper villages and down from Kure. I thought, my goodness... what a strong woman, what a brave mother. Now we heard the daughter was not sent to Tapi but to where she wanted to go and Tapi man married another woman. This story is also known as the story of Dempfer Lyecho. (Tage Dumi interviewed on 28.12.2014)

Another narrative by another women reveals more details of negotiation that took place between Kago Tunu (Dempyo’s husband) who was also a wealthy and influential man, and Tapi Kojing to annul the marriage where the offers were made by girl’s side. But Tapi Kojin was so aggrieved and adamant that he refused any price and demanded the *Chie* (price or compensation for humiliation) or entry into *Yalu Lisu* (see Glossary). Seeing the possible defeat of her husband Dempyo who was also a good orator went to Kure and narrated the story in a manner that brought government’s favor. These narratives do not necessarily glorify women but places women in a more central position where she is the main protagonist, unlike in the narratives by men.

#### 7.4. The Narratives of Oppression

The third theme of narratives was about the period of oppressions carried out as punishments. It started with the burning of entire Hari village in June 1949, arresting and killing of people, and continued as late as 1953 when forced portage was imposed on each household for the Mara Expedition against the Tagin community in Daporijo area. The narratives described of unspeakable terror that people lived in and expressed in as '*Saping sako lakuma*' (suffocating), '*Tagyang henter*' (as frightening as attack by wasp), and many said they never thought there will be days like today.

The two main sources of terror that generated mass hysteria among the people- first, the burning of the Hari village. It had a desired effect on people's mind. The whole valley witnessed the burning down helplessly as the army guarded the entire area. Men, women, children and elderly ran for their life while their entire belongings were gushed down by fire. More than this, the entire Hari population had to take shelter in jungle and then to their relations across the villages. Their plight had generated both sympathy as well as apathy and fear. Hari was more and more seen as the people who were targeted by Halyang for their alleged leading role in the attack. As a result their involvement and consequent suppressions got more attention even in the narratives. Now all other villagers feared the similar fate and thus they became more earnest in reaching settlement with the Halyang. Now this is a very different process of allegiance to a nation state, it was an imposed surrendering under the looming threat of death (as people understood it) with a faintest idea of what is a country and a nation state is about. Their only and direct interaction was the military and political face represented by the outpost and a group of outsiders who belongs to plains. Now had completely defeated and were dominating their sovereign autonomy.

The second source of panic among the people was due to the man-hunt that was immediately followed after to arrest persons involved in the attack, which means virtually the whole valley except for two village groups (Hiija and Biila) were the suspect. The main targets were the village priests who were alleged for having performed the village rituals before the attacks and the main instigators who held the meetings in *Lapangs* (see Glossary) to call for the attack, but random arrests were carried out against whosoever were pointed by anybody. Nobody could trust each other for their names would be taken out. There was a complete deadlock. All the intercourses between villages were stopped. Nobody could work in fields or forest, especially the Hari people who were not allowed to return to their village.

Finally, as everybody said that it was Kupe Tanyang, the Nyishi Kotoki, who broke the deadlock and opened a space for ‘negotiation’ (also see Oral History 3 in Chapter Four). All Taniis felt the relief as it meant no more village burning, killing or hunt for people. However, the negotiation set in motion another set of issues. While the man-hunt for the culprits continued, the entire valley was asked to pay for fine in form of free labour and accept complete authority of the government and its agents. While several wealthy men who were part in the attack were made to pay heavy fine in form of mithuns and other materials, the poorer ones had to continue absconding. Hage Bath (interviewed on 10.03.2015) who had joined the attack was constantly on run in jungles, avoiding people as they might turn him over to army men. Finally, he could take this living in constant fear anymore, he said he felt his life was no better than an animal. So, he decided that it is better for him to pay ten mithuns to save his life. He recalls, as everybody were paying, the mithuns were lined-up from Hari village to till the Jiro hill.

This was an opportunity for many to take out their grunt against somebody and give their names out to the agents. While many formed good terms with



Halyang and got themselves appointed as agents and managed to acquire wealth out of fines and bribes paid by people. The people who get arrested were again made to pay fine for their release. Many said people like Millo Pussang and Padi Lalyang became one of the wealthiest among Tanii out of this money.

One of the deepest and common memories shared by most of the women was about the Sepoys entering their houses and taking away their fowls, eggs and sometimes the pigs they were rearing. Tadu Yaka recalled:

Those Sipai would just enter any house, check for eggs in our baskets. They killed our chickens one by one. They would touch the chicken head with their stick and it would die and fall. Touch and it falls, touch and it falls. One day a Sipai came and tried to catch a hen sitting over its chicks in a basket. She flew and jumped inside the opening on the bamboo floor. The Sipai followed and tried to jump in there. I could not watch it so I pulled back his arm and gave out two eggs from basket to him. As I did not know their language. He smiled wryly, took it and went away. (interviewed on 23.03.2015, Mudang Tage village)

People witnessed series of unprecedented violence in their village by outsiders who now ruled their valley. Tadu Yayi and his wife Tadu Yaka spoke about the arrest of Tasso Talu:

As Sepoys were searching for Tasso Tallu, Ya Pai (Tasso Talu's brother) was caught, tied and handed over to Sepoys by his villagers in place of Talu. The Sepoys had surrounded and beaten him so badly to his death and left him there. The whole society mourned his death. (After a long pause) Later Talu was also arrested. He was running and hiding in the bamboo gardens. He was cruelly beaten. He used to scream Ayaa! Ayaa! We could hear him from where we were working (soil cutting at Ziro). Then, two sisters of Gyati Kano, Apii and Olang took shelter in our village after their village was burned. Once they went to check water flow in their fields when they were suddenly arrested. They were taken by Halyang to pound and husk their rice. They were kept for one or two months. Ah that Halyang harassment were terrible. Could not stay at home, kept running. (interviewed on 05.06.2013, Mudang Tage village)

Though not many but few admitted when asked about the sexual harassment and rape of women committed by the army men. They spoke about helplessly witnessing or hearing about how army men would chase womans working in their garden or on their way to fields and raping them. Nobody could dare to stop or say anything to them.

Another set of narratives spoke about their memories of losing their land. The conversion of their dry gardens into airfields, rice fields were filled up to construct roads and taking over of the entire Jiro hills and construction of buildings there shared by everyone. Taniis are very deeply attached to their land, as an intense agriculturist, the cultivable land is highly valued.

Therefore, losing their land to Halyang was very painful for many. For many those were the only piece of land they had. Older men and women had vivid memories of the landscape where they were growing up and felt disturbed by the drastic changes that had taken place. They talked about giant and old pine tree standing in Jiro Papii, casting shadows on rice fields when they used to work. All were cut down and land was leveled for the airfield. They remembered that Jiro hill was much taller and that there were giant rocks, all were broken down and they were forced to work in there to cut the land. However, as if there is a narrative format, their stories would end with swift closure with praises for all the good things and welfare that Halyangs/government had brought.

These dramatic changes in the narratives was common to all informants. However, what is important to note is that in all these narratives none had ever spoken against the government or the authority. They are presented as local and internal business as if it had nothing to do with the government or administrators. The entire blame went the local Kotokis, Gaon Buras and others.

The repercussions of the conflict was being borne by the entire community. The Political Officer advised by the Kotoki Kupe Tanyang deemed it better to punish the entire community for two objects first to crush and ensure any such possibility of resistance in future and secondly, to put pressure on people to give the names of the main culprit. This led to the naming and blaming to wash away their own hand. This had very good effect on people as the culprits were immediately identified and in some cases they were handed over by the villagers themselves. 'Nako Gyati, was captured from Yanchi forest, he was captured and handed over by the relatives of the people who were killed by Halyang to avenge the death of their relatives. At night there were two gunshots we heard, after which it was handed over to Military.' Recalled Late Nani Tabing. Everyone was a suspect. And by involving insider as the informers the whole community was divided and lived in distrust. There was a constant hunt for people who were involved in the attack and whosoever was pointed out were arrested and were compelled to give other's names. Heavy fines were imposed for their release. Those who acted loyal to the government were immediately appointed as Gaon Bura or Sardar. People started living in constant fear as many recalled those days as '*Tagyang henter*' ('as fearful as bee') and '*Saping Sako ko ter nyima*' (suffocating).

## **7.5. Disappearance of the Resistance**

*'May I not see nightmares (Siiyo tere ema yama), Tasso Pai was taken in Tage Lapang, tied and taken to Halyang by Tanii's themselves. They could not bear it anymore. They were too scared. In those days they feared the Halyang the more than anything. But in reality Halyang were just trying to make friend with them to teach them good and better things.'* (Rade Rambo interviewed on 05.09.2014, Tajang Village).

The stories of resistance and resisters gradually disappeared. Tasso Pai, Tasso Talu, Subu Khoda and Gyati Nako were handed over to the army. Random raids and arrests just at the whims of someone who had connections with Halyang and their agents was too much to bear. This was an act not to show allegiance but a sacrifice that was made for larger security of the society. So that many other names are kept safe and the constant terror that was in the villages could end. People wanted to go back to normalcy. In the process the community got divided. As the 'main culprits' were being identified and handed over to the army, the rest of the villagers were gradually trying to distance themselves from the event and the idea of doing anything against the government. Now they wanted to come clean and clear their names. It was this process and fear of not antagonizing against the government that conversely produced the allegiance and dependence.

Gradually all those people who took part in the resistance camouflaged themselves. The larger administrative and developmental processes and transformations that took place over the years overwhelmed their resistance and dissidence. As a result people started avoiding talking about the conflict or admitting their involvement in it.

Nevertheless, those years of oppression and fear had left deep scars in people's memory. The elders who were interviewed were suspicious. They asked me if I was sent by the government? They were skeptical and uncomfortable, at least initially, about talking about the event and its aftermath. Even the younger ones, those who were young during the time, would always start with their disclaimers stating 'this is what our elders had told us' and 'you may talk to others as well before ascertaining on any conclusion'.

Most of my informants were in their old age who still maintain their traditional beliefs and follow traditional norms of oral recitation or narration. In at least two cases they turned hostile and refused to talk further about the subject saying it an '*Arr Agung*' or '*Yachu Agung*' meaning talks which invokes evil and malevolent spirits. Both mentioned the nightmares of dead people they had started seeing after our talk. I had to immediately discontinue any further discussion on the subject. Another informant later shared about his initial reluctance to speak because he had an experience where his words were misconstrued and misinterpreted by somebody with whom he share the story. It had caused misunderstanding between him and his neighbor.

As nobody were willing admit their participation in the event and no one was willing to name anyone, the names started disappearing. In the process the narratives of Kure Chambyo went through a transformative filtering process. The narrative of Kure Chambyo is thus actually not about bravery and self-righteous nationalist, seldom they glorify this first ever attempted resistance against Halyang. It does not talk about the situations that compelled the entire valley (not just few influential people) to rise in resistance; it does not talk about the solidarity, a systematic processes, meetings and planning and preparations that went for the attack. I could not get any coherent or detailed stories regarding these processed which could show that the Kure attack was not just a spontaneous military action out of no where. But the narratives of Kure Chambyo is about an inevitably futile attempt carried out by few arrogant rich men who misguided the entire villages. The narratives have instead comical details making the entire episode look like a dumb play meant for amusement.

### **7.6. Seeing agency in Tropes and Rhetoric of Private Domain**

As discussed above the narrative and the act of narration are actually by-product of a complex cognitive synthesis process which is influenced by

external socio-political factors. This creates an inherent distance between the experience and their narration, there is a process of experiencing something and internalizing that experience cognitively, and then their articulation. The distance is more when the narration takes place in different socio-political environment and at a different time frame. As a result there is so much undoing of the experience and their narratives either by their telling and non-telling.

The post- Kure Chambyo period saw the suppression of any form and possibility of dissent. Beyond the outwardly transformation of the landscape and external realities, the entire imagination, belief, worldview and the experiencing, the local and unique ideology of the people was overturned and itransformed even in internal psychology of the people. Such transformations became visible even in people's narrative which went through internal transformation. Therefore, there are several contradiction in the narratives, their approach and perspective. The telling and re-telling by people who did not have the first hand experiences and who had various other factors influencing their narrations, there was a distance in their narration. While those, very old speakers, who had witnessed and have lived experience of the entire event period had become melancholic and disinterested about the event. The hegemonic power relations had subverted or obliterated<sup>70</sup> the narratives even inside the speakers self-consciousness.

It is at this juncture that Oral History as a method provides a giant leap of agency to individual's unique lived experiences and expressions. To take them away and out of their set script it takes more deeper probing, trust building and diverse set of respondents to give an understanding on the layers of meanings and memories and their telling/recollecting. These meanings exist in

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<sup>70</sup>'Obliviate' refers to the reduction of something to oblivion leading to its disappearance or non-existence.

more private domain, more personal experiences and nuanced telling and interpretation which are shared among the trusted people, the subalterns, the subjugated, disempowered or their own people. These private domains narratives contain criticism, stories, anecdotes, jokes, gossips, rumours, etc., and more importantly the speakers opinions. Unlike in the case where people spoke about the formula or scripted narratives which are so concerned about the invisible audience, the private domain conversations and narratives are rich with emotions, views, judgement and even biases. Nevertheless, a reality from a tangible experience.

Despite the slippery grounds of subjective interpretations of these private domain discourses, they are also an important source of information which are otherwise not present in the 'formula' narratives of the event. They provide the meanings to the history of people who were rendered subjugated and became underdogs within the new system. It is by digging out these accounts of people's feelings, sentiments and perspectives that one can bring the people's history to the fore. The history they feel they were part of or the history they feel they experienced. It is this way that one can compete or challenge what the dominant history is trying to tell or impress upon. Official documents are created to create their own narratives to make the conflict understandable (read- to delegitimize the resistance) and their own actions as legitimate.

### **7.7. The Narrative Tropes**

The experience or history when becomes unspeakable they become metaphors and myths that captures the essence of that particular phenomena. Under the fearful environment of distrust and violence, the oral community like Tanii who lives in their tightly packed villages surrounded by their kin, friends and family could not speak out and share about their stories or mourn their loss

openly. Their lived experiences, their customary belief system or worldview, their memories, their way of articulation; in another word their unique socio-cultural ideology was completely defeated under a new alien rule. Their valley went through a swift transformation. New centralized authority, military systems and army of appointed local agents like Kotokis, Gaon Buras and Sordars. Schools, modern technologies, concrete buildings, markets, roads and population of non-locals brought very visual change in the landscape. Describing the colonization of their valley, an informant said '*Taru-Tarpin chikang boncha lala, byanker yaya byanker yaya neku*' (They swarmed up like ants and worms, and became thicker and thicker). And for the local agents the common expression was '*Lancha pulye giinii*' (the ones who wears red coat). For them there was no safe space to commemorate their experience.

For many this research work was for the first time that gave them the context to talk about the past in this manner. In the past they were helpless as nobody could say or do anything and there was no one or no institution left powerful enough listen or take up their case. Similarly, at present when all the officials and electoral representatives are their own people, they found no one or no institution is interested in listening to them or could relate to the past. Rather now the speakers feel detached of their past as now it is very difficult for them to articulate what would be the relevance of speaking about it. So many emotions that was real, lived by the entire community, are now denied their existence by not allowing their commemoration. Besides their articulations at present became more and more complicated. As a result their emotions were merely bolstered. When I asked many of them how do they feel about this account of Kure Chambyo being written down? Almost everyone spoke in nonchalant ways but not without expressing their divided feelings and inserting their cautionary advice about how I should go about it if I am to pursue and write about it. One narrator after the interview said, 'Hmm.. so finally instead of boys a girl has come to ask about it, where are the boys?.'



However, unlike what was spoken out or not spoken out in public spaces, which were more controlled and censored, there were always more private spaces of conversations of personal experiences and their commemorations among the people they trusted, who shared similar experiences, where the narratives of loss, tragedies and oppressions survived and even re-told when occasions came. It is at this juncture that the cause of oral history method comes to its real significance and relevance. It gives a huge leap of agency to personal experience and expressions that tell the private stories, anecdotes and jokes, which otherwise could not be present in more formal, public or 'common' narratives. For instance, there are mentions of searches being made by the administrators and their Sepoys for the main 'culprits' who were involved in the attack to take their revenge by punishing them. These accounts would mention Chiging Nyime, an elderly priest who was then considered as the most powerful priest, being arrested and later released. However, it is in the non-traditional narratives that one gets to hear that one of the identified group of people who were alleged to be participant in the attack were the village priests for performing rituals before the attack for allegedly invoking spirits who caused malfunctioning of their guns. In Tanii tradition every violent activity such as war, raid, kidnapping, etc., is carried out after the performance of certain ritual called Tamii and Khasang rituals to propitiate blessings from spirits for victory and protection. So as per the Political Jemadar suggested the village priests became one of the obvious culprits. The village priests though do not hold any personal influence or power within the social system but they hold sacred status and emotional veneration because of the traditional belief system. People were helpless and deeply humiliated when they were hunted down. Mudang Dumi:

The Sipais were searching for all the priests day and night. When Sipais enter from one door, they would slip out from the other door. Liigang ate Tabing, Tilling Ati and Mudang Lali were searched from our village. One day Ate Lali climbed on the Mipya Lapang, with his shawl hanging on one side, he was jumping (padu dukang) and crying in the *Lapang* while saying,

*'Nyo ngiika diigo-tango pa, pager bagyo-enko bago pa,*

*kali gargo-siira bago pa, ngo siiking mayli ke aa,  
ngo nii pabo pa ke a ngo siikin lyi nii'*

[Translation: I am not going to die for my personal cause, not for my food, nor for any credits or wrong doing in my works, not for my personal debts and dues, my doom has come for the cause of the people, where are they now?]

Our people went to negotiate with *Halyang* through Hiija who were in touch with them. We requested them to spare our priests and others and not to burn our villages. My father who was known for his expertise in *Miji* and *Migung* was busy day and night without sleep. Finally an agreement was made according to which all Tanii wealth and prides were extracted. Our most valuable *Majis and Tallos* were given away to buy peace and we agreed to work for them. (interviewed on 28.12.2014, Mudang Tage village)

The sense of grief which narrators expresses as hers is actually beyond her personal representation. Another story shared as a joke but point out at the rampant corruption of power relation that had emerged due to creation of various power agents. Each level of Gaon Buras charged different amount of bribes-

'In those days there was no notes like today, we had 'aathiona' (aath ana), 'sariona' (char ana), 'duiona' (do ana) and 'ek toka' (ek pesa). That Siira... we used to call him Sariona-Siira.. (laughs) because he would do our job even for Sariona poisa (laughs).' (Anonymity maintained)

The existence of such lingo, private jokes of the underdogs, subalterns and powerless, the gossips, rumours, criticism are the markers of the presence of power dominance. The power control and control over communication runs proportionately. These private speeches and narratives are about resistance against the imposition and experience of power domination. Very often even if the speakers themselves are not conscious of their narrative structure or its cognitive origin as power resistance.

The tropes apart from being embedded with the socio-cultural deixies and semantics also has becomes the vehicles of history. From being symbolic representative of an idea and belief, they also function as memory aids. Each of the Tanii oral texts, like a necklace strung with numerous beads, has numerous forms and kinds of tropes strung or embedded to them. Then each of these tropes will carry its own stories (sub-stories), meanings and linkages woven around them. The recitation of the oral texts can be done from either side, through the tropes or through the string that holds the series of tropes. For instance, during the traditional *Ayu Q&A* competition where the participants asks and challenge each others in a sing-song parables couplets. One can ask from any end of the oral literature text of a particular thread. It is a technique for the preservation of oral texts. Through such oral packaging of tropes history can be safely delivered to next generation without losing much on its signifying essence, original function and the knowledge around it.

In the narratives of the Kure Chambyo I came across four kinds of tropes which were repeated or the technique was used by narrators:

**People:** Names: Names of the persons who were killed, names of people who ‘conspired’ the attack, people who were working with Halyang, people who were arrested, etc.. Even Haimendorf and his wife Betty and Ursula Graham and her husband Timothy were immortalized through their local names as ‘Laling-Yalu’ and ‘Soping-Yaper’ respectively. These names are signifiers of what people thought about them.

**Landscape:** Visual: Description of giant pine tree ‘*Yayin Piisa*’ at *Yaying-Pu* was more dominant character in the narratives of first seeing of Hayang. Description of crackling sound, smoke and fire, when Hari was set on fire. A visual imagery of one narrator of how group of big red caterpillar was eating on the carcass of Duyu Pilya. Description of sight of military marches. Description of Papii land, level land for airfield, the concrete government quarters, etc.

**Oral:** Famous Phrases: Famous phrases by Chiging Nyime that cause the Piita Chambyo, phrases used by Kago Dempyo to describe her joy, phrases Laji, etc.. These phrases are deixises which encapsulate the entire story of the event as well as their very unique socio-cultural contexts embedded with layers of meaning.

**Material:** There are few materials such as the famous Majis and Tallos which were paid to Kupe Tanyang by Taniis in order to buy peace after the negotiation. These materials become the market of the unjust payment. And like the phrases these materials too attain their unique value and meaning from their unique socio-historical contexts.

One of the most important narrative trope that came across during every interview was about the narrative of two most important *Majis* of Taniis which were paid to Kupe Tanyang to negotiate peace with *Halyangs*.

## 7.8. Material Tropes

**7.8.1. The *Pungo-bo* and the *Laji-bo*.** Taniis place great value and importance to all the material objects which are said to be of Tibetan (*Nyime*) origin such as beads (*Tassangs*), heavy metal bangles (*Kobyang*), Tibetan prayer bells (*Maji*), brass plate used as gong (*Talo*), a sword resembling samurai sword (*Chirie Ilyo*). Though now most of these items are brought from the plains, they are identified as Halyang origin and considered as inferior. The highly valued items, considered to be of Tibetan origin were traditionally brought down through series of interlinked networks of intermediaries who brought these items from Tibetan villages. It was the presence of Tibetan origin items in the valley led many early British explorers to believe that the region was under the Tibetan suzerainty. Nevertheless, the Taniis oral stories consider many of these objects as legends with human-like names. Many of these items are considered as sacred and attributed with

mysterious legends while many's origins are no more traceable. However, some of them very interesting historical attributes which tell about pasts that are not formally recorded in the oral traditions. For instance the stories of *Myambya*, a pair of iron plates, now is present in Late Nani Tabing's house. These plates are considered as husband and wife.

It is said that at the time when Taniis first came to the valley, the valley was swampy area with giant pine trees in places. In those swamps lived a legendary creatures called Buru. They are differently described but their main appearance being big size, hairless scaly body, long tail, slow moving and harmless. However, as people started draining the valley to cultivate in the swamp area the Buru's appearance became common site. One day a young Buru was killed accidentally. The enraged mother of the Buru killed the whole family who caused the death. It is believed that it is these *Myambyas*, which went and killed all the Burus as people were too scared and unable to do anything. Ever since both the *Myambyas*, are brought out during major festivals and they are offered rice powder and rice beer. These legends in many ways are the markers and tropes of the community's unique history.

Coming to the *Majis*, the giving away of two legendary *Majis- Pungo-bo and Laji-bo*, and another two important *Majis- Pura Chopo-bo and Kartu-bo* was one of the most common thread mentioned and repeated by every interviewee apart from the names of the people who were involved in the event. Few informants could share much more details about the *Majis* and the personal experiences related to the forced exchange of the *Majis*. There are three recurring narrative themes emerged in relation to *Pungo-bo* and *Laji-bo*. One is about their origin, one is about how they came among Taniis and then how it was given away by Taniis. In other words these material/physical *Majis* has become/ is an emotional trope that traversed across the myths and timeless history to present when so many real and temporal emotions are attached to it.

In Tanii history, the first person who gained the skills of balcksmithy and hence taught the knowledge was the *Neha Loma*.

‘So it was him who made those different kinds of *Majis*- the one that make sound when you ring it, was called as *Neha Khodii* ( *Khodii* meaning sound), then he made *Piicho Khodii* which made no sound. Then he made *Niudin Diitii*, *Tiinii Diitii* in the likeness of the *Neha*’s body, therefore it was considered more valuable. Then he made their friend *Majis* like *Niilin Neha*. Then he made lesser valuable ones. Even today such categorizations are followed when evaluating a *Maji*. But now there are many *Majis* made by the *Halyangs* but the ones created by *Loma* are the one that are valued most.’ After this he very carefully taught the skill and knowledge to others as well so that the practice continues. Thus another important saying/phrase goes:

*'Abo loma mi biipa yayi bapa diike, baya yasi baya diike'* (Hage Bath, interviewed on 22.04.2015, Hari Village)

[Translation: You will throw your knowledge and talents along with *Abo Loma*. Moral : Never underestimate or do injustice to weaker person you never know how valuable they turn out to be]

Thus all the items made by him is highly valued and priced, such as *Pungo-bo* and *Laji-bo* are given human names and are even treated like humans.

According to Mudang Pai (interviewed on 23.06.2013), ‘These names were give by *Missangs* from whom these *Majis* came to us. They are named just the way we give names to our children as soon as they are born. We give names to such *Maji Ridu-bo* (important one) just like we name the ministers or MPs to show respect, because they were created by the *Loma* himself, it is not good to keep them without a name.’

According to Hage Riku:

There are several parts of a *Maji* that we look for while evaluating them like *Ripyun Ripe*, *Maku*, *Meha*, *Lidin*, *Lamii*... each are distinct. Those *Pungo-bo*, *Laji-bo* and *Chopo-bo* are considered as the most ornamented. After Kupe Tanyang took it from Tanii, *Laji-bo* was with *Missangs* of *Yankha*, then it was bought back by *Nani Tangu* but then he realized that it do not suite him so he sold it back to *Pill Bagang* in *Yajali*. There too it seems the *Maji* had caused

terrible harm to its owner hence it was sold away again. Now we do not know where it is located.

There is a very famous saying which says:

*'Panyor poro takhii soma, Pare poro piita ngarma'*

[Translation: There is no squirrel playing near the Panyor river, there is no bird laughing near the Pare river]

There used to be a very wealthy Nyishi man called Laji Tajang. He gave his infant daughter, Yam, in child marriage to someone of a very powerful Taru clan of Nyishis of another village. While she was being taken on *Mida* (a marriage ceremony where the bride is taken to groom's house) some disagreement rose regarding the bride price exchange. So during the *Mida* ceremony while everyone were holding the child to look at her, someone pierced an iron pin in her skull where it was soft and killed her. She was killed her. Laji Tajang became inconsolable and everyone heard of the story. The father sought revenge but since the Taru Missang were very powerful he himself could not do anything. But as he lost his interest in all his wealth he decided to hire and form ally to attack the Tarus. So he approached Tani villages for alliance. He said there is no peace in his heart and in the village. So, it was him who offered those most famous *Majis* to Taniis, to join him in their raid against the Taru Missang. Hearing his tragedy Tani joined the raid and that Taru clan was completely wiped away in one night raid. That is why now we do not have their offspring and lineage. However, now we hear that few of them actually managed to escape or maybe they were not in the village at the time of the raid. They joined other Missang villages and took on their clan names to hide their identity.

That is why we do not talk about such raids and conflicts anymore because how would they feel about us if they now get to know about what our forefathers had done to their community? Now we all live happily, make friends and young children studies together in schools and colleges, such histories would affect their relations. Therefore, we consider such stories better be lost. But since you asked about the *Maji's* origin I had to tell you this. But if somebody does not discuss about the entire context it is possible that these stories can be misconstrued. Therefore our elders used to warn us. So that is how we trace the coming of these *Majis* to Taniis. It is for this reason these *Majis* are considered as cursed - for so many deaths are associated to them. (interviewed on 02.01.2015, Abulyang)

Like the two *Myamyas*, these *Majis* are also believed to be living. Dulle Pubyang is the daughter of Tage Tagyung, the owner of *Pungo-bo*:

It was Tage Biitang's son Tage Riku's (grandfather) *Maji*. Both *Pungo-bo*, the small one, and *Kardu-bo*, the big one, were our *Maji*. *Pungo-bo* would come out of the ground where it was hidden on its own to sit under the sun. It would go to *Kardu-bo* through the ground and scratch it badly. It was a living thing. So when Kupe Tanyang demanded for it and for the *Kardu-bo* at first my father refused. But they again came to ask him with various offers. Tage Riku, my grandfather said to my father, 'It is a living thing, those who keeps this *Maji* gets only one child or live childless, so sell it off.' A rice field near the Gyame and two other rice fields were given. (interviewed on 03.01.2015, Bamin Michi village)

So at the time when the *Majis* were handed over, Mudang Pai adds:

So at the time when *Pungo-bo* was being given away to Tanyang, our elders sat at the *Nako Lapang* and explained to the *Maji* about the exchange being made so that they don't get angry, 'We are not selling you away, this person is asking for you. We are giving you away out of compulsion, we don't want to give you away.' (*Hii momi khiker liibi la yaso khiike-khiike liibi la aa*). He is told how valuable and important he is to us, so that he happily departs from us. If we do not do this then they would cause bad fortune for the person who is taking it or the one who is selling it.

As this *Maji* was demanded for peace price by Kupe Tanyang, the entire village pooled their money to pay for it. The owner was shown several rice fields, he chose Tage Oda Donyi's *gyambo* field in exchange. Along with the eldest brother *Pungo-bo*, *Pura Chopo-bo*, *Panyi-bo* and *Kartii-bo* the younger ones were also paid. From Kupe Tanya, Nani Tangu brought it back to Taniis, then later another Nyishi, Pill Bagang, bought it from Nani Tangu by paying sixty mithuns. But now we do not know where it is gone. (interviewed on 23.06.2013, Biirii village)

Another interesting account comes from Hage Bath:

*Pungo-bo* was exchanged for 20 mithuns and a land plot to its owner and three mithuns to the broker by the village. The owner was my close relative so I saw when it was exchanged. Its a small one, not even beautiful. Mudang Riibya and Mudang Taker from Diibo, Nada Chobing and Pura Tangu from Hiija were all the witnesses. Even Koj Kojee, son of Koj Pussang, Kago Biida and



Nada Tangu were present. But none of them knew how to read the *Maji*. Finally they called Nada Khoda, who studied the *Maji* and holding his iron pin (*ulyang kuti*) showed, 'This comes out to *pahin* (liver) and here is the entrance to *Nesu* (Granary)' and showed every details of the *Maji* one by one. No one could argue and sat quietly. There were two holes in the *Maji* of thumb size at *Jyanso*. Those who did not know how to study a *Maji* would have rejected it for those holes looked deformed but when I asked about it later I was told that those holes are mark of evil curse, therefore we fear it. But its bearings/ ornaments (*Gijju-Giime*) are remarkable for which it is so valued. Nada Khoda finally declared 'This is good!' (interviewed on 22.04.2015, Hari Village)

Radhe Rambo gave account for the exchange of *Laji-bo Maji*.

The exchange of Takung-Buttang's *Laji-bo*, took place in our house because Butang was our *Biinii*, he and his family had come to our place to take shelter as their village Hari was burned down. They brought their *Majis* along. I have not seen Tage Tagyung's *Pungo-Bo* or how *Pura Chopo-Bo* look like but the one which was exchanged in our house had lots of decorations on it. It had all its proper qualities. I saw it when it was displayed to Turu Kago (Hari) to look at. The whole Hari had to convince him, they must have paid with many Mithuns, I do not know how many as I was very young. (interviewed on 05.09.2014, Tajang Village)

It is these layering and strokes of so many stories and meaning over these *Majis* that impregnate it with so much weight and values. The latest meaning diexes being the most significant tropes that encapsulate the emotions and experiences of oppressions, injustice, sufferings, sacrifices and people's attempts to deal with the situation. While on the other hand these *Majis* by their own strength in existing, helps in sustaining and ensures the survival of these stories and histories embodied to them. And thus through the telling and re-telling and commemorating these pasts a process of interdependence is set. People weight and draw meaning to their experience and memories associating or re-viving its legends, their own history, emotions, beliefs, legends, etc. Thus these *Majis- Pungo-bo, Laji-bo, Chopo-bo* work as a perfect historical oral trope and is still serving its purpose.

## 7.9. Oral Trope

**7.9.1. *The Tanii Chambyo or Piita Chabyo or ‘Tragedy in Eden’: The context as the cause.*** Another enigma that constantly guided this research study was in determining what have been the real gradual or immediate causes that would have lead to the culmination of the event of Kure Chambyo? But more disconcerting and perplexing was the question about why so many people, the entire community, joined the attack? How all the varying and often conflicting villages came together for this one cause? It is not that there is no explanatory narratives about what events and which individuals have lead to this ultimate attack as discussed earlier in the ‘causal narrative’ section above, and their underlying problems are also discussed. It almost feels uncanny that almost everybody had such a coherent and standardized narrative. The names are pointed out almost accusatively and events are narrated as if to reach its destined plot. However, none of these narratives seems to answer my second and third question. The standard narratives seems to depict how few individuals started with their personal problems decided to get rid of Halyangs and the whole community joined them in the attack, apparently because they were misguided. I also found it problematic in the emotional incoherence in these narratives where the narrators seemed to be internally divided about in articulating what they had experienced and what they ‘think’ had happened. For me another enigma that persisted and nobody could explain was the fact that two individuals- Chiging Nyime and Koj Karu from the same Duta village, who were so closely associated with Halyang. In fact Koj Karu was one of the emissary who went down to plains to bring Haimendorf, and Chiging Nyime who was considered as the greatest Tanii priest and who was so dearly written about by both Haimendorf and Ursula had suddenly turned so bitter against Halyang that they led their village in the attack. Later they were arrested and taken to Tezpur, Chiging Nyime returned after several years and Koj Karu could never return. I kept on asking but to no avail as no one could say beyond what has already been said. But it was only at the time when I started analyzing the interviews and narratives that I came across this

narrative behavior- all narrators who are considered as proficient with Tani oral traditions such as *Miji* and *Migung*, like Mudang Pai, Nani Pugang, Hage Riku, Kago Nabing, Nending Riido, Hage Bath; almost inadvertently would talk about another conflict that took place amongst Taniis three years before the Kure Chambyo, known as Tani Chambyo (Tani conflict), or literally named as Piita Chambyo (Conflict of Birds). It was difficult to see the connection because none of the narrators pointed it out or drew any such associations.

Stuart Blackburn argues the event was culminated due to two reasons the first one being people's discontent with outsiders interfering in their internal affairs, and secondly, which according to him was the main cause, that people were unhappy with the forced portage. He cites Haimendorf where he mentions about two arrests he had made to enforce locals to provide porters (Blackburn 2003). Indeed few of my narrators (Hage Bath, Hage Tane, Tadu Yayi and Radhe Rambo) mentioned about the incidence where two wealthy Taniis were 'arrested'/captured. Narrative confirmation by several people indeed confirms that this act had a deep impact on local's attitude towards the outsider and their exercise of authority. However, what is important to note is that the Kure Chambyo took place five years after Haimendorf had there were two more Political Officers who had joined. Besides it is also difficult to accept that these small private events could catalyze the entire community to join the attack.

Unlike in the case Kure Chambyo here we have more detailed documentation of the series of events that led to the Tani Chambyo (TC). Ursula Graham Bower in her book 'The Hidden Land' records the event in her chapter 'Tragedy in Eden' that took place in March 1947. However, the actual series of smaller events had started as early as June 1946 at a more individual level between Taniis, which soon engulfed the entire valley. All this inadvertently been recorded by Ursula because of which there are some written accounts

available as well. There are various problems in her account due to her unique political location which colored her approach, understanding, experience and her access to information. It only serves in presenting her perspective and understanding of what was happening, which was further diluted by her translator's own position about the event. It is to this event that Ursula's narrative come very interesting contrast between the emic and etic narrative. The positions from where both narratives comes from and how they describes the event has bring forth multiple layers of distance between the both, thus making it more imperative to bring forth the native's or insider's voice. To her credit she was not pretentious about presenting local's view or claim to understand everything, rather than dwelling too much on interpreting the locals she described her own experience of the locals.. For instance, this conversation between her and her husband Timothy Betts, the Political Officer of Subansiri Area, after he returns back from Shillong where he met the newly elected government representatives of newly independent India with the news that his service term is not being renewed in 1948. She was reporting on the political developments in the valley:

‘Danyi Pilya of Hiiija, now dead, stole Kago Gat's (Gyut) valuable dish (*Talo*) and left it with Tasso Talu of Hari, who took it away to sell, but was detected. Kago Gat then kidnapped Danyi Pilya's son. Danyi Pilya seized Tasso Tallu. Therefore Tasso Talu, presumably after ransom, has captured Tak Kimle (Taku Kiime), who is maternal uncle of both Kago Gat and Kago Tajo.’ “Can anybody make head or tail of that?” asked Tim, after a moment of blank silence. “Presumably God and the *Buliang* (the village council) can, and the latter seem to think they'll settle it.” (p169)

But like any ethnographer she was very conscious about her unique location among a community which has not been written about. Therefore, she was very consciously and meticulously documenting the community. In early June 1946, when she heard about a possible traditional duel called *Gyambo* between two village Biila and Duta, she asked one Tanii interpreter to inform her about the event. In Ursula's words: The Apa Tanis, closely-packed as they

are in their small, highly-cultivated enclave, cannot afford the long, bloody feuds of their *Dafla* (Nyishi) neighbours; their dispute must be regulated or they would starve' (Graham, opcit. pp119) This was one of the beginning of the Tanii Chambyo (TC). On hearing the news of the duel she rushed to the valley from Kure with camera to document it. Files of war dressed and armed Duta and its allies Mudang Tage and Hari men had gathered in a designated place outside the Biila village. It was an 'extraordinary sight' but however the event turned out to be what she considered as a 'comic-opera affair' as swarm of spectators- small boys and 'Tanii nobilities' arrived to watch. Nevertheless, as Biila refused to come out of the village to fight Duta, Hari, Hangu and Mudang Tage-Bamin Michi were compelled to raggedly attack an 'unwarlike vegetable garden' turn wise to demonstrate 'look-what-I-should-do-to-you-if-you-were-only-here' then everybody dispersed (ibid.123). She thought what just happened was like a 'nursery charades' in comparison to wars she has known among the Nyishis or the Nagas. She and her companion Doctor looked at one another blankly 'And then we both burst out laughing and were very glad that it was so.' (ibid. 124).

However, it was not over but only the beginng of the main conflict that took place after she and her husband left the valley leaing the Assitant Political Officer Rajani Kanta Gogoi and Political Jemadar Kupe Tanyang as the incharge. After spending eithteen months among the Taniis and Nyishis and in the valley with which she fell in love the very moment she sat her eyes upon, her last few weeks was painful due to so much of tensions and negativity that developed against them. She devastatingly writes about the 'hidden valley' while writing about herself: 'When we climbed the valley rim for the last time I did not look back. The forest closed in behind us, shutting the alley in, shutting us out, and we walked forward through the centuries, in a thin, unkind rain, towards the alien and better present and the strangers who were our own kind.' (p 235)

Though she missed on the final event which turned around the entire alliance system in the valley and a common feeling of doing away with *Halyang* was felt by Tanii, she witnessed and recorded the events chronologically. In various oral accounts the sequence of the event was never very clear as the years were juxtaposed to single thread of the story it becomes difficult to make links between other sets of happenings which could have been the contributing factors of the event.

### **7.10. The Tanii Chambyo or Piita Chambyo:**

The narratives of Tanii Chambyo is rather broken because of several associated events and individuals hence each of the narrators had their stories in parts. What seemed like a regular feud between two individual quickly in sequence of event turned the entire valley to a mass battle ground. Even in Ursula's 'The Hidden Land' the entire associated events are spread across her book which covered the eighteen month of her stay in the valley, but one can trace the sequence in chronological and linear movement of the problem.

*The Tanii Traditional Alliance System:* To understand within which this event was culminating out, one needs to understand a unique ritual alliance system that existed between the main village groups. The village groups Hari, Biila, Hangu, Hiija and Diibo are also named differently, the naming system more in practice among the older generation and also traditional names are referred for ritualistic purposes or alliance systems are discussed. To simplify the village group system and organization:

#### 1. Village Group-Diibo (traditional name Tiin Diibo)-

Village sub-groups- Mudang-Tage, Bamin-Michi and Duta

Villages- Mudang, Tage, Bamin, Michi and Duta

Clan colonies

2. Village Group- Hiija (traditional name Diire Bya)

Village sub-group- Taru, Nending,

Villages- Taru, Kago, Nending,

Clan colonies

3. Village Group- Hari (traditional name Hiichi)

Village sub-groups- Pato, Hage

Village- Pato, Hage, Gyati, Nekar,

Clan colonies

4. Village Group- Hangu (traditional name Niichi Niitii)

Village sub-group- Niichi, Niitii, Tapi,

Villages- Kago, Tiiling, Niichi, Niitii, Tapi

Clan colonies

5. Village Group- Biila (Reru Tajang)

Village group- Reru, Tajang, Kalung, Biila

Clan colonies

Mutual trust and insecurities are often the reasons behind which relations or alliances of interdependence were formed. Such relations are nurtured through sharing in time of prosperity and caring in time of need. Taniis have formed

their own traditional friendship or ally system over the period of time. Traditionally, these five village groups had their traditional and ritual alliances, which often when needed turned into political alliance, with each other forming three groups where Hangu and Hiija were allies, Hari and Diibo were allies. However, in case of Biila, each of its Village Sub-Groups had its allies with each of the other village groups. However, apart from this ally grouping there was a ritual grouping as well which has more geographical significance, in this division Hiija and Diibo which are adjacent to each other form one ritual group, then Hari and Biila form another ritual group and then Hangu which is located in the southern part of the valley and also the largest village group form an independent ritualistic entity. So every year the annual *Myoko* festival held in the month of March, that is to mark the beginning of the cultivation season, is organized by this ritual village groups on turns and invite their allies to their villages. For instance, if the turn to host *Myoko* falls on Tiinii Diibo and Hiija, then their respective allies Hari would visit the Tiin Diibo and Hangu would visit the Hiija, while Biila villages can visit both respective allies. And during the annual procession called *P'en*, the respective village ally would host the participants. At the time of conflict between two villages, their respective ally villages play the role of spokesperson or negotiator to break the truce. However, if the conflict surmounts all possibilities of peaceful settlement then the ally become their arm force.

*The Bulliang and councils in the village:* To understand how such system functions in practice one has to understand another system or institution called Bulliang. Haimendorf and many other scholars who followed him including Tanii scholars have interpreted Bulliang as a village council which overlooks all village affairs- social, political and judicial. Haimendorf who spent good deal of time researching among the Nagas and other communities in central India, found it more convenient to explain the Tanii system of governance (if any) structurally in Naga model. As a result he was left frustrated when he could not recruit any porters through local 'friends' he made whom he thought



as village head . (Haimendorf 1955 & 1962) For Bulliang is an institution with or without any personal influence and ability, which is not very different from any other person in the village. His authority and influence lies in roles he performs as clan representative in both ritual, social and even political occasions. He derives his political authority through his role as the sacred head. While the priest performs the incantations and evokes spirits, during the important village level based ceremonies, it is the Bulliang and Gora (Spiritual representative of the clan) who has to ordain or initiate the ceremony as a clan representative. Therefore, traditionally during annual festival like *Myoko*, the host village, especially the individuals who are hosting the festival send a gift of a *Pange* bird and a squirrel along with meat and rice beer to each and every Bulliang in the valley to ascertain their goodwill. The *Pange* bird is compulsory for ally villages.

*Conflict resolution system:* Usually in chieftainship or council system there is a fixed authority or institutions who or which assumes the ultimate voice. However, in Tanii systems of judiciary or political system, it is one's sense of traditions, customs, norms, morality and public opinion that plays the most important guiding factors in day to day dealings and behavior. If there is a differences between two individuals within the clan, the family line (*Uru*) and close kin (*Halu*) elders would try to resolve the issue, with the eldest playing most important role. The village elders are considered as specially blessed by *Popi Sarmin*, god or goddess of wisdom and knowledge, such elders are often themselves referred as the *Popi Sarmin* of the village. They possess years of experience, witnessed and met numerous people, possess the entire knowledge and information of each clan member and are well versed in the clan history. Their advice often becomes the final word on the matter.

However, if the conflict arise between the two different clan member they try to deal with each other at their personal level- there are various unique and traditionally accepted methods adopted to deal with each other. Such as *Nyime*

*Lanii* (capturing of person and keeping them as prison till terms of negotiations are fixed and implemented), *Asso Punii* (mostly indulged by rich where two conflicting parties would try to recruit allies by buying them, the one with lesser number of allies accepts the defeat) and *Yalu lisunii* (voluntary destruction of one's own property to challenge the other to match the suite, the one who stands longer wins). It can go till their conflict becomes public nuisance and affects the normal functioning of the village or till a party seeks intervention from the third party for resolving the case. It is at this point that interim bodies of influential relatives, *Gondu lunii* (negotiator or advocates) are formed at village level. However, the case is still considered as the personal conflict and even at this stage the Bulliang might or might not get involved, his word could influence or might not influence the turn of the event. The entire process is actually an inbuilt opening for peace negotiation. However, if all these levels fail to bring any solution then the conflicting parties head for the mass duel called *Gyambo*, joined by their allies at designated place and day. There are two kinds of *Gyambos*- one is, as witnessed by Ursula (see above), when the other party does not accept the challenge for duel, here property outside the village of enemy is destroyed to demonstrate the aggression. The second one is when both the parties actually meet for the duel, this form of duel then known as the *Chambyo* with actual violence involved in it. Haimendorf, who witnessed one such duel between Hari and Hangu reports that while there was announcement of the duel and perceived tension was high, women and children were still going about with their work in their cultivation field. However, as soon as the first news of the casualty was heard both the parties retreated back immediately and the *Chambyo* was called off.

It is at such situation when two villages get involved in a conflict that escalates to *Gyambo* like situation where due to the alliance system more than two villages get involved, the role of Bulliang becomes prominent in forming public opinion either to support or abort the conflict. However, as their sacred

role and responsibility they strive to bring peace, it is in this context the actual representation of ‘Council of Bulliangs’ comes in being now it will be called as the *Supung Bulliang*’ meaning the Bulliang of society/world/community; in order to restore peace as such violence could lead to destruction of the clan or many death toll. All the Bulliangs would dress up in their full traditional attire and invoke the role and rights ascribed to them by tradition and forefather and walk in procession to the war ground. When such processions are invoked no one can harm the Bulliang. Upon the announcement that ‘Bulliangs are walking’ (*Bulliang indo ka aa!*) the warring parties has to stand aside and put down their weapons down as the Bulliangs will walk straight in between the warring parties. And that is the end of the duel and the parties are now compelled to accept the peace accord.

Such a demonstration acquires its power and legitimacy from traditional sanctity to the institution of the Bulliang. Any harm caused to any Bulliang at this time would bring the entire valley against them. On the other hand, non-compliance to Supiung Bulliang’s terms means if the Bulliang refuse to take part in the *Myoko* festival or to the traditional festival then those rituals can never be initiated or concluded. Such festivals and ritual ceremonies in the traditional environments played important role in securing blessing from spirits and goodwill from their fellowmen for their prosperity and growth in the community. Thus, it is the sense of self-preservation and respect for the institution that draws people back.

A community which is so dependent on their agriculture and resource management for their sustenance and prosperity cannot afford to indulge in long run enmity, treachery and sense of insecurity for generations. Besides their compact living style and entrenched relations and ally systems across the valley, Taniis would seek immediate and ultimate solution of the problem. Therefore, there are levels of formal procedures for resolving issue. The pre-announced mass duel over raiding and constant capture and counter capture,

and that too with a clause for Bulliang intervention and other set norms of the duel actually work as a standardized safety outlet where women and children are not to be harmed and people can still carry on their activities without disruption.

However, the *Tanii Chambyo* or the *Piita Chambyo* had escalated to above all individual and village level tension, this time the conflict was in the line of the alliance system. The narrative here is brought and pieced together from various interviews with different speakers and Ursula Graham's book is referred to ascertain the time and sequence of the event. There was no much variations in the narratives except for extra details shared about speakers about their respective villages. According to Late Bullo Buga:

In our history, once Halyang and Tanii had a war. But before this there was a war among the Taniis themselves when the Nyibo and the Hangu fought over the supremacy of the Bulyang where Hage Jarbo was killed, Piina Tajo was killed.

It started like this- Radhe Kani, who had come here (Hangu) to drink during the Myoko<sup>71</sup> festival. Koj Nichi ambushed him at Biirii and captured him. There was some cattle debt against the Radhe Kani which Koj Niichi was trying to recover. In our village at first there was rumor 'Radhe Talang is captured!', and then next moment we heard 'Radhe Talang escaped!' It seems when he was being taken from Biirii to Diibo village by his captors they had taken away his meat and put a rope made of bamboo strips on his neck. But they did not take away his *Jilya* shawl<sup>72</sup> because it would be inappropriate to take away a Tanii child's cloth and make him walk naked. However, he had a small knife which used to be worn near armpit and because of the shawl no one saw it. His captor made announcements as they entered the village. People came out

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<sup>71</sup>Myoko festival is one of the major annual festival organized in the month of March. Every year turnwise the three village clusters organize the festival. The host village will invite and host the other two village clusters. This is the time when there is a complete ceasefire during the period, even cultivation and other activities are stopped during the period, to encourage and facilitate visits by friends, relatives and allies across the valley without fear. Gifts of meat, traditional items and traditional alcohol drinks are exchanged.

<sup>72</sup>*Jilya* is made of raw Assam silk and considered very valuable. He was wearing *Jilya* as per the custom to wear while visiting for Myoko festival.

to see and were discussing, ‘why this man is being taken?’ As they reached the *Tiisang* entrance, there was Tage Aku Dolo’s house. Radhe Kani took out the knife and cut off the rope and dashed into Tage Dolo's house! Then as it was the norm before, Tage Dolo said, “How will you take away someone who took shelter in my house, you dare not touch him.” How after this attempted capture Radhe demanded and Kani, Koj Niichi payed two female Mithuns to Radhe Kani as compensation. However, then Radhe Kani accused Radhe Talang, his brother with whom he had gone to drink Moyoko O ( drink), for betraying him, ‘It must be you who must have told them that “Kani and I are going for Myoko drink, keep an ambush ready”, you must have sold me out'. This accusation agitated Radhe Tamang so much that in order to demonstrate his innocence he destroyed the garden fence of Koj Niichi’s relative Kojee. Thus Radhe Talang and Kojee’s started their Dapo (case). The Dapo was argued out in the Lapang of Kagos who was the third party village. (interviewed on 17.04.2014, Hangu Village)

According to Late Nani Tabing:

It all starts with Hiiija and Duta<sup>73</sup>. There was a constant dispute between them over the common land ownership of Piisa pu. It has areas known as Duta Pume and Hiiija Putii; and they were fighting over Hiiija Putii. They would not let each other tie their cattle at Papii and would let loose their cattle over each others’ fields. Duta came to call us to support them. Thus, those who were ally with Hiiija spoke for Hiiija and those with Duta were with Diibo. As a result our Reru Tajang also got divided. However, this status quo remained for very long till the conflict between Radhe Kani and Koj Niichi broke out. (interviewed on 28.04.2015, Biila Village)

According to Radhe Rambo (interviewed 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014) this conflict is also known as ‘Piita Chambyo’ which literally translates into ‘Conflict of the Birds’ because it was during this conflict that alliance system was revoked and the distribution of Myoko gifts of *Pengu* bird to Bulliang of the entire valley got reserved only for the alliance Bulliang. People started arguing lets decide who are with or against. Though most speakers denied such terminology for the Tanii conflict but they acknowledge its aptness and incisiveness.

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<sup>73</sup> Hage Riku interviewed on 2.01.2015 called Hiiija-Duta conflict as *Myod Karsu Yalu*.

As the negotiation and debates were going on allies also took their side. Hangu joined their traditional ally Hiija while Hari joined Diibo-Duta. However, as said before, Biila had different village sub-groups which had allies all across the village groups.

So in one of the decisive meetings Chiging Nyime who was considered one of the most influential orator spoke about the condition of Biila-

*'Regyu rero Reru, Jamin jalyo Tajang, pyapin pyali pare pampa  
siika ma henger ma, empu elyang kader ma'<sup>74</sup>*

[Translation: You Reru and Tajang, what kind of rice field you keep, it is completely mixed up/impure. It is difficult to differentiate/exclude which one is Pyapin plant, which one Pyali plant and which one is Emo plant. Meaning: He was pointing towards ally system at Biila, that one cannot make out who are the friends and who are the enemies]

The Reru-Tajang utterly felt humiliated, their spokes person Radhe Tagyang responded saying:

*'Asang Korlang nii-o dogyu miilyo-sudung sayi kiibyu pamba-  
kiipa pama mi jolo biidu nii-o, ato Korla nya sarli iigyung sapa  
iigyung mi pecha dunii. Niika hii Duta hepui alyi, Tarpui ere  
ngunumi tarte mola kendo aa.'*

[Translation: It is the *Assang Korlang* (Typhoon) that uproots and throws and destroys even mighty trees. Your Duta wind that is used for drying things, you cannot even push our belly. Meaning: Assam *Korlang* is metaphor for Reru Tajang and their strength, Duta is nothing before them]

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<sup>74</sup> Another version: '*Reru atu..garpu garta empu-eli pako kader ma, gata dacha la elang-eli pako kader ma, pyapin soko kader ma, emo kader ma*'.

Since then all the Tajang Bullyang and Reru Bullyang declared we are taking side with Hiija and Hangu, now on we are going to visit only to Hiija and Hangu during the *Myoko* and the *Pengu* bird will be distributed only among the respective allies. Thus Hiija and Duta conflict resumed as Diibo declared they would not let the *Myoko* procession between Biila-Hiija and Hangu which passes through their corridor. Then in their first mass duel Puno Tajo was shot at eye and he died. (Then at Punyo Tamer's piisa at Biirri, near the field)?. Hari came to cut it where another battle took place and Hage Jarbo was killed with arrow. At this point the Halyangs intervened. They said Tajang may join wherever they want to but now they will not allow any further violence. Then rice was collected from all the villages- Hiija, Reru-Tajang, Hangu and Duta. Then the rice was mixed thoroughly and it was said that now there is no Diibo rice and no Hiija rice, now eat together. That is how the case was settled. No *Gyuchi* or *Gyutii* shall be counted, therefore Hage Jarbo (who was a Mitii) and Piina Tajo (a Miira) were counted as same, and thus equal casualty happened in both the side therefore now it is over. This is how the case was resolved.

**7.10.1. 'Trouble in Eden' and Ursula Graham.** Ursula Graham gives a very interesting account of the ally system which she calls as 'a treaty'. According to her information, Biila, Hiija, Hari and Hangu are the original villages who formed the friendly alliances. The new comers Duta, Mudang Tage and Michi Bamin- a village group collectively called as Diibo-were admitted to the alliance.' (opcit. 219) However, Hangu and Hiija declined this new entrant, Hari left its old pacts and formed pact with new group while each half of Biila formed pact with both of them. For generations it went well but 'then a devil entered into Duta' (opcit. 120) which led to the *Gyambo* that took place in June 1947. Here she notes that the Biila felt that the *Gyambo* was an unfriendly act therefore they decided to re-unite with the former friends i.e.

Hiija and Hangu, instead of Diibo and Hari. Days passed in fruitless conferences. (opcit.120).

Her book is the first hand account of what was happening in March 1947. Her account reveals that it was the Political Jemadar, Kupe Tanyang, who was dealing with all the local political issues in absence of Timothy Bettr who was on tour.

On 13<sup>th</sup> March 1947, the trouble started as Miidang Tage- barricaded their area at Biirii which is the corridor between Hangu and rest of the villages. Then Political Jemadar Kupe Tanyang called for the common meeting of all at Papii for next day i.e. 14<sup>th</sup> March. She notes there was remarkable sanity among people as they all wanted peace and resolution, the elders feared youth might turn things to otherwise out of excitement. However, as Duta did not join the meeting was called for the next day again. On 15<sup>th</sup> March, there was barricades and patrolling all over. She frankly describes the increaing hostility between the locals and them, she does not hide her disliking of them and their sneers towards them (see Graham, 1952, p. 225).

She gives the first hand account of the resolution meeting called by the Halyang at Papii, which went for four hours:

The meeting, when it began, was stormy, and for four solid hours the discussion raged under our feet, separated from us only by a thin skin of floor, and the house fairly rocked to it... when we looked down from the balcony we saw a black se of heads, tousled dusty and dry, shoulders hunched in quilted grey cloaks, and innumerable long hair-skewers which formed a brassy pattern on the background of hairy pates. (p. 226)

On 16<sup>th</sup> March, as Myoko festival was nearing a resolution was arrived because of very reasonable elders. It was decided to not have the annual Myoko procession called *Pen* though all activities will continue as usual.



However, on 17<sup>th</sup> March, the skirmishes started once again. Then describes the actual battle between two parties leading to one casualty and immediate calling-off of the battler. It seems the government's attempt to bring resolution did not work, it was not acceptable to people. Rather, some scars and unhappy group of people were left. She had hardly given any explanation or description of what was actually happening. Her narrative was completely limited to her own experience, as much she saw and heard from her own distance. Soon, probably in a week time, they departed from the valley, to North Lakhimpur, to Calcutta, to York and then finally to London. She felt tragic in the new place, she writes:

The English hills were too close. I wanted to push them back, to have space, to have forty and fifty miles of clear air between me and untrodden mountains. We have been torn by the roots...People talked kindly, could not understand, were bewildered. We had come home; what could be the matter? How could one explain that home was no longer home, that it was utterly foreign, that home was in the Assam hills and that there would never be any other, and that for the rest of our lives we should be exiles?... Of all that we had seen and known, nothing remained but the intangible... For a horrible moment I knew that I had died and that this was my own particular, private hell' (opcit. Pp 237-238)

Soon after Ursula and Timothy had left, another battle took place. Late Bullo Buga, shared:

The first *Dapo* combat happened between the Diibo and Hiija group where Piina Tajo (from Hiija) was hit on his eye with an arrow and died on the spot and the combat was immediately called off. Our ally was killed. *Ebyo eh!* Thus in return Hari (Diibo ally) and Hangu (Reru-Tajang ally) also entered into another combat where Hage Jarbo from Hari was killed and the combat was once again called off. But tension began as Diibo party sought revenge for Hage Jarbo, an ally's death. When people said that now the number of dead person is equal in both side, Diibo refused to accept Hage Jarbo's (a *Mitii*, patrician) in exchange death for Piina Tajo (a *Miira*, plebeian), they said a '*Mitii* for *Mitii*'. The situation deteriorated, as we were getting ready for another battle and to kill each other. We started eating our *Mima* and *Sie* (last supper). It became difficult to move out of the house.

Then the *Supung Bulyang* came and called for a peace meeting at Biirii<sup>75</sup>. They said ‘Come to senses (*Huti ato ku*), stop this war or else all our offsprings are going to perish due to war. Now on nobody is going to raise their hands or feet.’ This is how our Tani Chambyo was finally resolved. However, since then till today we do not ally with Diibo, you see. Reru-Tajang called us to form the *Yalyang Bulyang*. So we asked Bulo Tago as *Yalyang Bulyang*, Takhe Laji from Nada as one *Bulyang*, Nami Laji from Nami, Kago Tapa from Kago and Punyo Palyo from Punyo to stay with *Akha Bulyang*. (interviewed on 17.05.2014, Hangu Village)

There is a qualitative difference in the voices and their representation between Ursula’s account and the local’s narratives. Unlike in Ursula’s account, for the local narrators Taniis were the loci of the entire story, all the events and consequences revolved around them and they were the main actors- taking decisions, speaking, understanding, and acting. *Halyang* was in periphery of the entire narrative, unlike the way Ursula had presented their role- the heroic representation of Kupe Tanyang and Timothy Betts. However, unlike Late Bullo Buga’s narrative that it was the *Supung Bulliang* which finally brought back the peace, in other narratives by other informants it was the *Halyang* who imposed the final solution and peace.

There were many who were not happy. There were round of discussions across the valley over the legitimacy of an outsider who are dictating their terms on them, who are now constantly interfering on their community as well as personal affairs, the outsider who is lead by ‘*Missangs*’, they are being forced to work as labor, they saw that under the protection of the *Halyang* many Taniis have actually started exploiting them.

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<sup>75</sup>Biiri is a small land mass located almost in central to all village groups. When Tani first migrated to the valley they settled here before dispersing to different location in the valley as their population grew. Therefore, Biirii for several reasons considered as a meeting ground for issues related to the entire community.

‘So they started meeting saying,

“*Hiijo liima mi tunu mi Hiijo liima mi khenkha duke; Yayi liima mi tunu mi Yayi liima mi khenkhang duke; Bije lima mi khenkha make*”

[Translation: When *Hiijo* (wild variety of bamboo grown in plains) roots overgrow and intrudes then its roots are uprooted; when *Yayi* (cane grown in Nyishi areas) roots overgrow and intrude then its roots are uprooted; nobody uproots *Bije* (domesticated variety of bamboo used by Taniis). In their *Bije* garden no other varieties are allowed to grow to compete with it. Thus, here the old saying was repeated saying Taniis should live only among themselves, when others tries to intrude it is better to remove/uproot them].

We should solve our matters on our own in accordance with our tradition. So long outsiders are here they will continue interfering, we will not get our due justice or recover our depts. So, they went to all villages and the whole *Supung* (society/community) agreed to it. The discussion went on for almost two years across different villages. The main prominent people who were affected by their cases lead the meetings. They approached the *Halus* (clans) wise. But all this happened in secret as the Kotokis were not informed.’  
(Late Bullo Buga, interviewed on 17.04.14)

Narratives by Nada Tadii, Nending Riido and Nending Mumpa from Hiiija and Radhe Rambo, Habung Biida and Nani Tabing shows that even Hiiija and Biila, who were in good terms with the government were also approached secretly but they refused to join for ‘it was them who invited the Halyang and now they cannot turn against the Halyang’. Kotokis like Kago Bida and Nada Riku in Hiiija and Padi Lalyang and Millo Pussangs, convinced their respective village from joining the attack. They instead informed at the Kure about the impending attack and in fact on the day before the attack all went down to Kure and stayed there to show their loyalty and faced the attack. An old lady (anonymity maintained) from Hiiija shares that Hiiija was threatened by other villages that they would be the next target after the Kure. So, all Hiiija entrances were barricaded and everyone stayed inside the village. However, the next morning after the night the war party went for the attack, they saw all of them were silently walking back towards their own villages.

### **7.11. Conclusion: Tangible tropes and capricious orality**

Orality or narratives are vulnerable to its tangibles and intangible contexts. These contexts have their own meaning making processes and objectives as they constantly affects people's perceptions, sense of experience, their articulation, and their remembering and telling.

Tropes, on the other hand, considered to be tightly tied down to its fixed and core narratives and meanings. It is no more as vulnerable to meaning making contexts and traverse across the times safely. Yet even tropes when, like narratives, are completely displaced from their context, from their origin purpose, they either lose their relevance and hence, wait for its gradual demise or newer meanings are invented that often defeat or remixes the earlier meaning. Tropes plays an important role in oral narratives. On one hand they are used in projecting or encapsulating certain emotions on the other hand they functions as mnemonic, they function as the dots that connects the narrative threads to bring out that larger meaning to the story. When they are ornamented with oral texts or once stories and meanings are embedded to them they are well packaged to be safely delivered to its audience to be passed on. It is for us to unpack them once again to understand the enigma they embody.

People are meaning making beings. They are not only tied to their social behavioural grammars that helps in discerning the meanings of everyday acts and speech but also to constantly create and manipulate these meaning production process. Every speaker reinvents or reiterates these contexts through simple act of speech when they retell their experience and memory.

Therefore, two important things that one needs search for is- the voices, what is the narrator trying to talk about from their story, sometime it could be anti-narrative of what the narrator's own narrative plan. And second is, the voices that are silent or subsumed by larger picture or master narratives, or sometime camouflaged in another meaning forms.

## CHAPTER 8:

# CONCLUSION: VULNERABLE TEMPLATES OF AN EVER SHIFTING PAST

### 8.1. Introduction

Memory study and its use in history has been an increasing practice, despite several historians criticizing the use of memory as a substitute for empirical history (Klein 2000), some consider memory as an unreliable source (Perks & Thompson 2006:2) while others take it as subjective fantasies (Pickering & Keightley 2006). Keightley (2010) argues that memory might not be used as the direct conduit to historical truth but it should be studied as ‘a process of making sense of experience, of constructing and navigating complex temporal narratives and structures and ascribing meaning not only to the past, but to the present and future also’ (Keightley 2010:56). Its layered assessment and nuanced study brings out a certain truth about the past. Memories tell about the lived context—the cultural past which continues to exist through transmission, and about the social relations and structures of relations between individual and collective identities, and the socio, cultural and political power dynamics in between (Fentress & Wickham 1992; Olick & Robbins 1998; Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998 as cited in Keightley 2010: 58). Keightley argues that instead of obsessing over the fact finding historical method, one should focus on how memories are to be approached, studied and theorized. The utility of memory in historical writings has been proved beyond doubt, especially for the pasts for which written accounts are not available but only memories of lived experiences. Halbwachs (1992) one of the most influential scholars on conceptualization of memory says that memories are indivisible from its social environment where it is being experienced. However, these experiences are not created in vacuum. There are different structures that enunciate a very particular

way of experiencing and then even their remembering. Therefore, Halbwachs (1992:44) suggests the identification of intersections that influences them. The speakers always had their particular position and relation with their social environment, even in the past.

Connected to memory study is the study of articulation and communication of those memories. Such communication and articulation has to be meaningfully 'reconstructed as representation' (Terdiman 1993: 8). Thus, memory articulation has to borrow meanings from the context in which they are being articulated in other words, it involves the interpretation and communication of memories. It should be remembered that their sharing is process of conscious or unconscious selection, absence of, multiple and potentially conflicting memory. They are constantly constructed and the individual's agency and hegemonic power are the main creators (Keinghtley 2010:60). Thus, the template of past when it is being narrated is ever shifting.

In a situation like this study, where one attempts to write the history of a particularly traumatic experience of the entire community about which there is no official documents available, one has to depend on the oral accounts. Oral history writing, with its unique way of going deeper into memories and seeing beyond the narratives, provide the unique opportunity to do this study.

Taniis are an indigenous and ethnic community of Arunachal Pradesh. In the absence of written tradition, they rely on collective and individual memories as the only source and repository of history and knowledge about their history.

Clifford Geertz in his 'The Interpretation of Cultures' emphasizes on 'thick description' which juxtaposes the ethnographic detailing, historical narratives and the lived experiences to create the meaning to what one is doing. He argues that it is such thick descriptions that can capture these processes of co-creation and helps to meaningfully interpret, explain and develop a narrative (Geertz 1973) process from the moment of speech when the speaker is speaking or

narrating something in response to a question or conversational situation posed to him or her. But this doesn't answer certain important questions, for instance, how do the socio-cultural contexts affect the speakers (both the interviewer and the interviewee), the process of their interaction, the content and their interpretation(s)?

The oral history project in such a cultural context therefore has to be contextualized keeping in mind these multiple sources which 'speak' during the oral history interviews or dialogue.

One of the important sources that oral historians have been exploring is the oral traditions of ethnic, indigenous and oral communities. They have been dealing with questions such as: What are the different forms of oral traditions that exist? How old are they? Who creates and uses them? Is tradition a process or a product? How far has these traditions crystallized over time? My experience of doing oral history research among the Tani community of Arunachal Pradesh led me to ask a different set of questions. Oral communities like Tani and many other communities in the Northeastern region of India, had oral traditions that are intricately woven to their culture and day to day life, at least till they came in contact with outside societies and wider literate worlds around them. Their oral traditions perform roles much beyond being a mere repository of traditions. Thus, in my research I was looking at the act of narration to understand how their cultural contexts and environment affected them? Or thus, the main question in my research was how their cultural context and environment affects the act of narration? I found that in oral community, where orality and the ability to orate and its knowledge is highly valued. Oral narration is a performance, different from a simple rhetorical conversation or recitation. Taniis believe that all are not born with the ability to learn and narrate oral traditions. Hence, lay persons are often restricted from narrating them without proper precautions.



This paper argues that oral tradition is not a simple narration but a performance with various norms and rules. These norms along with their cultural contexts have bearing even on simple and informal narrations. Hence they have several implications on the oral history writing of the community. The onus thus, lies on the researcher to train oneself to embodying those meaning making process within, to be able to interpret their experience and culture complex. There are so many voices that are speaking if one wants to hear.

## **8.2. Vulnerable templates of ever shifting present: The structures of narrative production**

The narrative templates in historical conversation, before the post-modern turn in history writing, were hardly seen as sites of inquiry but were rather assumed to be inconsequential to historical facts. But the postmodern turn brought such narratives, particularly the linguistic narratives, right into the middle of analysis. History writing is no more considered as a dispassionate and magnanimous act and their consciousness bring forth a new understanding of very critical implications to various processes of research.

Oral history conversations, particularly takes pride in being sensitive to the subjectivity of voices and their representation. However, this emerging oral history trend still has to gain experience and epistemological wisdom in working with traditional and ethnic communities which have orality as the main source of remembering and recording. The people one meets and the conversations that take place in such settings are socially, culturally and socio-politically laden with several layers. Each layer has to be peeled off from the different perspectives of both the speakers and the listeners.

These conversations were held on very vulnerable templates of experiences- such as memory, the ever shifting reality of the present, morality, oral traditions in one hand and on the other hand the experience- of political processes, state

dominance and the inevitable surrender to travails of time. I started with the idea of doing oral interviews to write the history, to recreate an event in the past, where I tried to capture the voices and understand the persons behind the voices to see what those pasts meant to them. (And to see what have become of their experience in their present realities.) The persons Shahid Amin interviewed during his course of study about Chaura Chauri tell of people who took part in the event for the cause, for justice, for freedom, for Gandhi and for what they thought of a nation of their own- for an ideal; and now where they are struggling to register their names for freedom fighter's pension. Now they talk about the meager money they are getting, the corruption of officials and neighbor who enters wrong names, the money they are not getting, etc. The template of their present reality has shifted completely. Donald Richi (IOHA Conference in Bangalore, 2016) said the history and its account should be written right after it occurred, otherwise you never know what you are going to get and write.

All my interviewees were of elderly members in different Tanii villages, in their 70s or 90s, and many passed away even during the course of this study. They have seen generations come and go and have seen different times changing. They are considered by the society as someone who are wise and knowledgeable. In Tanii custom, they are called as the *Popi Sarmi*, the village elders who guides and advices the village. People go to them for their wise and unbiased advice. The age, ascribes them with status and responsibilities. And accordingly they themselves had to tune themselves according to the responsibility and the role they have to play. However, over time these institutions degenerated as people's attitude changed. Now people see village elders as old people. One recounts,

'We lived our life, we did what we could or thought was right... we fought with Halyang for our land but later our own people asked us to move our little houses into backyard in order to broaden the road so that vehicles can pass through... I don't know if I will ever get to drive one at this age, but I gave my land. Now we have space for vehicles to come and go even within villages. They (younger generation) are educated and

understand papers and do what they think is right. We lived our part and did the best we could, now it is their turn so let them do what they think is right, it is theirs now' (Interview with Doging Tamu, name changed).

Some seemed to have distanced themselves from the present and from the possible future and were unwilling or detached in their comment or unwilling to comment. While others who felt responsible for the present and future generations, felt more responsible for providing the 'right' story and hence presented their views very carefully.

The Kure Chambyo was the most significant event in the recent past of Tanii. This event opened up the legitimacy narrative for the government to annex and occupy the Tanii land, using military force. Like the experiences of many other communities across the hills of the Northeastern regions, whether the annexation of their land took place through a violent clash between the resisting community and the government army, or through gradual assimilation, nowhere does the community narrative accept such occupation as legitimate. The occupation of Tanii by Halyang transformed their way of life by upturning it. The centuries old ownership, sense of security and belongingness to their homeland, which they had meticulously tended, to turn a wild, waste and swampy land into a fertile, irrigated, organized and productive land that sustained hundreds of villages within one landlocked valley was all overturned. This land which became the envy of their neighbours and the cause of admiration and greed for visitors ever since the first arrival of the Europeans, was their homeland where they had evolved their economy and socio-cultural ecology. The land which they had protected by resisting any encroachment ever since their first settlement in time unknown, was the source of their identity as well. But all that they had built over centuries were transformed into something unrecognizable now. Ever since the coming of the government, entire villages and the communities, and their autonomy were brought under a single authority and governance. The new education system and new market economy, new Panchayati governance system, law and judiciary, police and military, roads,

buildings, electoral party based politics, modern media through TV, films, print media, etc., dominant national languages, cultural impositions and the hegemonized notion of being part of a larger national country called India has completely altered their history and location. The community became merely one of the communities in this country and were no more the center of any narratives. What they perceived about their world was based on the limited knowledge of their forefathers who had been telling them about things and people around them. Now, the things and people around them were no longer the same one. The people whom they called Halyang, who lived in the plains and who were heard about only in oral traditions, had swarmed their valley and were ruling over them. They had never experienced exercise of so much power by any human or human group, forced labor, organized military with modern weapons or institutionalized punishment system.

The Indian administrators, under Balipara Frontier Administrative Act 1945, had devised a well calculated administrative system. The Gaon Buras, Kotokis and Political Interpreters or Jamadars, from each and every village were appointed. While they were meant to only advice the Deputy Commissioner, they were also given several judiciary and administrative powers to deal with local and traditional matters according to 'traditional norms'. The idea being that, it was too early to introduce a formal, unitary judiciary system in the community that was illiterate, 'uncivilized' and did not know the world outside. However, the policy played out differently in practice as the societies were already complex and had their own political processes. Many of these local administrative representatives had their own interests and baggage and thus instead of creating trust and a sense of just governance, divided the community into oppressed and oppressor groups. The new power centers thus created were loyal to the administrator. They became the first agents of government and promoters of government policies within the community.

They promoted the new school education system and recruited boys and girls from the villages to attend those schools. There were several stories shared by

different people about how those recruitment drives were carried out and when people resisted, children were taken by force and threats. The villagers in Bamin-Michi, Hangu and Biila shared that out of fear for their children, they made an arrangement in the village whereby the most needy person volunteered to send one of their children 'for Halyang' (*Halyang kupa*) to attend the school—a child from each village. The whole village contributed rice grain to that family. Since they did not trust Halyang, they feared that their children might be kept for ransom to blackmail them to do things they do not wish to do and be used against them. On the other hand they did not want their children learning Halyang's ways, their language, dressing like them, eating and behaving like them and doing no work. Later, as they also saw school children being used as domestic helps by teachers and others, this they felt completely humiliated. In earlier days Taniis looked down upon Halyangs as dirty and lesser people. However, as time passed they also saw those children who were going to schools gradually being taken on for government jobs as Dak runners, peons, *Sardars*, in military and other administrative services as drivers, helpers, cooks, gardeners, etc.. Because of their understanding of Halyang language, they found closer contact with Halyang.. Thus, gradually more children started studying in schools. In these schools children were taught, socialized and integrated into the country.

On the other hand, various beneficial schemes were introduced, some were given jobs, and large number of Gaon Buras was appointed. With the establishment of new administration located in the newly carved out town towards the south of the valley called *Hapolyang*, a small market was emerging and several other concrete houses came up, and cars and cycles were brought. All these created a great impression on many. However, during the pompously organized visits of the VIPs the Taniis from different villages were huddled together along with the Nyishi people. These visits were also for the inauguration of several structures of modern amenities such as water tank in a village, bathing ghat, water pump, makeshift dispensary, craft centers, etc..

During such occasions speeches and promises were given of great prospects. Each of these programs were then followed by gift distributions of cloth piece, iron axe or plough, umbrellas, threads, etc.. Whenever a VIP visited they were also taken to the villages where the whole village would gather. Each of these occasions left remarkable imprints and impressions on how ‘*Halyang Saabs*’ are to be treated. The show and demonstration of respect and power socialized people to behave in a particular manner towards the authority and officials.

The village elders I interviewed, all seemed to have a similar narrative when asked about their feeling and view towards the Halyang and the Kure Chambyo. They all seemed to say how Halyang’s were benevolent towards Taniis and how Kure Chambyo was a mistake entirely on the part of Taniis; and how the actions the government had taken – the village burning, murders, rapes, forced labor, taking away of land, stealing and demanding valuables- were all legitimate. It is ironical to hear people say one’s losing and suffering was just. It is only when one meets other sets of people who talk about the atrocities caused by the military and authorities and the injustice delivered at the hand of the Gaon Buras that one knows about them. The focus of their narratives was not the Kure Chambyo, its cause, the event or explaining what Halyang were doing rather, their narratives repeatedly reiterated their sufferings. The same ‘legitimate punishment’ of the other group’s narrative is narrated as a period which was so terrible that they thought there will be no tomorrow. This group of people included women and men who were never interested in the doings and developments by the Halyang. However, even in their narratives they do not blame Halyang for causing so much of suffering rather the local agents who did corrupt practices. The wife of one Gaon Bura in Mudang Tage village shared that she used to despise her husband’s involvement with the Halyangs. She said he had completely given up his responsibility of looking after the fields and other social responsibilities and instead he would walk around with so much huff and puff. She said she feared that her husband will soon get affected by the curses of people.

There are several theories on memory and its effects on the narratives of past and experience. All my informants were elderly people and due to their age many of them were immobile. Eliciting exact and particular information was a challenge and also an unfair expectation. Like their stories, their memories were also vulnerable. As one Tilling Tapi of Hangu village shared, it is difficult to remember the recent and in-between memory, while the memories of her childhood had come back as if it happened yesterday. Similarly, Hage Tane of Hari village shared how memories came back in unexpected flashes even without thinking about them while the things she tried to remember did not come back. There was another informant who kept on repeating a particular memory. His description was as vivid as his memory vision must have been but he would come back to the same description again and again even while discussing a different subject. Their memories were also vulnerable to the content matter, where their emotions were heightened. Often I had to use the technique of asking what or how she/he felt at a particular moment to trigger more lateral memories.

Thus the templates of narratives of the same event are different depending on who is speaking. Each had their own unique experiences which has built on into what they believe/think and thus deciding how they interpret their past. Their social locations, political positions, economic status, the state of mind and heart at the moment and age were all factors in the arrangement of their narrative template. These templates are ever vulnerable.

### **8.3. Oral history and oral tradition, the distinction:**

Oral history brings a unique understanding that there is no unnecessary need to make a truth claim over the voice claim. Oral historians are often criticized for their indulgence in subjective narratives rather than focusing on core history/ fact /objective of the story. During my research among the Taniis in relation to the early history when the government was establishing its military and

administrative base, I came to know that it was a very painful experience for the community. It was experienced very personally. To write about such stories merely from a historical perspective would be injustice. Their experience and perception of what had happened are important for writing the history of the community. In their narratives very often, they are the protagonist or 'Sutradhar'. Such richness by empowering the speaker's voice and clarity of testimonial analysis can be provided only through oral history writing.

Oral history considers oral history narratives as a product of the experience of the speaker or the narrator. It also shows how subjective each interview and narrative process is. Often the narrator and the interviewer together, through a discursive process discover new meanings to a particular experience or invoke an inarticulate memory. In the words of Ronald Takaki (1993), 'In the telling and retelling of their stories, they create communities of memory'. The narrator's control and rights over the interpretation of one's experience is recognized and the researcher's role as a facilitator of this process of remembering and reflection is recognized. By bringing ordinary people's narratives to the fore in the making or redefining of the dominant narrative, it provides an alternative interpretation of the past. In this way, oral history democratizes history by bringing the voices that was earlier unrepresented (Shopes, nd and Paul 1988:2)

On the other hand, it was often observed that oral traditions have been given an offhand treatment. It is understood merely as another source from where narratives can be generated or as a fixed and tangible object or text that contains some history. However, for an ethnic, traditional and oral community like Tani of Arunachal Pradesh, oral traditions are living texts that is embodied in their way of life. Their meanings are created within their unique cultural context and lived reality. Ruth Finnegan (1992) tried to provide some conceptual definitions of the term oral tradition, but not before noting the existing ambivalence on the term. She found different literatures have defined and challenged some definitions differently. According to her oral tradition is something which is- '1)



Verbal or 2) non-written, sometimes or alternatively 3) belonging to the “people” or the “folk”, usually with the connotation of non-educated, non-elite, and/or, 4) fundamental and valued, often supposedly transmitted over generations, perhaps by the community or “folk” rather than conscious individual action.’(p.7) Henige (1982:2- 7) in the context of oral history had defined ‘oral tradition’ as ‘those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture... and have been handed down for at least a few generations.’ However, oral traditions especially in the context of oral societies, have similar and often more roles than their written history counterparts. It embodies the history of the people, the community, their ancestors and their traditions. Oral traditions are cultural and social markers of a particular traditional and ethnic community.

The oral traditions are not a mere recording of the past but have a distinctive role in identity creation. It cannot be individually claimed and interpreted. The cultural and traditional norms and common ownership, brings a unique censorship to the narratives. Orality, tradition, oral tradition, oral literature, oral texts, oral narratives, narratives as art, folklore, etc. are few common terms that ethnographers have been dealing with for some decades, while the term itself has been understood differently. However, the term oral tradition has been used very rarely in oral history writing. More so because, oral history writing projects were seldom carried out in traditional oral communities. Therefore, oral history per se has less engagement with these terms and concepts within particular cultural contexts. It is important to locate and derive their meanings from their cultural contexts.

#### **8.4. Conclusion: Towards the methodology of co-writing- voices, context and culture**

My experience of doing oral history interview with each individual was complex, though not unique as they were typical of the experience within the community. Individuals in traditional communities are inscribed into their

tradition. Although they live their individual lives, they also bear common values and perspectives inherited from their past to which by adding their own stories, they creatively interpret and reinvent tradition and make it alive.

Individual narrators are at the core of oral history, they do not exist independent of their social environment (Cashman, Mould, and Shukla 2011.) Moving away from pre-formulated questions, being aware and sensible to their cultural context and letting them lead us through their narrative strategies instead of imposing the direction and forcing the content of the interview is the way for narrator centric oral history. Their way of life, traditions, belief and environment co-creates their reality. It was only during the transcribing process of the interview records that the multiple overlapping domains and layers of meanings became evident. The oral history narration took place in a very culturally laden narrative environment /domain.

As an insider I was in a more privileged position to understand and grasp these meaning making domains. It is through one's constant interaction, acting upon, practice and merging within a cultural context and surrounding of a society in their day to day life that one could generate or understand the esoteric meaning of that doing/act. And it only then, one is ready to interpret the domain and the experience. It is an insider who after dwelling with them and reflecting on one's experiences, can embody, discern, understand and consciously or unconsciously react and respond to them. It is then one is ready to exact the encrypted experiences and meanings and try to write them down.

Translating and writing down the ethnographic oral narratives feels nothing less than a crime. Because it is not just the words that were spoken, but the speakers who were expressing themselves, the context of the subject located in its unique environment and history were all co-creating the meanings for the spoken words. It was the language- their semiotics, their indexing- the spoken and unspoken words and their silences which contributed to the meanings as they were communicated. To write them down in a language, which is so alien to the

contexts, where they were created is a hermeneutic challenge. After extracting and decoding the latent and often intangible meanings and then writing them down to another domain of meaning, namely, academia where those narratives have to make sense to larger/dominant cultures and societies and academia feels like uprooting the meaning and transplanting them into another cultural context.

Kure Chambyo was not a unique event among the other similar events that took place in the region- the Northeast including the present Arunachal Pradesh where the communities found outsiders increasingly encroaching into their land and interfering with their way of life. While the larger narrative of these events was already set in motion by the colonial rulers who were very aware of such resistances put forth by these autonomous and unorganized communities. While the colonists adopted the diplomatic strategy of the Ahoms outwardly, covertly, they were very clear of their ambitions to make their passage through this land to enter central China. While the larger and often obvious strategy seemed to be to remain content with their own areas in the foothill, yet at the ground level the instructions pushed the boundaries of control. The officials could not avoid but engage with the hill tribes who were visiting the plains and thus drew themselves right into the middle of the local hill politics. Post independence, the Indian strategy was to occupy and maintain the political holds and military outposts, and to extend deeper, though the imperialistic interest of colonial period was no more the driving force

It is difficult to say how things would have turned out if the people in the valley knew the future. The strange encounters with Halyangs on their coming to the valley were too minuscule exposure and experience for their elders to say the Kure Chambyo for Taniis had expedited the process of occupation and gradual assimilation to the larger Indian politics.

The Kure Chambyo that has left unprecedented episodes that has transformed the way of life of the Taniis and their homeland. It is within this socio-political

environment that the men and women of the community were telling their stories.

The templates of what led to this event, what happened during the event, what happened after the event and aftermath, and the template when these stories are being told has been shifting. Told from single thread of each individual stories, the narrators see these pasts as an evolution- a transformation for better things- and yet also see a complete break between the past and the present. And thus, the past is actually being told from the templates of present where one is telling the story of present rather than the past. Yet, there was a definite sense of understanding and consciousness among all the informants about the historical nature of this study and they wanted their stories and what they knew to be registered. They knew their role is of a contributor in this study. When I asked Late Nani Tabing, if he would like his name to be kept anonymous he cried, 'No! I am telling all this so that my name (as the historian) should go in there and known to future, people should know and remember that I was the one who told this history. You make sure you write down all the details exactly as I said.' While for many, they spoke for the first time about the painful past. Shame, fear and pain were their repressed emotions which were expressed through silences. They had never even expected that they would be ever sharing this story with anybody. These stories were told not as an act of defiance against the government or told in anger or with vengeance. It is difficult to know that, unlike in many similar events of resistance and defiance against the outside forces or intrusive state system across the country in different locations, the event of Kure Chambyo will ever be commemorated but still despite their fear, inhibitions and doubts they retrieved and shared their memories, for many, for the first time after long time, so that it is not lost but known. Maybe, not defiance but these individual memories survived looking for some redress when the entire community seems to have smoothly moved on or as an reminder of something undone.

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