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## **Colonial contact in the 'hidden land': Oral history among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh\***

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*Drawing on field recordings and recent scholarship on social memory, this article analyses colonial contacts and oral histories in Arunachal Pradesh, in northeast India. It argues that, despite its geographic and cultural isolation Arunachal did not escape the armed conflict that dominated relations between tribes and external authorities during the colonial period. Two events and their causes are examined: the first visit by a British official to a tribe in 1897; and the raid on a military outpost by tribesmen in 1948. Comparing written histories and documents with local stories about these events, the author demonstrates the need for oral histories.*

Colonialism came late to the Apatani valley in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> British officials first visited the valley in 1897 and stayed only two days, followed by approximately six similarly brief visits in the 1920s and 1930s. Only in 1944, when a temporary government outpost was set up by an anthropologist-administrator, did the Apatanis come in contact with even a minimal government presence; soon, a second and permanent outpost was built and the Assam Rifles stationed to protect it. In 1948, however, that outpost was attacked in the first and only act of armed resistance by Apatanis against the newly-arrived external political authority.<sup>2</sup> The attack, which was easily repulsed, provoked the Political Officer in charge to retaliate by burning two villages.

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<sup>1</sup> The area of present-day Arunachal Pradesh formed part of the North-East Frontier Tracts of Assam during the colonial period; in 1954 it became part of the North-East Frontier Agency, in 1972 a union territory and in 1987 a state.

<sup>2</sup> Sometime between 1948-50, Apatanis and Hill Miris burned down a local school in protest against Assamese language instruction (Public Record Office, London. FO 371/84250. Calcutta Special Report no. 71, dated 7 Oct. 1950).

If the visit in 1897 marked the beginning of colonial contact, the raid and retaliation in 1948 signalled the beginning of the end of traditional tribal authority in the Apatani valley; thereafter, a complete administrative apparatus—a dozen government departments, schools, courts and jails—swept into the valley.

The main body of this article examines these two events, the 1897 visit and the 1948 raid, using both written sources, mostly contemporaneous government reports, and Apatani oral histories, which I recorded in Spring 2002. My initial curiosity about these events was raised when I found that the visit in 1897 is still remembered and that the attack in 1948 is part of everyday knowledge; later, when I discovered that the raid is not mentioned in written sources, I decided to write about these events. One aim of this article, then, is simply to record the fact of that attack in 1948; another is to examine its causes and motivations, which might shed light on local resistance to external authority elsewhere in the northeast region. In pursuing these aims, the article also challenges the prevailing view of the Apatanis as an isolated tribe, whose history is separate from the wider patterns of British relations with the hill tribes of northeast India. Certainly this population of about 25,000 people, who live in a valley at 5,000 feet in the mid-Himalayas, had fewer and less extensive contacts with the plains than did other tribes; but the nature of those contacts and the problems they generated place the history of the Apatani valley firmly within the broader context of the region. This observation confirms the conclusion of Sumit Guha's recent book, which uncovered 'a long history of active participation by . . . supposedly isolated peoples in the politics of their region';<sup>3</sup> although the Apatani valley is not the same as Bhil forests, and although some of Guha's arguments do not apply to mountainous regions, the histories of both forest and mountain peoples have been obscured by the romance of isolation. Finally, in juxtaposing written and oral sources, this article reflects on the uses of orality and social memory, especially in the colonial context and especially among people who, like the Apatani, have no written history of their own. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200-1991*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> As is well-known, the category 'tribe' is ethnographically imprecise (applied loosely to groups who differ in social structures, political organisation and subsistence strategies) and historically constructed (applied to those groups whom others wish to control) (Morton Fried, *The Notion of Tribe*, Menlo Park, Ca, 1975; Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*). However, in the context of northeast India, the term does refer to small-scale societies that are marginalised within mainstream subcontinental culture and separated from it by fundamental features such as religion and language, diet and clothes. The observation that tribes are best understood 'as secondary formations, reactions to the formation of states' (Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, p. 2) applies more to the forests and hills of the subcontinent than to the Himalayas. Finally, although in most of India the term is politicised and controversial, not least because of the list of 'Backward Tribes' and 'Scheduled Tribes', in Arunachal Pradesh, where tribes predominate, the term may be politicised but it is not controversial and is often used with pride (Andre Beteille, 'The concept of tribe, with special reference to India', in A. Beteille, *Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Sociology*, London, 1991, pp. 57-78).

## Social Memory and Orality

Any attempt to examine the uses of oral history in a small-scale society is indebted to the multidisciplinary research that opened up new perspectives on orality in the 1960s and 1970s; in particular, I would mention Rosaldo's study of the Ilongot, which demonstrated the oral historical imperative for an ethnography of small scale and marginalised cultures. Since then, another critique of historiographical practices has coalesced around the concept of social memory; although already something of a cliché, this concept affords two distinct advantages to an analysis of the uses of the past in societies without writing. First, the idea of social memory reinforces the legitimacy of oral history, or at least places it on a par with other technologies of remembering the past, such as the thin descriptions contained in written sources. In this way, the concept of social memory renders obsolete those ~me and debilitating dichotomies of myth vs history, and oral vs written. As to the first of these oppositions, the authors of a recent book on history in south India have put the case concisely: '[w]riting history is not a simple matter of generating non-literary facticity; instead, as they argue, the conventional criteria of historical writing—sequence and causality elements of an interpretation of the past which also embraces various forms of memory.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the supposed conflict between a mythic imagination and historical truth is misleading because it is neither synonymous with nor exhausted by objective reality. Writing about Australia, Chris Healy similarly collapses the dichotomy between myth and history into a larger category of 'inscriptions of historical imagination'; oral legends and printed books, he argues, 'are critical histories and products of historical situations.'<sup>7</sup> Healy also critiques what he calls the 'inclusionist' approach, that is, the attempt to bring indigenous histories into the academy, where they inevitably fall prey to the intellectually-bankrupt goal of determining 'what really happened'.<sup>8</sup> Instead, he argues, oral or indigenous or 'other' histories should be understood in their own terms, and not as new means toward conventional historiographical ends.

Healy's argument—that the concept of social memory embraces but should not erase the differences between the dichotomies of myth/history and orality/ writing—finds partial agreement in an excellent study of oral history in the Dang region of western India.<sup>9</sup> In his 1999 book on oral genres and history among the Bhils, Ajay Skaria criticises the inclusionist approach as a 'denial of difference'; in his view, this attempt to upgrade oral history by denying any difference with written history fails because it ends up reinforcing the prejudices of conventional

<sup>5</sup> Velcheru Narayana Rao, Sanjay Subrahmanyarn and David Shulman, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600-1800*, Delhi, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, Cambridge 1997, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Healy, *From the Ruins*, pp. 50-53.

<sup>9</sup> Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, Delhi, 1999.

historiography. In order to avoid this intellectual appropriation, Skaria advocates an 'affirmation of difference', which he describes as the dominant intellectual position in studies of colonial and postcolonial societies. Unlike Healy, however, Skaria argues that a critique based on orality is inadequate because it cannot 'escape the history of hyperreal Europe', as the legitimising standard. Instead of logocentrism, Skaria advocates a more radical critique, a 'mythcentrism' based on memory. In this, however, he sets up another dichotomy, this time orality vs memory, to replace the others we have left behind. Memory might be prior to speech, but his argument that the oral basis of Vedic and Greek civilisations discredits the analytical potential of orality and enhances that of memory is itself undone by its valorisation of the primitive.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Skaria's description and analysis of oral historical genres among the Bhils is the most sophisticated study of such material in South Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the limitations of Skaria's proposal, it does underscore the need for an analysis of history to include more than orality. In my view, this is a second advantage of the concept of social memory—that it reaches beyond both oral and written sources to other means of recording and remembering history, specifically to performed culture—parades, rituals, festivals—and to material culture—monuments, objects, photographs. Looking again at Healy's study of Australian histories, for example, it utilises an impressive array of forms from museums and films, to photos and enactments; a similar, if more impassioned plea, that parades and rituals are more powerful than books as forms of memory is made in a recent study of Andean people.<sup>12</sup> And from others, we now appreciate that historical memory is also embedded and transmitted through material objects, such as barkcloth and betel bags.<sup>13</sup> These reconceptualisations of history are genuine intellectual breakthroughs, in that they reveal what previously we could not fully apprehend: we knew that people without writing nevertheless had historical sensibilities, but we now have a more precise vocabulary for describing them.

<sup>10</sup> His claim that 'hybrid histories are the moments when powerlessness betokens power' (*ibid.*, p. 13) is not convincing.

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent study that uses social memory to reconstruct the history of ordinary people in Rajasthan in the 1930s and 1940s, see Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrow: Nature and Power and Memory in Rajasthan*, Durham, N.C., 2002; for a detailed dissection of a single event in Indian colonial history, see Shahid Amin, *Event. Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, Delhi, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Abercrombie *Pathways of power. Ethnography and History among an Andean People*, Madison, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change*, Oxford 2001; Janet Hoskins, *The Play of time Kodi Perspectives on Calendars, History and Exchange*, Berkeley, 1993; Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*, New York, 1998. See also Kirsten Hastrup, ed., *Other Histories*, London, 1992; Jacques Le Goff, *Memory and History*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Carman, New York, 1992 119771; Jeanette Mageo, ed., *Cultural Memory: Reconfiguring History and Identity in the Postcolonial Pacific*, Honolulu, 2001.

## Apatani Histories

Like the great majority of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, Apatanis have no written script.<sup>14</sup> Since the introduction of government-funded schools in the 1960s, the Apatani language does sometimes appear in roman letters, but the few schoolbooks in romanised Apatani have not proved popular and written culture is dominated by English and Hindi, which has replaced Assamese. History, however, is recorded and remembered in Apatani oral traditions, performances and material culture. The three to four-week-long festivals, for instance, require extensive knowledge of the past. For days before the start of the rituals, small groups of kinsmen sit together to make and then assemble the bamboo pieces that will be used to construct a dozen different altars; and during the many hours of chanting, priests refer to past performances, invoke ancestors and summon them to guide the rituals (see Photo 1). The raised wooden platforms (*lapang*), upon which some rituals are conducted, are themselves repositories of memory and most have their own origin stories. Bead necklaces (*lasan*), the only form of wealth controlled by women, and bronze bells (*maji*), obtained by trade from Tibet but without clapper or handle or any ritual function, are extremely valuable objects which stimulate story-telling about the past: who gave them to whom, and at what occasion. Other more familiar objects, such as photographs from holidays to Shillong or videos of ceremonies, are also now used to record and understand the past.

Apatani oral representations of the past are diverse and complex. The two major oral genres, *miji* and *migung*, both contain historical material. *Miji* are primarily the chants performed by priests to accompany the sacrifice of mithuns, cows, chickens and pigs; sung in a priestly language, from one hour to 12 hours, these ritual performances describe previous interactions with the spirits or gods (*wi*) and explain origin myths (see Photo 1). *Migung* are more historical; narrated in prose, these stories explain the origins of the Apatani people, their genealogical links with other tribes, their migration from Tibet, a few place legends as well as more recent events, such as the downfall of a nineteenth-century ne'er-do-well. Running through both these genres, both the ritual chants and the prose narrations, is the figure of Abo Tani, the apical ancestor not only of Apatanis but of all tribes in central Arunachal Pradesh, who form the so-called 'Tani' group.

Finally, history is also remembered and interpreted by Apatanis through anecdotes and ordinary conversation. These informal, non-narrativised forms of oral history are the focus of this article.<sup>15</sup> The formal oral genres described above (*miji* and *migung*) cover the mythic and legendary past, geographical and genealogical

<sup>14</sup>The only tribe in the state with its own script (derived from Mon-Tai) are the Khamptis, a Buddhist group who migrated from the Shan area of northern Burma in the late eighteenth century. Among Buddhist tribes on the border with Tibet, Monpas use the Tibetan script, while the Membas use the Hikor script and the Khambas the Hingna script, both derived from the Tibetan.

<sup>15</sup> Many oral histories are expressed not as narratives but through conversation; see, for instance, Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts, the Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 125.

**Figure 1: Padi Kago, an Apatani priest, reciting a ritual chant**



origins and relations with supernatural powers, which leaves a good deal of historical memory to conversational genres. It would be difficult to measure the extent of historical interest among Apatanis, but I suspect that it does not rank particularly high among the cultures of the world. Above all, Apatanis are industrious and pragmatic; their highly regulated society, their densely populated valley and their skilfully cultivated rice fields require a practical approach to life. Nevertheless, they are keenly aware of their distinct identity--defined not only by geography but also by facial tattoos (no longer worn), by textiles and language--and they are proud of their culture.<sup>16</sup> Given the right situation, resting in the sun or warming by a fire, they talk about the past, like anyone else; and when prompted by a photograph or a question, especially about certain events, this normally taciturn people have a great deal to say. Before turning to these informal oral histories, however, we must set the written history of the Apatani valley within the context of northeast India.

### **The Romance of Isolation: Arunachal Pradesh and the Apatani Valley**

Since 1947 the history of northeast India has been dominated by separatist movements and insurgency, which still disrupts life in many parts of the region.<sup>17</sup> Arunachal Pradesh, however, is often seen as the oasis of peace in this turbulent region; except for recent and minor infiltrations of armed groups from Assam and Nagaland, the state is free of the insurrection and terror in the region. This may be an unforeseen benefit of the isolation policy implemented by Elwin and Nehru after Independence; protecting indigenous tribal cultures has apparently also insulated them from the worst elements of post-Independence politics in the northeast. But this image of a peaceful haven, though comparatively true today, would not have been recognised by many of the colonial officials and their Indian staff responsible for governing the region before Independence.

British rule in the northeast began in the early nineteenth century with armed conflict and was sustained by low-level wars throughout that century and well into the twentieth.<sup>18</sup> Having consolidated its power in Bengal in the 1760s, the influences of the colonial state in the northeast was confined to minor tax and land

<sup>16</sup> Tattoos worn by both women and men have gone out of practice, banned since the early 1970s by the Apatani Student Association.

<sup>17</sup> For overviews of these movements in northeast India, see Sanjib Baruah, *India against Itself. Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, Philadelphia, 1999; Jyotirindra Das Gupta, 'Community, Authenticity, and Autonomy: Insurgency and Institutional Development in India's Northeast', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 56(2), 1997, pp. 345-70.

<sup>18</sup> For the history of British relations with the tribes of present-day Arunachal Pradesh, see H.K. Barpujari, *The Problem of the Hill Tribes of Assam* 3 Vols, Gauhati, 1970-8 1; L.N. Chakravarty, *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*, Itanagar, 1995 [1973] 3rd edition; B.C. Chakravorty, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam*, Calcutta, 1964; Jyotirinda Nath Chowdhury, *The Tribal Culture and History of Arunachal, Pradesh*, Delhi, 1990; Jyotirinda Nath Chowdhury, *Arunachal Pradesh: From Frontier Tracts to Union Territory*, New Delhi, 1983; N.N. Osik, *Modern History of Arunachal, Pradesh (1825-1997)*, New Delhi, 1999.

disputes until the turn of the century when it was drawn into open conflict with the Garos; within a few years, the British had annexed Assam. When the powerful Ahoms, the Shan dynasty which had ruled the Brahmaputra valley since the thirteenth century, fell apart in the early nineteenth century, one faction invited the Burmese to support it; and the presence of Burmese soldiers on the eastern border of Bengal provoked Fort William. to send in troops. The first Anglo-Burmese war ended in 1826 with the treaty of Yandabo, but it left the British authorities with more than the problem of defending their newly-conquered territory; along with the fertile Assam valley, they had also inherited, without fully anticipating it, conflicts with the hill tribes.

During Ahom rule, tribes were paid *posa*, a form of blackmail, in order to regulate the otherwise frequent raids upon villages near the foothills. Immediately after annexation, the British were overwhelmed with the problem of understanding and then administering this system: they drew up treaties, specifying exactly how many pieces of cloth or animals which tribesman was entitled to from what village.<sup>19</sup> But even the most efficient and benevolent administration could not eliminate the geopolitical asymmetry between the rulers in the plains and the people in the mountains. From the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, the colonial state fought low-level wars with groups designated as 'tribes' all over the subcontinent, especially in the Chotanagpur area, western and central India.<sup>20</sup> Armed conflict with tribes in the northeast began and ended somewhat later but differed little in their causes: resistance to forced labour, interference by colonial officials and the loss of land rights. An early example set the pattern, to be repeated time and time again in the northeast. When British influence was extended to Sadaiya, in Upper Assam, they met with resistance from the Khamptis and Singphos, who feared loss of their authority and land; treaties, tax agreements and puppet rulers were to no avail. In 1839, the conflict exploded in an attack of nearly 1,000 tribesmen against a British force; the government retaliated, killing more than a 100 tribesmen and burning all their villages. These attacks and retaliations occurred in every decade right up to the 1940s. The Adi tribe fought what one historian has described as 'four Anglo-Adi wars' between 1848 and 1911. <sup>21</sup> The last incident in the long history of government-tribal warfare, in which 45 members (mostly tribal porters) of an official expedition were killed by Tagins, occurred in 1953.<sup>22</sup> Ramachandra Guha has suggested that the autonomy of the hill people in the western Himalayas accounts for the relative lack of violence in

<sup>19</sup> In some cases, British officials continued to make these *posa* payments to tribes right up until 1947.

<sup>20</sup> On these armed conflicts, see K.S. Singh, *Tribal Society in India: An Anthro-historical Perspective*, Delhi, 1985, pp. 119-54. Well-known examples include resistance by the Bhils in 1818, the Kols and Bhumijis in 1831-33, the Santals in 1855-56 and the Munda groups from 1874 to 1901.

<sup>21</sup> Osik, *Modern History*, pp. 23-68.

<sup>22</sup> Chowdhury, *Arunachal Pradesh*, pp. 135-36. A summary chart of many (but not all) conflicts with hill tribes is given as an appendix in Chakravarty, *Glimpses of the Early History*.

their resistance to external authority, but a similar autonomy did not prevent a considerable level of violence in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>23</sup>

Not all tribes in present-day Arunachal Pradesh, however, were caught up in this low-level warfare that characterised British relations with the hillmen; most of the conflict was confined to tribes with 'vertical habitation', who lived in contiguous regions from higher to lower elevations, eventually reaching into the plains. One tribe not in open conflict were the Apatanis; they did not live in complete isolation, but lacking a river and cut off by ridges reaching 8,000 feet, contact **with** the plains was infrequent. At 5,000 feet midway between the plains and the high Himalayas, Apatanis live in a rounded valley, six miles long and three across, where they maintain a network of ingeniously irrigated rice-fields. This prosperous, self-contained and relatively isolated valley always appealed to the European imagination. From the very first impressions reported in 1845 to the first ethnography published more than a 100 years later, the Apatanis have been consistently described as 'civilised' (in comparison with their neighbours) and their valley described as a haven of peace.

Before E.T. Dalton compiled his classic *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* in 1872, he served as Assistant Commissioner of Assam and toured the Nyishi and Hill Miri country, which borders the Apatani valley. In a letter printed in 1845, he wrote that the Apatanis were reported to be 'very superior to the tribes of this family' and that they appear to be 'a very peaceably disposed people'.<sup>24</sup> When he heard of their method of warfare, which was openly announced and directed only to men, Dalton was moved to declare that the Apatanis were a 'humane people'.<sup>25</sup> No European, not even Dalton, actually visited the valley until 1889 when a tea planter hiked up from the plains and arrived on Christmas Day; the adventurous Mr Crowe, too, was impressed with the Apatanis as 'peaceful', 'harmless and inoffensive savages', not given to warfare, like the Nagas.<sup>26</sup> The first British official to reach the Apatanis, a few years later, came with an armed expedition to punish them for murders committed in the plains; yet even he found time to marvel at the valley:

The sight is one I shall never forget, as we suddenly emerged on a magnificent plateau .... 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.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalayas*, Berkeley, 2000 (revised and expanded edition), pp. 129-31.

<sup>24</sup> E.T. Dalton, 'On the Meris and the Abors of Assam', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 14(1), 1845, p. 429.

<sup>25</sup> Dalton, 'On the Meris', p. 428.

<sup>26</sup> From H.M. Crowe, *Account of a Journey to the Apa Tanang Country* (1890), quoted in Verrier Elwin, *India's Northeast Frontier in the Nineteenth Century*, Bombay, 1959, pp. 196-97. A second visit by Crowe and a Capt. Dun, a few years later, confirmed these impressions (*ibid.*, pp. 199-201).

<sup>27</sup> British Library, OIOC, Eur Mss. D932/2, Leventon Papers, 'Report on the Apa Tanang Expedition of 1897', by R.B. McCabe; see also Elwin, *India's Northeast Frontier*, p. 191.

This romance of isolation coloured British views of the Apatani valley throughout the colonial period.<sup>28</sup> Ursula Graham Bower, who lived there with her husband (the Political Officer, F.N. Betts) in 1946-48, entitled her book *The Hidden Land*, in which she describes the 'brush-fenced lanes which might have been in Cornwall' and whose soft hills reminded her of Devon;<sup>29</sup> the inter-village feuds which blighted her departure, she called a 'Tragedy in Eden'.<sup>30</sup> The peaceful Apatanis, softly nestled in their isolated valley, were also consistently and favourably contrasted with the Nyishis, their dominant neighbours, who were cast in the role of warlike savages; Nyishis practised jhum cultivation, lived in scattered settlements and hunted for food, while the Apatanis cultivated their permanent rice-fields and lived in tightly packed urban-villages. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, the anthropologist who set up the first temporary government outpost in the valley in 1944, knew both cultures well. He described Apatani culture as an 'incipient civilization' not unlike those that gave birth to the Harappan civilisation.<sup>31</sup> The contrast he drew with Nyishi culture was striking:

With their [Apa Tani] industriousness, their passionate sense of order and tidiness and their budding feeling for beauty, they had created and maintained an oasis of stability within a world of semi-nomadic, improvident tribesmen. While their Dafla [=Nyishi] neighbours despoiled the land wherever they settled, in this one valley the fertility of the soil was preserved indefinitely, for the benefit of future generations and every gift of nature was bent to the service of man.<sup>32</sup>

While this representation of the Apatani valley as a Shangri-la is not altogether misleading, it is inaccurate to suggest that the history of the valley can be separated from that of the rest of Arunachal Pradesh; huddled in their fertile and protected garden, unvisited by Europeans until the late nineteenth century, Apatanis nevertheless traded with both Tibet and Assam. Their contacts with the plains may have been less regular and less extensive than those of other tribes, but the Apatanis were not untouched by the problems that created conflict between the inhabitants of present-day Arunachal Pradesh and the rulers of the Brahmaputra valley. That colonial contact in the valley, with its misunderstanding, mistrust and military force, began in 1897.

<sup>28</sup> The only dissenting voice appears to be Eleanor Bor, wife of a Political Officer in the 1930s, whose single visit to the Apa Tani valley prompted this observation: 'The Apatanang men were naked except for a very small apron-and a tail made of plaited cane ... these people are reported to have been cannibals ... they appeared to answer so accurately to those almost legendary tales of Himalayan savages' (Eleanor Bor, *The Adventures of a Botanist's Wife*, London, 1952, p. 29).

<sup>29</sup> Ursula Graham Bower, *The Hidden Land*, London, p. 116.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary*, London, 1955, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

### 1897: First Colonial Contact

The heart that warmed at the sight of primroses' in 1897 belonged to R.B. McCabe (ICS) Inspector-General of Police and Jails in Assam.<sup>33</sup> His visit to the Apatani valley was official: as Political Officer, he led an expedition to punish the tribesmen for murders they had committed in the plains. The reports, which reached the District Commissioner in North Lakhimpur and then the government in Shillong, was that on 8 November 1896 a party of Apatanis raided the house of Podu (a Hill Miri who worked on Mr Crowe's tea plantation), killing two and taking four captives (one of whom died en route back to the valley). Such raids and killings between Hill Miris, Apatanis and Nyishis (the three tribes of the Subansiri region) were commonplace, but since these murders had been committed within the territory directly under colonial administration, that is, inside the Inner Line, it could not be ignored.<sup>34</sup> According to McCabe, some kind of punitive expedition was necessary to prevent 'serious loss of prestige in the eyes of the trans-frontier Daphlas [Nyishis] and Miri tribes.'<sup>35</sup> The Chief Commissioner of Assam requested a small party of 200 soldiers because he felt that the Apatanis were 'small and not very warlike', but this was immediately overruled by the Army and the force increased to 300.<sup>36</sup> The supplies and equipment for the 18-day expedition required 400 porters (Hill Miris and Nyishis), which presented problems: the promised number of porters often failed to show up and when they did, fell ill or deserted. The porter problem, the forced recruitment of local labour and the resentment it created, soured relations between the government and all tribes in the northeast, including the Apatanis, as we shall see.

On the march into the mountains, groups of Assam Rifles were left at various staging posts, so that when the British force entered the Apatani valley on 14 February 1897, it consisted of only 120 soldiers. This still large party of armed outsiders was met, outside the village of Hong, by hundreds of men carrying long spears, who shouted angrily, 'Don't enter our village; we'll call our leaders and then you can discuss terms.' But when McCabe talked tough and marched ahead, the Apatani men gave way and no shots were fired by the troops. Having planned at first to sleep in local houses, McCabe found they were dirty and lacked water and so made camp on a hillock in the paddy fields.

<sup>33</sup> 'Report on the Apa Tanang Expedition of 1897', by R.B. McCabe; Sir Robert Reid. *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering Assam*, 1863-1941, Shillong, 1942, pp. 274-76. The details of the expedition come from McCabe's 1897 report.

<sup>34</sup> The Inner Line was established in 1873 in order to demarcate the extent of British administration; normal government bureaucracy operated up to the Line, beyond it tribal authority prevailed. For the text of this legislation, see T. Nyori, *History and Culture of the Adis*. New Delhi, 1993, pp. 317-18.

<sup>35</sup> British Library, OI0C, Mss Eur D932/2, Leventon Papers, 'Report on Apa Tanang Expedition of 1897'. by R.C. McCabe, p. 2

<sup>36</sup> Sir Robert Reid. *History of the Frontier Areas*, p. 274.

In the morning the negotiations began, and they lasted for two full days. McCabe, who had spent 20 years in the northeast, admitted that he had never had to show more patience and restraint. He opened the parley by bringing charges of murder within British administered territory, but the Apatanis said they knew nothing of Inner Line regulations. When he told them to hand over the captives brought back from the plains, he was told that they were being held in the next village of Hari Frustrated, McCabe demanded the captives but was told, 'Are you a bird that you can fly away? If you burn our villages, we'll surround you and keep you here as our slaves forever.' McCabe defiantly declared that he would stay as long as necessary, which seemed to persuade the Apatanis to summon the men **from** Hari, who had committed the murders and taken the captives.

On the second day, the men from Hari arrived, led by Murchi, who admitted to having led the raid. Before that admission, however, he subjected McCabe and his fellow officers to two hours of oratory. In explaining the charges against Podu and other Hill Miris and Nyishis, Murchi used the traditional method of placing small bamboo sticks (*khotiir*), one by one, on a longer stick which lay on the ground; each stick represented a claim: one mithun stolen, one woman captured, one man wounded or killed. Using five bundles, each with 50 to 100 sticks, he enumerated the Apatanis' grievances against their neighbours. Many Apatanis, Murchi complained, had been contracted by Podu and others to work in the tea plantations, but many had been cheated or died there. Listening to this speech through his interpreters, McCabe heard the words 'finally' and 'in conclusion' innumerable times before this 'long Scottish sermon' did finally come to an end. By the end of the day, the Apatanis turned over the three captives, as well as Mr Crowe's gun, which they had stolen from Podu's house.

Whatever its irritation, this speech and the return of the captives apparently persuaded McCabe to mitigate punishment against the Apatanis. He demanded only that they return 10 further captives, taken in a previous raid against a Nyishi village. The Apatanis agreed to free six of the 10, but also gave three mithuns and a valuable Tibetan bell, after which they fed the entire party, including the soldiers. Realising that the mithuns would only end up in the hands of the Nyishi porters, who had cheated him throughout the expedition, McCabe, in a final gesture of reciprocity, gave the mithuns back to the Apatanis.

This first contact with colonialism, a punitive expedition with armed soldiers that entered the valley in 1897, appears in McCabe's report as a successful police case: accusation received, suspects sought and apprehended, accused heard, punishment served. Apatanis had committed murders, albeit in retaliation for crimes against them, and they had been brought to justice and treated fairly. For the Apatanis, 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 neighbours.

When I went to the valley in Spring 2002, I brought with me a badly-reproduced copy of a photo taken on the 1897 expedition (Photo 2) <sup>37</sup> Entitled the 'palaver',

<sup>37</sup> The photograph is found in the British Library, .OIOC, Mss Eur D932/4, Leventon Papers and reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.



*Photo 2*  
Apatani Leaders and British Officials Negotiating in 1897

it shows a large group of men, British officers and Indian sepoy soldiers standing around an inner circle of squatting Apatanis, Nyishis and Hill Miris engaged in debate. I had little hope that anyone alive would remember this event, but I thought the photograph might prompt memories of more recent events; remarkably, however, the first group of men who saw the photo, and more importantly heard a summary of the event pictured, remembered the story well enough to tell their version. These men were 70 years or more and from the village at the centre of story, which, they said, happened in their grandfathers' time. None of them actually told a self-contained narrative of the events, but rather responded to questions put by other Apatanis and me. The main informant was Hage Hiiba, whose account I have edited here and augmented with details from other accounts.<sup>38</sup>

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 sepoy soldiers 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 an Apatani friend, here in Hari village. The Apatani man then sent the murderer to another

<sup>38</sup> Hage Hiiba's account was recorded on 5 Mar. 2002 and 4 Apr. 2002, in the village of Hari another account, by Hage Tapa, was recorded on 11 Apr. 2002, also in Hari. Both were translated with assistance from Hage Komo and Hage Gyati. Attempts to collect Nyishi oral accounts of this event were unsuccessful.

Nyishi village close to the plains, in secret, to keep him safe. Someone in that second village, however, betrayed his whereabouts to the village where the murder had taken place, and soon a party of the dead man's kinsmen captured him 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. He called him 'uncle' [aku] but still cursed him to die if he himself died. Next day, the Nyishi captive was escorted to his village and probably killed.

When he heard this news, the Apatani man set out on a raid to attack the village near the plains that had betrayed the hiding place of the murderer. I think he did this because the Nyishi man had been his friend and he had given him refuge in his house and then helped him escape to the plains. But, you see, 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 of the murderer, and thereby put himself in danger of retaliation, the Apatani man from Hari gathered a small party and carried out the raid.

I don't know exactly what happened in that 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 Biiirii 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 Apatanis 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.

This summarised and collated oral account of 2002 accords in several details with the official British report written in 1897. Both sources, for example, agree on the raid on the village near the plains; on the name of the Apatani man who led the raid and the negotiations; the place of the negotiations; the fine imposed (three mithuns in the British source but only one in the oral histories); its return by the British; the use of the counting sticks; even the description of the leading orator fits with the image in the photo. However, more interesting than this corroboration of the accuracy of social memory, at a distance of 105 years about an event that has not been narrativised, or read by those who gave the oral accounts, is the difference between oral and written histories. They differ not in essential details or even in the sequence of events, but more fundamentally, in their respective points of view. Viewed from the perspective of the government headquarters in the plains, this event began with the raid that killed three people in administered territory, and concluded with a demonstration of a fair and just application of power.

The expedition found the guilty party, listened patiently to his evidence, and imposed reasonable punishment; it stayed two days in hostile country, settled the dispute and left. The military discipline of the expedition, according to the written report, partially explains its judicial success. The Apatanis, on the other hand, tell the story from a very different perspective; for them the story began not with the raid and the killings, as in the British report, but with another murder, committed several months before. By harbouring that murderer and then sending him to safety, an Apatani man had exposed himself to danger. He was betrayed by those who revealed the hiding place, and he was placed in greater danger when the murderer was killed, thus creating the conditions for the dead man's soul to wreak revenge upon him. In the oral accounts, the raid by the Apatani man is a retaliation for this double betrayal.

Compared with these oral accounts, McCabe's detailed, typewritten report appears like a badly-cropped photograph, a snapshot that distorts not by what it shows but by what it leaves out. Stripped of its context and its motivations, the raid becomes a criminal act, which requires government reaction; whereas, when seen in a wider context, the raid is itself a justifiable reaction. These differing perspectives are partly explained by the geopolitical distance between the tribesmen and the government. The authorities in the plains were obliged to respond, however reluctantly, to raids within administered territory; it necessarily picked up the narrative trail from the raid and would not know, as local people would, the background to such events. There is also the difference imposed by genre: in terms of psychological depth, an official government report can hardly compete with oral histories, recorded even a century after the event. Even allowing for these somewhat obvious factors, however, and remembering that there is little difference in the details or main episodes in both sources, one is struck by the sharp contrast between the two descriptions of the same historical event. The government report begins the story with an almost wilful disinterest in the wider context, whereas the Apatani accounts cannot avoid beginning with a reference to the ongoing trade with the plains and the events that preceded the raid. Other Apatani histories, migration legends and genealogies, show a similar tendency to embed the core narrative within a larger context; like many other narratives, which also follow a different set of conventions to those recognised by modern historiography, these accounts tend to begin with the creation of the world or of human beings. Apatani histories do not commence *in medias res*; they begin from the beginning.

Taken together, however, the written and oral sources for this initial colonial contact in the 'hidden land' reveal the positions of the two parties that would define their relations until the end of the colonial period. The Apatanis opposed the entry of the outsiders, whom they called *halyang*, and only ceded to their demands (handing over captives and paying a fine) because of their military superiority. The expedition, which had little grasp of tribal culture and none of its language, faced the problem of finding and retaining the necessary number of porters. During the next 50 years, contacts between Apatanis and government were not extensive,

but when they did thicken in the 1940s, the problems first revealed in 1897 culminated in an explosive event.

### 1948: The Raid on Kure

After the expedition in 1897, contact between Apatanis and the government consisted mainly of investigations of minor incidents within the Inner Line, and the romance of isolation continued to veil descriptions of the Apatani valley. The killing of a British official in the neighbouring Adi country in 1911, however, prompted the government to send three separate expeditions into the mountains. One of these, the Miri Mission, which explored the country east of the Apatani valley, met with resistance and ended in disaster: 26 Hill Miris were killed and two villages burned.<sup>39</sup> When the Miri Mission retreated and passed through the Apatani valley, en route to Assam, a British correspondent accompanying the expedition remarked that the change from the 'dense jungles of the hills regions, to the cultivated oases of the Apa Tanang plateau was very delightful; the vista of pine-woods, broad open cultivated valleys, stretches of rice-fields, nestling villages, and grassy knolls, forming a picture that rejoiced the hearts of the sepoys'.<sup>40</sup> The hidden land was still a Shangri-la.

In the early 1930s, the valley was twice visited by the Political Officer of the Balipara Frontier Tract, based at Charduar. Dr N.L. Bor went to investigate an allegation that some Apatanis had stolen iron railings from a tea garden, but he was given the cold shoulder and returned to the plains without managing to meet with any leading men.<sup>41</sup> Two years later, his successor Captain G.S. Lightfoot was apparently more persistent, met with the 'chiefs' and reported that 'confidence was re-instilled'.<sup>42</sup> These official reports describe the Apatanis as 'shy', 'quaint' and 'gentle'.<sup>43</sup> With the exception of these three official visits, the Apatani valley, not thought to be of any military or political significance, was left in peaceful isolation.

This official indifference, however, did not survive the Second World War. Although the government wanted to know the extent and nature of Tibetan political influence in the northeast border region, they expended few resources in satisfying that curiosity.<sup>44</sup> Then, in 1942, Japanese invasion of the Naga Hills dramatically revealed the unprotected northeast flank

<sup>39</sup> Angus Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles*, London, 1912, pp. 188ff, 332ff. Thirty years later, Furer-Haimendorf found that he had to compensate the kinsmen of some of those killed when he travelled through the same country for the same purpose, namely to discover the nature and scope of Tibetan influence (Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary*, pp. 207-8).

<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles*, pp. 341-42.

<sup>41</sup> British Library, 010C, L/P&S/12/3114 Political (External) Dept. North Eastern Frontier, Assam, Annual Reports on Frontier Tribes, Annual Report for 1932-33.

<sup>42</sup> British Library, 010C, L/P&S/12/3114 Political (External) Dept. North Eastern Frontier, Assam, Annual Reports on Frontier Tribes, Annual Report for 1935-36.

<sup>43</sup> See, however, the quotation from Eleanor Bor in note 26 above.

<sup>44</sup> Alastair Lamb, *et*, *China and India, 1914-1950: A History of Imperial Diplomacy*, Hertingfordbury, 1989, pp. 417-19; Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontiers, a Political Review of British, Chinese, Indian and Russian Rivalries*, London, 1969, p. 211.

and the government reacted quickly to extend its control over these unadministered mountains, right up to the McMahon Line, so vaguely drawn in 1914. One move was to appoint a little-known anthropologist, working in the hilly jungles of central India, as Special Advisor for the Subansiri region; his task was to establish friendly relations with the Apatanis, Nyishis and Hill Miris, as a preliminary step to bringing the area under more effective government control and thwart any ambitions north of the Himalayas.

Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, and his wife, walked seven days from the plains and arrived in the Apatani valley in March 1944; they stayed only two months but returned that autumn, escorted by 75 Assam Rifles and remained there, exploring the surrounding country, until May 1945. During that time, FurerHaimendorf achieved his political objectives: a government outpost was established in the valley; warring groups negotiated settlements under government supervision; the surrounding regions were explored, although circumstances prevented him from fulfilling his and the government's ultimate aim of reaching the snowline of the Himalayan range. After Furer-Haimendorf's departure, a brief visit was made by J.P. Mills, then Advisor to the Government of Assam for Tribal Areas, accompanied by 25 Assam Rifles and Major C.R. Stonor, an agricultural officer and botanist; among other things, Mills found that Captain Anthony Davy, who was Assistant Political Officer, had made himself unpopular by forcible arrests.<sup>45</sup> But there was no permanent government presence in the valley until a new Political Officer arrived in November 1946. Major F.N. Betts and his wife, Ursula Graham Bower, picked up where Furer-Haimendorf, left off: they revived the outpost in the valley, established a new and permanent military outpost nearby at Kure, and oversaw more peace negotiations between warring groups. After the usual summer interval at Shillong, Betts returned in the autumn of 1947 and left the valley in late March 1948.

Within two months of their departure, however, several hundred Apatani men attacked Kure. One evening in late May, they put on their war dress and gathered to perform rituals to ensure success; when the rituals were finished it was past midnight, and in the early morning they walked the five miles through the forests to the outpost. With spears and bows and arrows, the Apatanis charged, but when the soldiers fired and killed three men, the attack was over; the attackers quickly fled back to the valley, where they burned a government storehouse at Papii. The government retaliated quickly: after investigating, they burned the houses and granaries in the two villages they considered responsible for leading the raid. In that burning two more Apatanis were shot. Everyone in those two villages, approximately 5,000-6,000 people, were forced to take refuge in the forest and then with friends in other villages. Five months later, the refugees returned to rebuild their houses and granaries and look after their fields, their primary source of

<sup>45</sup> L.P. Mills remarked that Davy's attempts to reconcile Nyishis and Apatanis had 'tended to alarm both' (Public Record Office, London, FO 371153661, 'Programme of work for North-east Frontier Agency for 1945/46' dated 14 August 1945). See also Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes*, Vol. 3, 1981, p. 272.

food. In the end, five Apatanis had been shot, several wounded and many sent to jail. Apatanis were not complete strangers to warfare-disputes between villages, and with Nyishis were common and occasionally resulted in casualties though rarely in death; but this level of violence and loss of life was unprecedented.

The colonial contact begun in 1897 had culminated in this event 50 years later, which marked the end of traditional tribal authority and the beginning of external government authority in the Apatani valley. Apatani society had been regulated by village councils (buliyang), which adjudicated disputes and imposed punishments, usually fines or imprisonment; their power was the real casualty of the attack. Although Political Officers had been invested with considerable military, police and judicial powers, there was little scope and some reluctance to utilise them especially in internal tribal affairs. As an extension of the government's retaliation to the attack in 1948, the use of those powers was normalised; before long a court system, under the control of the Deputy Commissioner, had completely usurped the traditional role of the village councils.

Despite the significance of this event--a rebellion, deaths and village burnings in a region that the government was attempting to pacify--it is not described in published histories.<sup>46</sup> Neither Furer-Haimendorf nor Graham Bower mention it in their memoirs. Graham Bower and her husband, F.N. Betts (the Political Officer), left two months before the attack, but in 1953 she published a detailed description of their work in the valley, complete with postscripts. Furer-Haimendorf left three years before the attack, but he visited the valley several times after; still, nowhere in his many writings does he mention what happened in 1948. Nevertheless, both Graham Bower's and Furer-Haimendorf's books tell us a great deal about the conditions that led up to the attack on the government outpost, the establishment of which was the crowning achievement of their collective efforts. Indeed, their personal accounts of the contacts between themselves, as representatives of the government, and the Apatanis are not just entertaining but extremely candid, and not always flattering to the authors. One revealing example is a section in Furer-Haimendorf's 1955 book describing his forcible arrest of two Apatanis for refusing to work as porters; this section was excised from the second edition of the book.<sup>47</sup>

Government documents are even more baffling. Political Officers wrote fortnightly reports, which were sent to the Governor's office in Shillong, where they were collated and summarised 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,<sup>48</sup> a copy is held at the

<sup>46</sup> The only written source to mention the raid is a local publication (Takhe Kani, *The Advancing Apa Tanis of Arunachal Pradesh*, Itanagar, 1993, p. 26) which notes that after F N. Betts left, there was 'hostility between the Government Sepoys and the Apatanis', that this hostility was locally called Kure chambyo, that a few Apatanis lost their lives in the attack, and that this hostility caused the government to rapidly expand its administration.

<sup>47</sup> The section from middle of page 111 to the middle of 113 in Furer-Haimendorf's 1955 book is omitted from its updated version (Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Adventure: Early Travels in North East India*, New Delhi, 1983).

<sup>48</sup> British Library, OIOC, L/P&S/12/3118.

Public Record Office in London. The report for the Subansiri Area for the first half of June reads:

It is reported that there was a recent plan to attack the Assam Rifles outpost at Kure [Kure] the reason being that the Tribals 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.<sup>49</sup>

The next report states that the 'main instigator of the conspiracy' was arrested and put in jail; and the next concludes that 'the disturbances amongst the Apatanis have been settled'.<sup>50</sup> 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, 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<sup>51</sup>

The raid that officially did not happen in 1948 is, however, the most prominent event in Apatani oral history. Apatanis call it *Kure chambyo*, or 'the attack at Kure'. Kure was the government outpost (a large building for the Political Officer and several smaller buildings: cookhouse, interpreters' house, Assam Rifles barracks) built in the winter of 1946-47, in the hills about five miles and a three hours' walk from the Apatani valley. The recollections of the attack that I heard in Spring 2002 are numerous-almost everyone over 70 had personal memories and many told stories as if the event had happened last year. The various accounts are not always consistent and frequently contradictory, especially about the exact role of each village in the attack, but they are in agreement about several points. Many of the men and women spoke with sadness about the deprivation suffered after the villages, including the granaries, were burned down; Apatanis are also not immune to self-mockery and some accounts made fun of their ancestors' fears of the 'firepower', which they thought could be countered with 'water-power'. Several accounts also emphasise the language barrier between Apatanis and the government officials, which could only be breached through the Assamese-speaking tribesmen, employed by the government as 'Political Interpreters'.

<sup>49</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.

<sup>50</sup> Public Record Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, DO 142/461. Fortnightly reports, on the Assam Tribal Areas, Reports, first half of July 1948 and second half of July 1948, Office of the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi.

<sup>51</sup> This 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.

Another recurring feature is an account of the rituals performed prior to the attack, first to ascertain its chances and then to ensure its success.

Beyond these characteristic emphases, the oral histories agree on the fundamental issue of causes: the two primary causes of the attack were the government's interference in internal village affairs and its policy of forcible portage. These policies also underpinned local resistance to colonial authority across the Himalayan region, as shown in Guha's study of the Uttarakhand region;<sup>52</sup> but in order to appreciate the force of local resentment to external interference in the present case, it should be remembered that the Apatani valley had been more isolated from colonial contact and noted that Apatanis did not porter for anyone prior to the arrival of the British. As summarised above, colonial contact only began in the last years of the nineteenth century and before 1944 had been limited to three brief visits by government officials. The arrival of Furer-Haimendorf in that year, and of armed Sepoys the next, was a profound shock to local culture. An indication of Apatani attitudes to outsiders is their classification of people into three groups: *tani* (that is, themselves), *misan* (other tribals, especially Nyishis and Hill Miris) and *halyang* (non-tribals, people from the plains, especially Assamese but also anyone else).<sup>53</sup> The British officials and their Assamese assistants were *halyang*, outsiders who came from elsewhere and did not belong in the mountains; this is how they are uniformly identified in the oral histories (even today this term is used to refer to people from the plains or beyond, whether Indians or foreign tourists). When the *halyang* set up a temporary base in the valley and then a permanent base at Kure, fear and resentment grew. At one point in his memoirs, Furer-Haimendorf remarks that he 'experienced how difficult it was to impose on Apatanis any outside authority'; yet such an authority was necessary in order for the government to accomplish its declared objective of the pacification of the region.<sup>54</sup>

At first, the government was successful in maintaining a policy of non-interference in local affairs.<sup>55</sup> Apatanis believed that the government had come to assist them in their disputes with neighbouring tribes (*misan*); Furer-Haimendorf had been invited by a few men for this task and he did supervise the negotiations that brought temporary peace, but, as we know, he was actually sent by the government to establish control over all tribes in the region. Even Mills, who constantly sought to lessen the military presence in the area, referred in 1945 to 'our occupation of the Apa Tani country'<sup>56</sup> When Betts arrived in 1947, he called together

<sup>52</sup> Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, passim.

<sup>53</sup> A resistance to 'outsiders', conveniently identified by a local word, was a common factor in conflicts between tribes and the state in India (K.S. Singh, *Tribal Society in India*, p. 149).

<sup>54</sup> Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary*, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> The Assam Frontier Regulation Act of 1945 recognised the authority of village councils and village headmen, which were allowed to police their own affairs but not inter-tribal affairs.

<sup>56</sup> Public Record Office, London, FO 371/53661, 'Programme of work for North-east Frontier Agency for 1945/46', dated 14 Aug. 1945.

the 'headmen' of Apatanis and said that the government would not interfere in local disputes if managed well; only in cases of 'flagrant oppression' would the government interfere; for example, to free a 'slave'.<sup>57</sup> Within a few months, however, inevitably, and against its will, the government was sucked into local disputes within the valley itself. For one thing, the government had been invited by men from a particular village, in which it set up its camp and from where most of its Political Interpreters came; to local eyes, that meant that the government was allied with that village. Although both Furer-Haimendorf and Graham Bower give no indication that they took sides in internal disputes, that is not how it is remembered by Apatanis.

The oral histories are consistent in claiming that two particular disputes led to the attack on Kure in 1948. One involved a stolen brass plate (*talo*), and the other a young woman who left her husband to live with another man. Both disputes, according to the oral accounts, were taken to Kure for arbitration, where decisions were delivered; the men who lost these cases grew angry, rallied the rest of the valley and led the attack on the authority that had, in their view, denied them justice. The case of the stolen brass plate is noted in Graham Bower's book, but she makes it clear that the government was not involved. After summarising the conflicting claims of who stole the plate from whom, her husband, who had just returned from a tour, replies, 'Can *anybody* make head or tail of that?' And Graham Bower answers, 'Presumably God and the buliyang can, and the latter seem to think they'll settle it.'<sup>58</sup> There is no mention in her detailed memoirs of the second case, the marital dispute. Whatever the truth of these conflicting claims about the government's role in settling these cases, Apatanis believe that the government took sides; and that government interference generated resentment. At the very least, we do know that anger sufficient to motivate hundreds of men to attack the government did exist in 1948 and that the men who lost the cases were ringleaders of that attack.

But that resentment cannot be wholly attributed to two, or even several, disgruntled litigants. The second cause mentioned consistently in the oral histories and revealed, perhaps unwittingly, by Furer-Haimendorf and Graham Bower is that of portage. While the disputes over stolen plates and missing wives were more public and dramatic, portage was no less a factor behind the attack on Kure. Both interference and portage were felt as the imposition of an external authority, backed by superior military power: the former undermined the independence of the *buliyang* (local council), the latter undermined the freedom of individual Apatanis. In any case, the Apatanis forced to carrying loads for the government far outnumbered those who lost their cases and blamed the government.

<sup>57</sup> British Library, OIOC, L/P&S/12/3117, fortnightly reports on the Assam Tribal Areas. Reports, first half May 1947, Office of the Advisor to the Governor to Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi.

<sup>58</sup> Graham Bower, *The Hidden Land*, p. 169.

The problem of portage, which we noted in the report on the 1897 expedition, was unavoidable when an external power attempted to exercise control in the Arunachal region: no party could move through that terrain without local labour and the numbers required were in the hundreds. Equipment and rations sufficient for the officials, assistants and soldiers who stayed in the valley for many months amounted to many very heavy loads, which a single man might be forced to carry as many as 15 times in a winter season.<sup>59</sup> Although the government paid what they considered a good wage to their porters, it was well aware of the discontent among tribesmen of Arunachal; many of them did not want to go to the plains, where others had died of disease, and they needed to work in their own fields. As an official report candidly commented in 1945, 'there is no doubt that portage is intensely unpopular throughout the North East Frontier Agency'.<sup>60</sup> J.P. Mills, the man most knowledgeable about the government's position in this period, was more blunt: 'We soon found that if we got the tribesmen to do the portage they were taken off their own cultivation for so long that they were faced with starvation'.<sup>61</sup> For Apatanis, who had never worked as porters before the arrival of the British, portage was also an insult to their personal dignity. They do not like to work for anyone; they are entrepreneurs, who own their own land and live in nuclear families in separate houses. Even today, it is extremely rare to see any Apatani doing contract labour, and never for the *halyang* ('outsiders', including Indians); road construction and similar work is done typically by Indians from the plains.

Whenever the government undertook a trip between the plains and the valley, or from the valley into surrounding country, it required not dozens but hundreds of porters. The government had a staff of permanent porters, mostly Galos, but to them at least a 100 or more Apatanis had to be added.<sup>62</sup> The normal method of recruitment was to ask each village to supply a certain number, about 15 men. If individuals refused, the oral histories claim, they were abused or beaten and sometimes sent to jail; individuals also paid others to take their place in the rota. Furer-Haimendorf considered the problem of portage significant enough to devote an entire chapter to it in his 1955 book. Once, when he was ready to leave for the plains but no porters were forthcoming, he took two armed soldiers and arrested the man responsible for the non-cooperation. When 15 men then promised to serve as porters, the hostage was released; but two days before departure, there

<sup>59</sup> British Library. OIOC, L/P&S/12/3114, J.P. Mills, 'Report on the Assam Tribal Areas for Year ending 30 June 1945', Shillong.

<sup>60</sup> British Library, OIOC. L/P&S/12/3117, Fortnightly reports on the Assam Tribal Areas, first half Sept. 1945. From Office of the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi.

<sup>61</sup> J.P. Mills, 'Problems of the Assam-Tibet border'. *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*. XXXVII(2), 1950, p. 158.

<sup>62</sup> One hundred and fifty permanent porters were employed in the Siang region (Public Record Office, London. FO 37 1/5366 1. Letter of 17 Oct. 1945 from the Joint Secretary to the External Affairs Dept to the Secretary, to Governor of Assam).

was still resistance to the recruitment of men, so he again took an armed escort and arrested two men. When, finally, he marched out of the valley en route to the plains with a small group of porters, he was met by crowds of jeering Apatanis shouting to the porters to drop their loads and threatening to make war against the government.<sup>64</sup> The tension grew to such a point that Furer-Haimendorf feared an attack because the Apatanis were 'resentful of being harassed by the recruitment of porters'.<sup>65</sup> Shortly after he left the valley, three Apatanis came to the government headquarters in the plains and informed officials that the whole tribe refused to carry loads in future, except in an emergency, and that the government must provide its own porters.<sup>66</sup>

Pressure on porter recruitment was eased slightly when, two years later, in 1947, Betts organised an air-drop for supplies, but it was not eliminated. In the months preceding the attack in Spring 1948, mistrust and tensions between Apatanis and the government increased. Kure was protected by 50 Assam Rifles but in the Autumn of 1947, the garrison was reinforced with additional soldiers, who kept up 'vigorous patrolling' to 'arrest culprits' and to inflict 'punishment on guilty villages'.<sup>67</sup> Most of this activity was directed against the Nyishis, but the persistent demand for porters and the perceived interference in their internal affairs created anger and frustration among many Apatanis, too. In Spring 1948, when the government got caught up in a conflict between villages, bands of armed Apatani men shouted abuse and threatened to attack the government; at one point Graham Bower herself had to be escorted by armed soldiers.<sup>68</sup> Even some of the trusted friends of the government, men who had co-operated since Furer-Haimendorf's arrival, began to turn against it. When Graham Bower left in late March 1948, she was alarmed at the outbreak of inter-village rivalry and violence, but she did not anticipate that the aggression would soon turn against the government.

A final striking feature of the oral histories, beyond the unanimity in attributing the attack to external interference and enforced portage, is a talismanic repetition of the names of the dead. Whatever the confusing welter of details, of who was where when, there is never any doubt about who died: Tasso Pilyan, Duyu Kolyang Tasso Kojing Hage Doley and Hage Khoda. Every account I recorded included this list of names of the Apatanis killed in the attack and the retaliatory burning of their villages. The war dead are remembered in most societies, in official

<sup>63</sup> This section was excised from the second edition of Furer-Haimendorf's book (Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Adventure*); see note 44 above.

<sup>64</sup> Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary* p. 109ff.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>66</sup> British Library, OIOC, L/P&S/12/3117. Fortnightly reports on the Assam Tribal Areas. First half Sept. 1945, Office of the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi.

<sup>67</sup> British Library, OIOC, L/P&S/12/3117, fortnightly reports on the Assam Tribal Areas. Second half Nov. 1947, Office of the Advisor to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas, Shillong, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Delhi.

<sup>68</sup> Graham Bower, *The Hidden Land*, pp. 224-30.

ceremonies, state funerals and history books, sometimes names are engraved on memorials and some graves may become a site of pilgrimage. But among a people whose history is not recorded in writing, among the Apatanis., there is no memorial, am even an epitaph, for those killed in the raid on Kure.<sup>69</sup> For a people without writing the verbal repetition of the names of the dead is an act of social memory. Like an aide memoir, the list of names recalls the wider context-the interference by outsiders, the burden of portage and the imposition of an external authority. Speaking the names of the dead, however, is more than an act of remembering; it is also an enactment. Elizabeth Tonkin has forcefully argued that telling oral history as a form of social action, and the Apatani material presented here confirms her point.<sup>70</sup> Oral histories may sometimes lack the detail and depth, the reasoning and argument of the best written histories, but they are not only an exercise in social memory. The speaking of history is itself an event, which collapses time and the past within the present.

### **Conclusions**

In examining colonial contacts and oral histories in Arunachal Pradesh, a tribal state in northeast India, this article has reached two main conclusions. The first concerns the 'romance of isolation', the presumption that tribal cultures, especially in the peripheral northeast, are either timeless or live in an eternal present. Although the mountainous region of Arunachal is a linguistic, ethnic and cultural anomaly in South Asia, it has not been unaffected by historical and political movements in the subcontinent: until very recently, for example, trade routes linking Tibet and Assam passed through Arunachal; the Ahom kings of the Brahmaputra valley negotiated treaties with the hill tribes until the early nineteenth century, similarly, new economic and political forces in the colonial period also touched Arunachal.

With the establishment of British rule in Assam in the 1820s, the people of Arunachal were drawn into a pattern of armed conflict that defined colonial contacts with Adivasi groups throughout the nineteenth century. In Arunachal, the duration, scale and frequency of that colonial contact and the resulting violence differed for different tribes. For the Apatanis, living in a valley at 5,000 ft, the first contact came only in 1897; and a permanent government presence was established in their valley only in the 1940s. The only armed conflict between the Apatanis and the external authorities occurred in 1948, when the tribesmen attacked the government outpost. In the end, five Apatanis were killed, many wounded and some who were sent to jail in Assam never returned; in reprisal for the attack, two of their villages, including granaries, were burned to the ground. The causes of the raid on the government outpost--forced portage and the undermining of local tribal authority--also place the history of the isolated Apatani valley within well-known patterns of resistance to colonial power.

<sup>69</sup> Apatanis are buried, and the graves of the wealthy are often marked by bamboo altars. or more recently by concrete structures.

<sup>70</sup> Tonkin. *Narrating our Pasts*.

A second conclusion concerns the need for oral histories, especially in cultures without writing. Although the 1948 raid is the most significant event of the twentieth century for Apatanis, it has never been reported in written histories. The fact that the raid had occurred was also denied in the fortnightly reports by the local Political Officer, who admitted that there had been a 'plan to attack' the outpost but that it had been prevented by timely action. We know that oral histories are not always accurate, but sometimes, as in this case, they may be required to set the record straight.

Appendix  
Apatani Oral Histories of Kure Chambyo, the Attack  
on the Government Outpost at Kure in Spring 1948

*Version 1: by Hage Bhatt (70 years) on 30 March 2002 in Hari village; questions put by Hage Komo and Stuart Blackburn; translated with the assistance of Hage Komo and Hage Gyati.*

After Laling and Yalu [local names for Furer-Haimendorf and his wife, Betty] came to the valley, disputes were generally solved by the *halyang*.<sup>1</sup> As one example, once the Bullo clan in Hong village got angry [because they lost a case, see below]; after that, Hong village didn't want the *halyang* to interfere in their affairs anymore.

Q (SB): When did the *halyang* first come up to the valley?

I was only about this high [about 12-15 years] when Furer-Haimendorf first came. I saw them when I went to Pape via Pige Lembo, the road that connects Hija with the main road.

Q (SB): Where did Haimendorf first live? Was it Kure?

No, it was in Hija, in Lying Piisa, then at Papii. When they set up in Papii they made us Apatanis carry loads [as porters]. They even brought a case against two people who refused to carry loads. That was Tasso Tasser and Hage Tating. People used to carry loads from Kimin to Ziro, via Jorum and Laji Mai.

So we used to carry loads; then the *halyang* also began to settle our disputes. Before they came, we settled them ourselves. Soon people started to say, 'We shouldn't allow these *halyang* to come up here. It's not good. We should fight the outsiders [*nibo pasa*].' The people who began to talk like this were, first of all Tapi Kojing of Hong, Nako Gyati and Subu Khoda of Kalung, and Tasso Talu of Hari. Before long, the whole valley was saying, 'They shouldn't come here. We won't discuss our disputes with them any more. We'll settle them ourselves. We'll attack them.'

The *halyang* had built a sort of go-down, to store supplies, at Papii. When the people attacked Kuru, they burned it down. During the attack, Hazarika saab and the sepoy's fired their guns and Apatanis were shot.

<sup>1</sup> *Halyang* denotes 'non-tribal'; see p. 355.

Q (HK): Who was shot?

First, it was Tasso Pilyan, Duyu Kolyang and Tasso Kojing. Those three. Q (HK): Just three?

Yes, only those three were killed at Kure. After they were shot and killed, we couldn't do anything. Only Dusu Riku was able to stab Hazarika saab like this [shows thrusting spear through neck]. But when those three were shot dead, we all ran and came back to our own villages.

Four days later, after the attack on Kure, Menji Baruah came to Hari with a party of eight sepoy.<sup>2</sup> They fired their guns in the air bang! bang! Then they called out to the PIs [Political Interpreters appointed by government] to come out-at that time the PIs in Hari were Dusu Tayu and Hage Doley. Dusu Tayu was immediately arrested and taken away. Hage Doley was shot and killed, over by his granary, just nearby here.<sup>3</sup>

Q (HK): So he was the fourth one killed?

Yes, he was the fourth. By then Menji Baruah was in Old Ziro [the new headquarters]. From there, he ordered that Hari be burned-completely destroyed! During the burning, Hage Jabru was shot in the back and his guts came out the front [but didn't die]. And then Landi Haley was shot, and wounded in his bamboo grove, behind the village; and finally Hage Khoda was shot and killed.

After that, we gave in and did whatever work the government asked us to do-carrying loads, and other things. At Kure, there was Menji Baruah, Rai Saab, Genda Saab and a few Nyishi PIs-Kupeh Taniah, Nikh Kopeh, Taba Tatu.<sup>4</sup> And the saabs began to appoint Apatanis as gaunboras-Hage Dolyang, Gyati Tadu, Mudan Taker, Padi Lalyang, Takhe Tagu.<sup>5</sup> These gaunboras agreed to co-operate with the government, to assist them. They even asked to be forgiven for the attack on Kure. They agreed to all this because they didn't want more of our people to be attacked and maybe killed.

They also gave a *maji* [bell] and a *talo* [brass plate], mithuns and cows, to the government with the pledge, 'I'll work for you!'

Soon a new government headquarters was constructed on the hill in Old Ziro, and we all helped to build it. And we also did porter work. But when we worked, those sepoy would insult us: 'Useless people! Work's no good!' We carried their loads-so many of those loads! If we didn't, we'd go to jail. We carried the loads to and from Kimin, to Daporijo, via Parsing, and Khemio near Tamen. We had to agree to do it; if not, they would send 10 or 20 of us to jail [*patii*].

Q (HK): Did you read any chicken and egg omens before attacking Kure?

Yes, we did. The older men gathered on the *dokan lapang* [oldest one in Hari, belonging to the Miido clan] and read the chicken livers. They did the same in Hong, and Bula, too. Independently, we decided that we could attack. Reading the livers, we thought it was a good time to attack. Everyone went in the attack, everyone except old men and women and children, All the men went.

<sup>2</sup> The identity of 'Menji Baruah' is unclear; no one of that name is mentioned in written sources, although an S.C. Baruah did serve in Kure at this time.

<sup>3</sup> Another man, who participated in the attack and later became a government peon, said that Hage Doley was handcuffed, but ran off and was shot dead.

<sup>4</sup> Kupeh Taniah [=Kop Temi] served under Furer-Haimendorf and Betts.

<sup>5</sup> *Gaunboras* were government-appointed Village Headmen, an office that competed with the *buliyang*

Q (HK): Then, why was Hari the only village burned? Why not Hong?

Because people told the *halyang* that Hari was the most powerful village, that Tasso Talu was involved. You see, we also had two PIs in Hari-Dusu Tayu and Hage Doley-but they did nothing to prevent the attack. They punished us for that, by burning the village.

Q (HK): Weren't there PIs in Bula?

No, they had only gaunboras-like Padi Lalyang. But Hong had PIs, such as Tinyo Biida; but in Hong only Tapi Kejing's house was burned. In Kalung there were PIs, such as Nako Gyati and Subu Khoda, so Kalung was also burned and for the same reason-that they didn't prevent the attack on Kure. They burned Hari first, and then Kalung.

Q (SB): What cases led to the attack on Kure?

Well, before the *halyang* arrived, we were used to settling disputes among ourselves. In Hari or in Bula, for instance. After Haimendorf arrived, we started to go to the saabs-to him, to Menji Baruah and to Hazarika Saab. We wanted them to settle cases, but they used force and sometimes sent us to jail. We wanted to stop that; we wanted to handle our own affairs. We didn't to want to follow their rules.

Q (HK): Were any *buliyang* [leading men] sent to jail?

Of course, the *buliyang* wanted to settle the cases themselves, and to avoid going to jail. They felt that the *halyang* were outsiders and shouldn't try to solve our cases. We wanted to continue with the old ways, putting someone in the stocks [*ta piirdu*] instead of sending them to jail. This is what our fathers and grandfathers -told us-that we have *buliyang* and we can handle these cases. But the *halyang* interfered, in the case of the mithun and the case of that young girl.

Version 2: by Mudan Donny (40) on 31 March 2002 in Hapoli; translated with the assistance of Hage Komo and Hage Gyati. [Donny's father, Dandhin Tagyang-Naku, took part in the attack. His grandfather was Dandhin Takher. He has gathered information from his father and others, which he records in a notebook, in a mixture of English, Hindi and romanised Apatani.]

There were two cases in the background of the attack on Kure. The first was the case in Hong. When a young girl wanted to leave her husband, the husband's father, Tapi Kojing, tried to persuade her to stay. 'Once you go to a man's house, you should stay there,' he said. But she left her husband anyway and began living with another man. They couldn't stop her, you see, but they got angry and complained to the *halyang*. That's when the dispute started. The girl was a good speaker, and when she and her family went to Kure to see Menji Baruah, she convinced him that her first marriage had been 'by force'. Today we call it 'child marriage'. Menji Baruah decided the case by saying that forceful marriage was wrong. So Tapi Kejing lost the case, and the girl stayed with Punyo Kojing.

The second case was in Hari. Taku Kime borrowed a mithun from Tasso Talu, and when Tasso Talu asked for it back, Taku Kime denied that he had it. Tasso Talu complained to Menji Baruah but lost the case. Apparently there was an eye-witness to the borrowing, I think it was Nako Gyati, but he was related to Tasso Talu. Then Tasso Talu began shouting, 'These *halyang* have only just come up here but already they are destroying our way of life!' They were very angry.

About this time, Menji Baruah used to spend a few months at Papii, and the rest of the at Kure, his headquarters. At Kure, his PIs were able to talk with him in Assamese, Was his language. There were Tinyo Biida, Padi Lalyang and Myabo Tadu, as well as Dusu Tayu and Hage Doley. No one else could speak to him directly, they had to go through these PIs. Actually Myabo Tadu was in Kure during the time of the attack-he was that close to the government.

Three men planned the attack-Tapi Kojing, Tasso Talu and Nako Gyati-and then went around and convinced the other villages. Hari said, 'Ready'. Hong and Bula 'We're ready, too'. But two villages, Mudan Tage and Michi Bamin, had to talk it \*m first. In Mudan Tage, men gathered on the *miipyan lapang* and talked.

The first to speak was Mudan Dandhin Ribya: 'Can we really defeat them?'

Dandhin Hanya said, 'Yes, we can. Let's attack. If we continue to report cases to the *halyang* like the mithun and the girl cases, we'll lose our authority-the *buliyang will* have no work. We shouldn't obey the outsiders. It's better to fight them They just keep on coming up here-first it's Haimendorf, then Sopyy-Yuper,<sup>6</sup> then Baruah, little by little they're coming up and soon they'll steal all our land. And they are easy to defeat. They're soft Even my *mamu* [little sister] could knock three or four down with a single blow! They're lazy and soft--don't even carry a *dao*. <sup>1</sup>Don't wear warrior clothes--they're naked and soft, like worms!'

Mudan Abu: 'Yes, we can defeat them all right! If the whole valley joins together, we can do it.'

Mudan Takher: 'But they have guns, which spit out fire. It's very dangerous.'

Mudan Abu: 'If they use fire-power, we'll use water on our bodies' (speaker laughs).

Tage Dolyang Tana: 'Yes, they even have soft, droopy necks, like mithuns. We can kill them in the neck.'

Buru Tayu: 'Even if we close our eyes, we can cut them down, by swinging our *daos*, pok! pok! Like slicing through soft bamboo.'

So, in the end, it was decided to join the attack on Kure. The very last speaker, who summarised the discussion, was Tage Uja: '*These halyang* are naked and soft! Let them use fire-power, we will use water against their fire. You women and children! Get ready to take away their belongings [after we kill them].'

Now all the villages were ready, including Mudan Tage and Bamin Michi. Finally they had to consider whether they should inform Hija. Mudan Dimpyo said, 'Hija brought the *halyang* up here in the first place, via Jorum. Those two men, Pura Tagyang and Nada Twa, invited them here. Hija also reported the talo case to the *halyang*. No, we shouldn't tell them about the attack. After we attack Kure, we should burn Hija.'

You see, in the old days, Nyishis used to harass women and children in the villages, and we drove them away. And now they wanted to do the same to the *halyang*.

In an effort to stop the bullets from coining out of their guns, Apatanis sacrificed mithuns, did rituals to wis [spirits], especially to *giiri tamu* and to *kasang khali* [for individual good luck]. When the priests and old men discussed how to stop those bullets, they said, 'Our gods are powerful and strong; we can defeat the *halyang*.' Then they told everyone to perform rituals to the gods.

<sup>6</sup> 'Sopyy-Yuper' (apparently) refers to Betts and Graham Bower, who succeeded Furer-Haimendorf as government representatives in the valley.

<sup>7</sup> A sword (*ilyo* in Apatani), for everyday use, such as cutting down bamboo.

On the march to Kure, while the men from Mudan Tage were waiting for others to join them, my father, Dandhin Tagyang had a dream. In the dream, he saw two frogs, with various coloured stripes-brown, red, green. Then a third frog appeared, then a fourth and finally a fifth. He tied them to a bush by the leg and prevented them from moving. He thought that the frogs represented the souls of the *halyang*, and now that he had trapped them he felt sure that the Apatanis would defeat the *halyang*. My father then spoke to his brother-in-law, who agreed with this interpretation of his dream.

Meanwhile, a large party was en route to attack Kure. Two among them, Liagi Tamin and Liagi Ruja, spoke among themselves: 'Let's go to the front, past these people from Hari; they're clever and may steal all the credit for the victory. If we get there first and kill a few *halyang*, we'll be the famous ones!' They ran ahead, full of expectation. Everyone had *daos*, spears, and wore the *pidin*,<sup>8</sup> and they thought the *halyang* wore nothing-that they were naked. My father said he thought they would overcome the *halyang* easily. 'As soon as we kill one or two', he thought, 'the rest will run away'. When they got close, about one kilometre from Kure, they began to shout the war chants; holding their *daos up* high, they rushed forward shouting, 'Ho! Ho! Let's kill them!

An Apatani named Myobya Tadu, who was there at Kure, heard the shouts and told Menji Baruah. Baruah said, 'What? Why are they attacking us? What reason could they have?' Then he asked what weapons they had and was told they had *daos*, spears, bows and arrows. Baruah then felt relieved and said, 'OK let them attack; we're not prepared, but let them come.'

The Apatanis ran forward, shouting their war cries. When the guards cocked their guns, the Apatanis thought that meant the guns weren't working! [speaker laughs] The rituals had worked! Onward they rushed. One man, Bulyi Tage Kago, had brought a dog's head, from a sacrifice he had done, and he threw the head at the guard-house, but instead of going inside, it just hit the wall and fell down, useless.

Menji Baruah still told his men to hold their fire. One guard stuck his head out the window to get a better look, and then Dusu Riiku, who was crouching beneath the window, speared him through the throat! Then they opened fire and killed two people-Tasso Pilyan and Tasso Kojing.<sup>9</sup>

The Apatanis fled, and guess who was the first to run-right, those two guys [Liagis] who had boasted of killing the *halyang* and had run to the front. Everyone ran, jumping down ravines, in all directions, to get away. Two had died immediately, and another man, Duyu Kolyang, was wounded in the leg and couldn't run. He tried to crawl away, toward Talo, but the sepoys found him. They wanted to carry him back to Kure, but they weren't able to, so they left him; he crawled away, but fell down a ravine and died.

My father, unlike others, had not performed a ritual, and so he said that when he ran he couldn't see properly-maybe he had been too close to the gunfire. He had what we call *ropuha*, that is, he lost his eyesight and fell down unconscious. He lay there for about an hour before his brother-in-law found him and carried him on his shoulders; soon they reached a stream and he regained consciousness. My father also said that the sepoys had not chased them; they had stood in one place and fired-that's all. If they had chased them, they would have killed more Apatanis.

The jokester, the man from Mudan Tage, was the very first one to arrive back in the valley. 'Listen everyone!' he shouted as he

8 A kind of top-knot worn by Apatani (and Nyishis). Another man told me that 'the smell of gunpowder was horrible and frightening.'

9 Another man told me that the 'smell of gunpowder was horrible and frightening.'

entered the village. 'Slaughter your pigs and chickens and eat a big feast because the *halyang* have killed many at Kure and they're coming here!' Then this man went to an old man's house and asked, 'What are you going to cook for your *simi*, your last meal before death?' Everyone was frightened and fled to hide in the bamboo groves.

After they fled back to their villages, they did not burn Hija, as planned. But in a few days, Hari was burned. Later, my father told me, 'This was the capture of Arunachal, of our land, by the Indians.'