

# Culture & Lifestyle

VOLUME 2 : PHAM-KHO-SOWAI FESTIVAL



THE  
ASSAM  
VALLEY  
SCHOOL

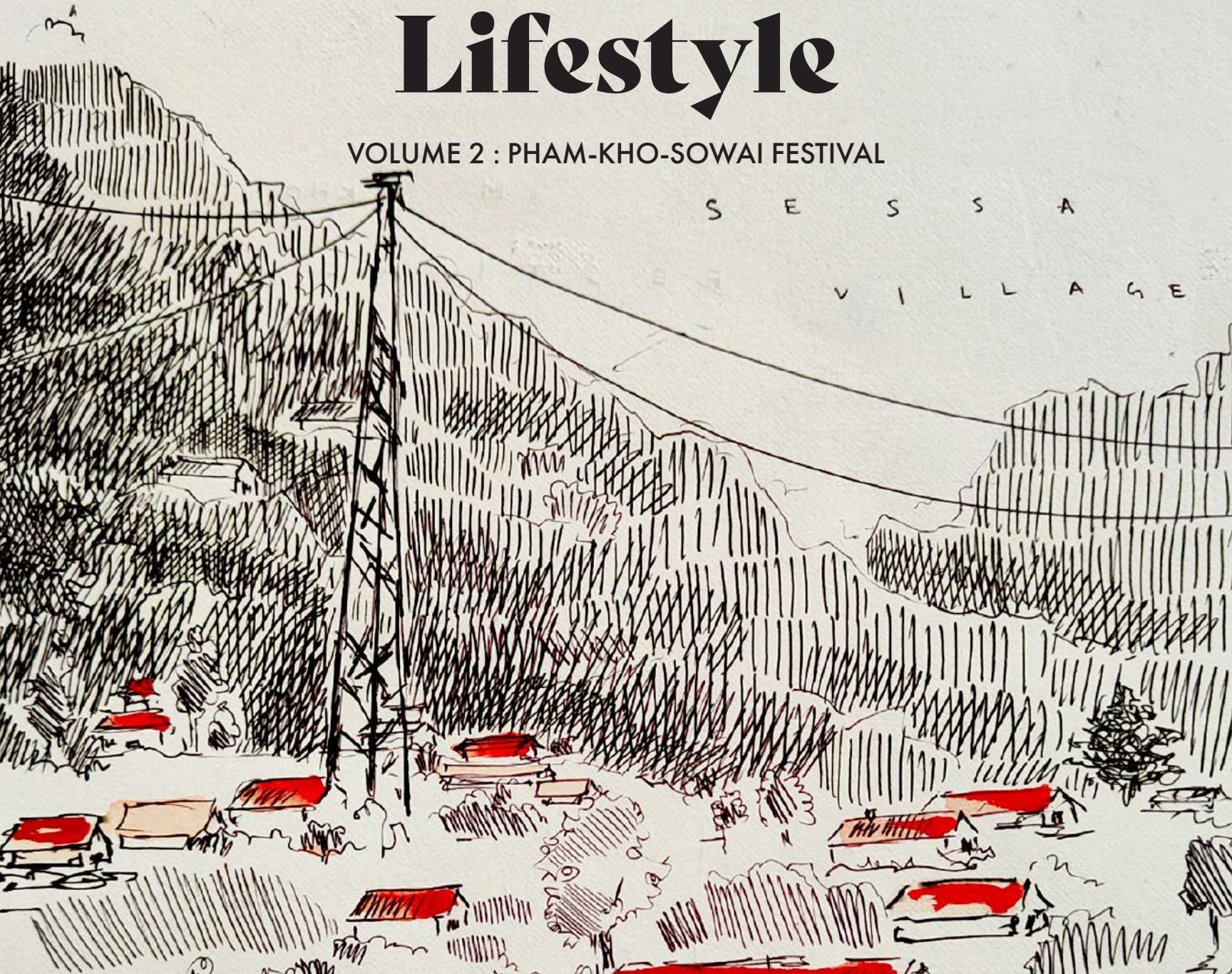


# Culture & Lifestyle

VOLUME 2 : PHAM-KHO-SOWAI FESTIVAL

S E S S A

V I L L A G E







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# Foreword



Culture and Lifestyle are entwined forces that structure our identicalness and escort our behaviour. To foster tolerance, diversity and global collaboration in an increasingly fragile world, understanding and respecting different cultures is of paramount importance.

**Dr. Amit Jugran**  
Headmaster,  
The Assam Valley School  
24<sup>th</sup> October 2023

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TENGA VALLEY



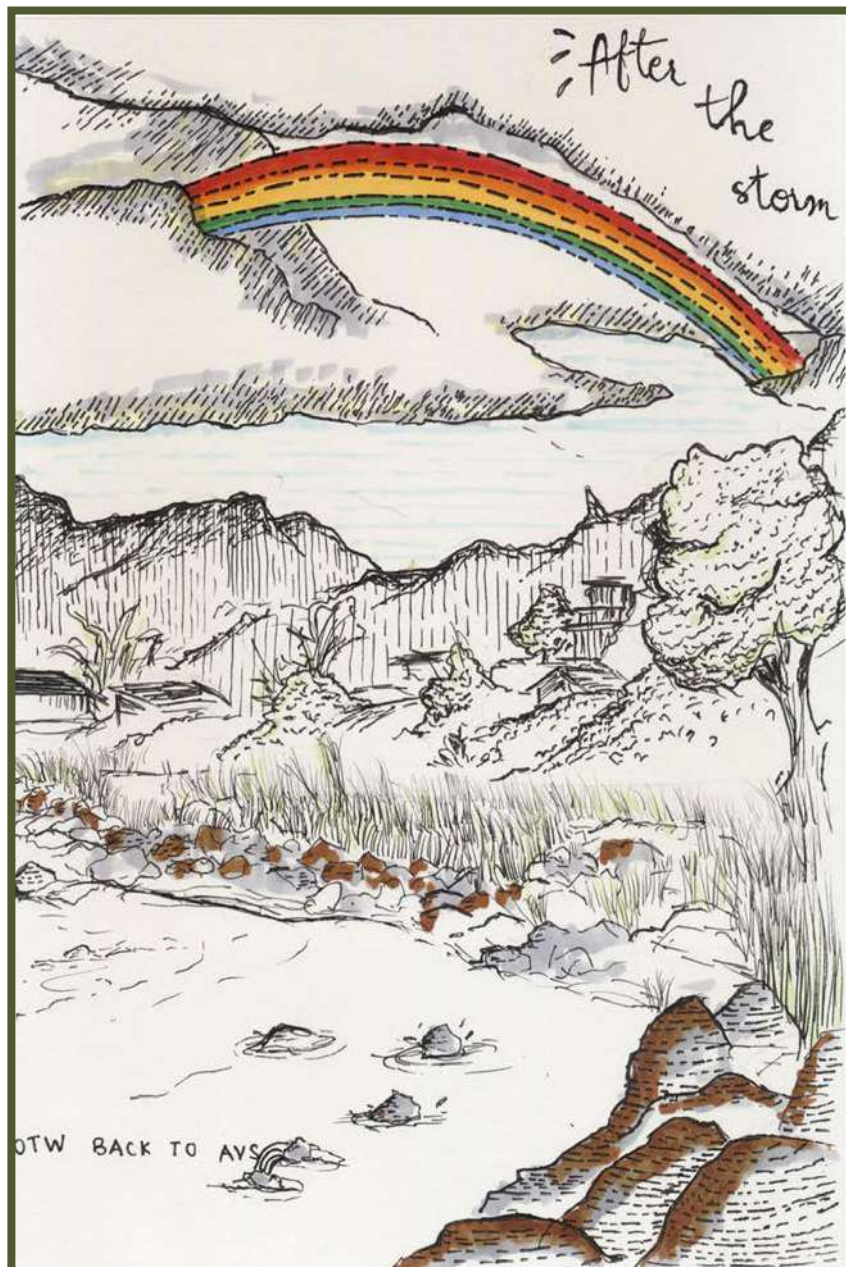
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PHAM-KHO-SOWAI FESTIVAL



# Introduction



On the 10th of September 2023, fourteen students and three teachers from The Assam Valley School visited the Tenga Valley on an overnight trip. The trip was an enriching experience and the students captured the cultural and natural imagery through artworks and photographs. The Assam Valley School 2024 Calendar brings you glimpses of the Pham-Kho-Sowai festival held every year in the Singchung village through the lenses of the AVS team members. Here we share our impressions and experiences about one of the varied regional cultures and lifestyles in India, the Tenga Valley in Arunachal Pradesh.

# AVS to Tenga Valley







On our way to the Singchung Village in the Tenga valley we crossed Bhalukpong which is on the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh border.

Located in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, just an hour away from Tezpur, Bhalukpong is considered as the entry point to the state. The place is famous for archaeological ruins of King Bhaluka who was the grandfather of King Bana of Mahabharata fame and an ancient ruler of the region. A historical fort of 10th-12th Century AD is situated in the foothills of the region and one can see the stone remains of the fort.

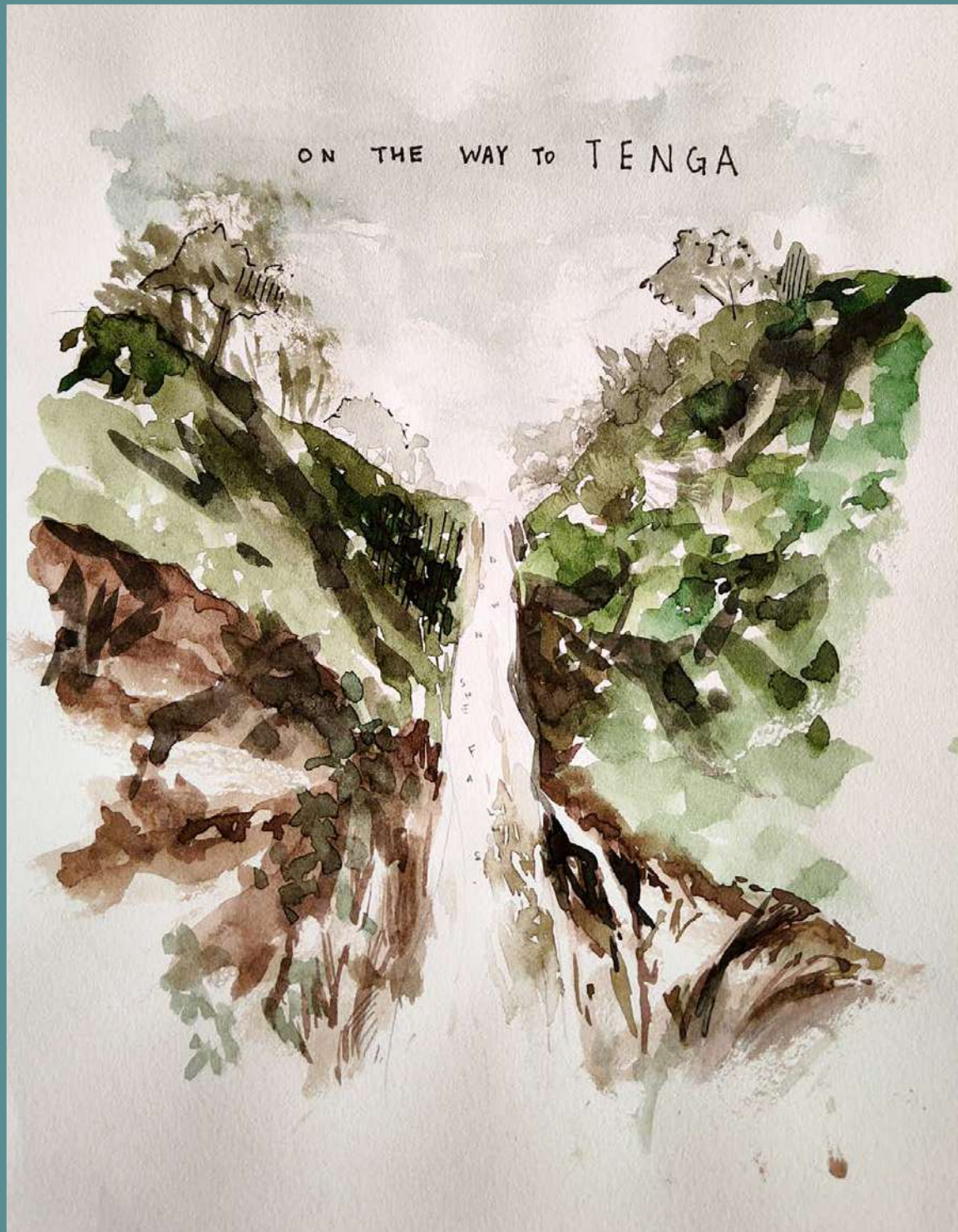
Bhalukpong is surrounded by the evergreen forests of the Pakhui Wildlife Sanctuary, also known as the Pakke Tiger Reserve.

The Kameng River flows through Bhalukpong providing ample scope for adventure tourism. It is also a beautiful picnic spot. From adventure activities like river rafting to angling, this beautiful town is truly a delight for tourists. It is a mesmerizing place for wildlife enthusiasts, nature lovers, and an ideal destination for hikers, rafters and anglers.

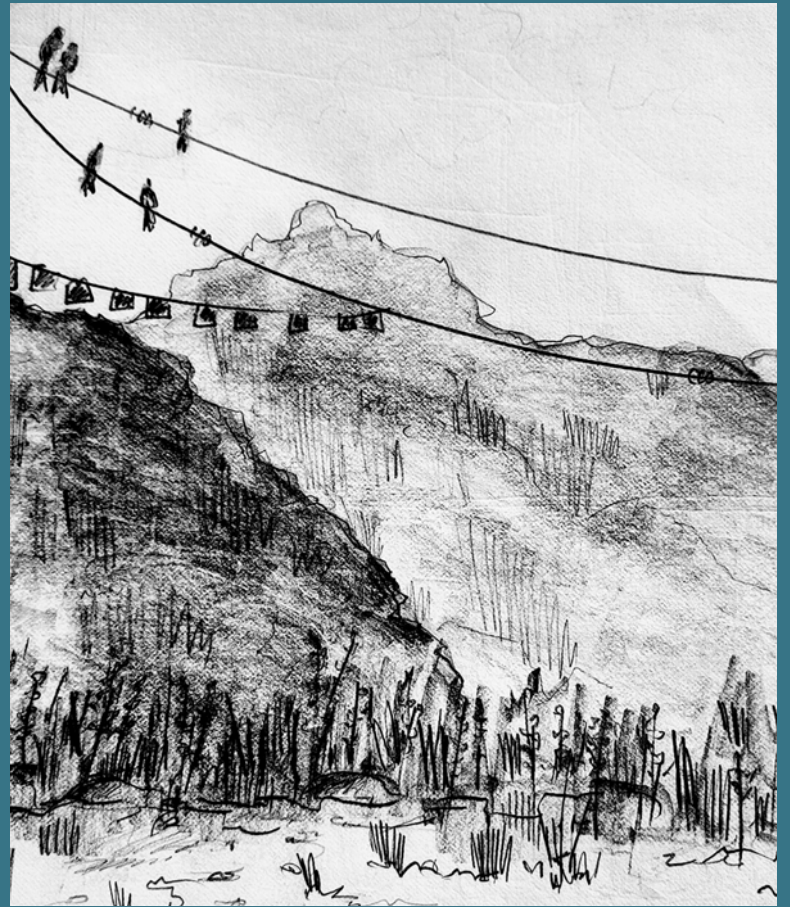
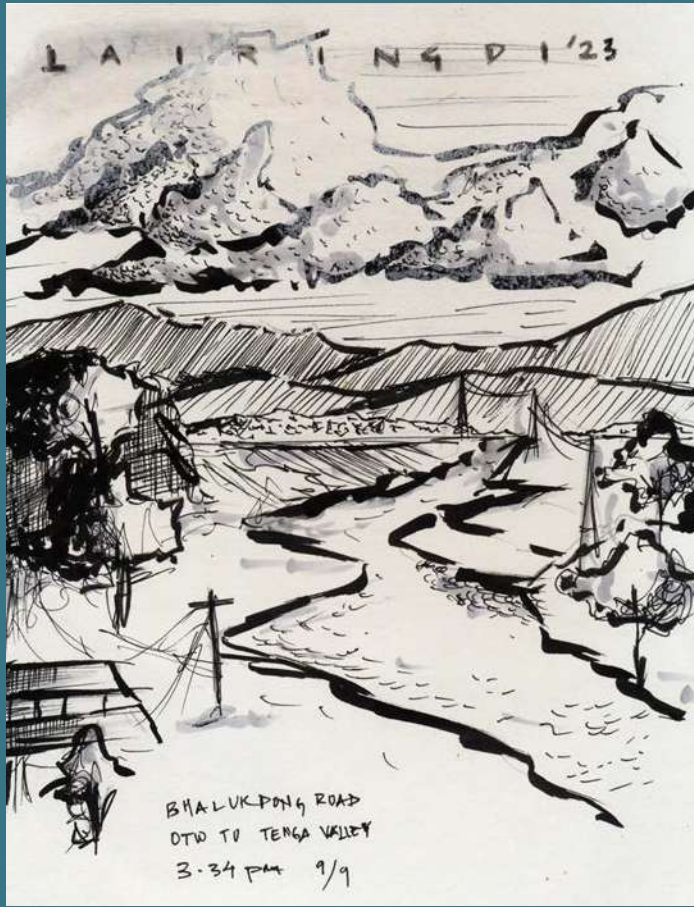
All along the road, there are breathtaking views of the Kameng River. As we approached Tenga Valley, we encountered dense fog and chilly winds near the innumerable waterfalls gushing down the hillside.

Beyond Bhalukpong the road is extremely treacherous. It is incredibly narrow and steep with innumerable hairpin bends. It is also prone to landslides. In addition, long stretches of it are over 10,000 feet above sea level. We missed a landslide minutes before we reached the outskirts of the tenga valley.

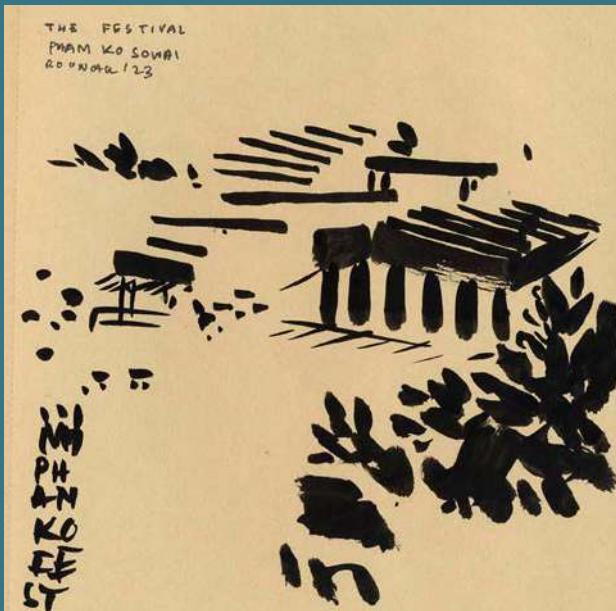












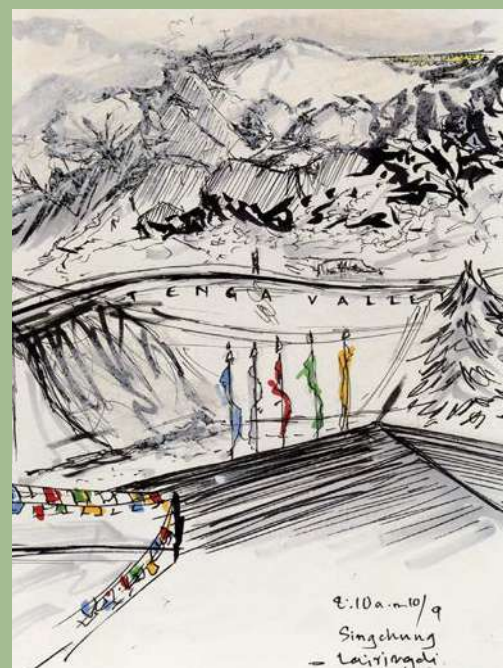
# Tenga Valley

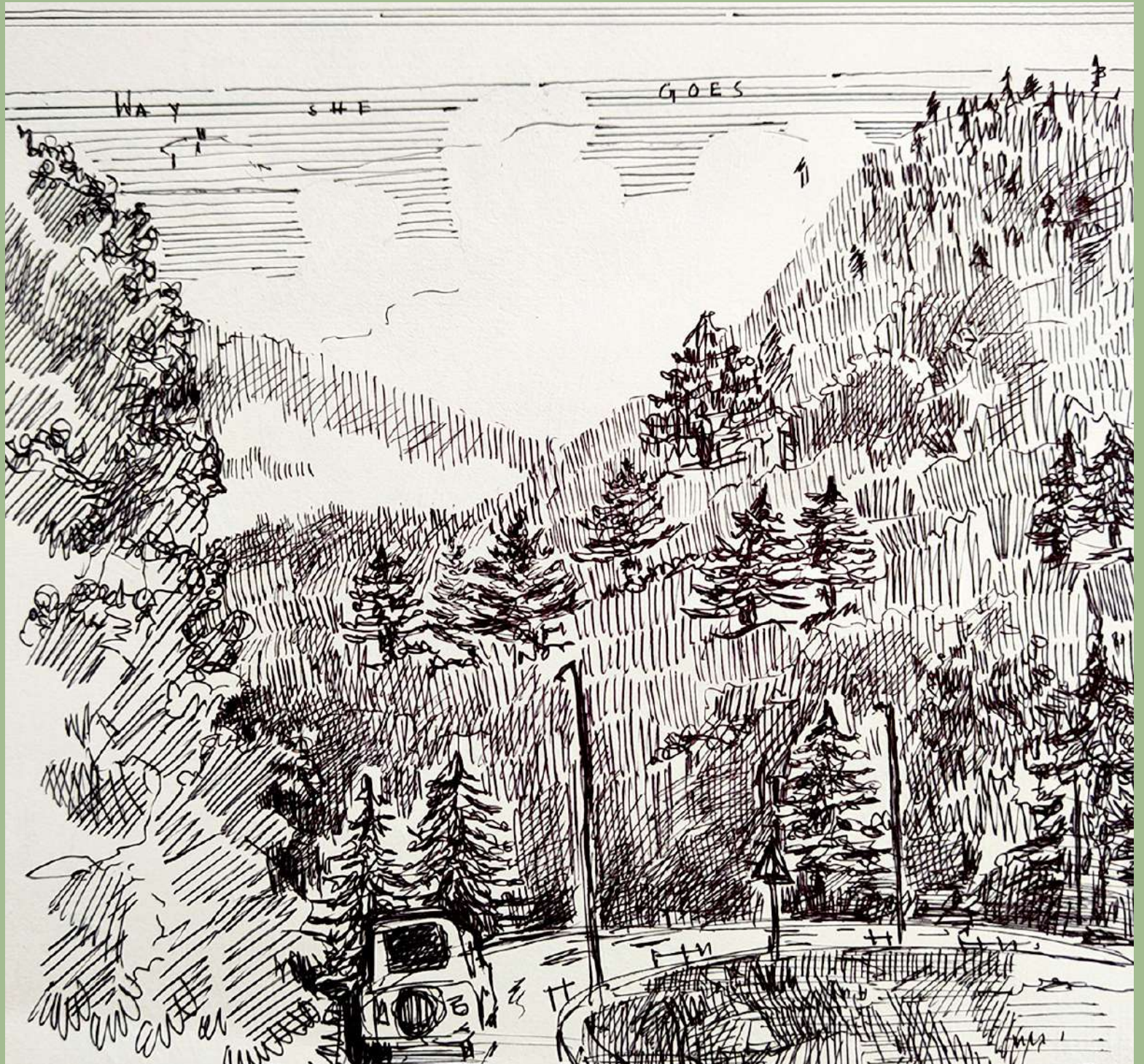




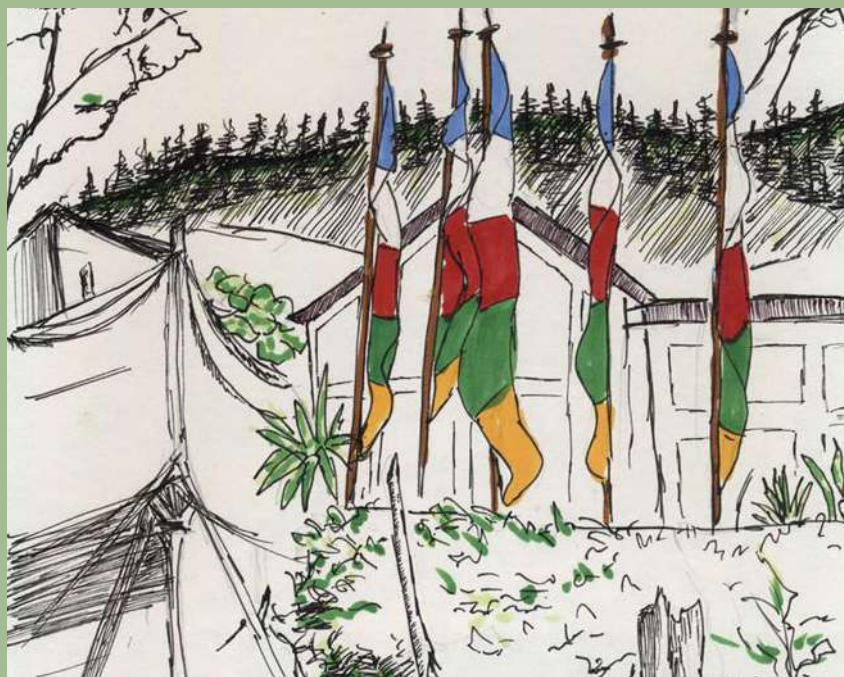


Arunachal Pradesh, is a state located in the northeastern part of India, and it shares international borders with Bhutan to the west, China to the north, and Myanmar to the east. The state is known for its stunning natural beauty, with a landscape dominated by mountains, lush green forests, and rivers. Tenga Valley is heaven for mountain mongers. The serenity of the valley and the calming crackle of the freshwater streams running by and the alluring view of the mountains is relaxing and refreshing. Monpas of Arunachal use prayer flags and Mani walls as part of their religious practices. Prayer flags, inscribed with prayers and mantras, are believed to spread positive energy when fluttering in the wind. Mani walls are structures built with stones inscribed with Buddhist prayers.





The ethnic diversity in Arunachal Pradesh is a significant aspect of its cultural richness. The state is home to 26 major tribes, each with its distinct traditions, languages, and customs. Additionally, there are numerous sub-tribes, further adding to the cultural tapestry of the region. Some of the prominent tribes in Arunachal Pradesh include the Nyishi, Adi, Apatani, Galo, and Monpa, among others. The Khowa tribe, also known as Bugun people in their native language, are the inhabitants of Singchung vaillage, Tenga valley, in the West Kameng district.





The roads in Tenga Valley are narrow and they go up the mountains twirling around them. The valleys are very deep. The AVS team stayed at a homestay along the river, called the Eagle's Nest Residency at Tenga Valley. There was an Army establishment near by.



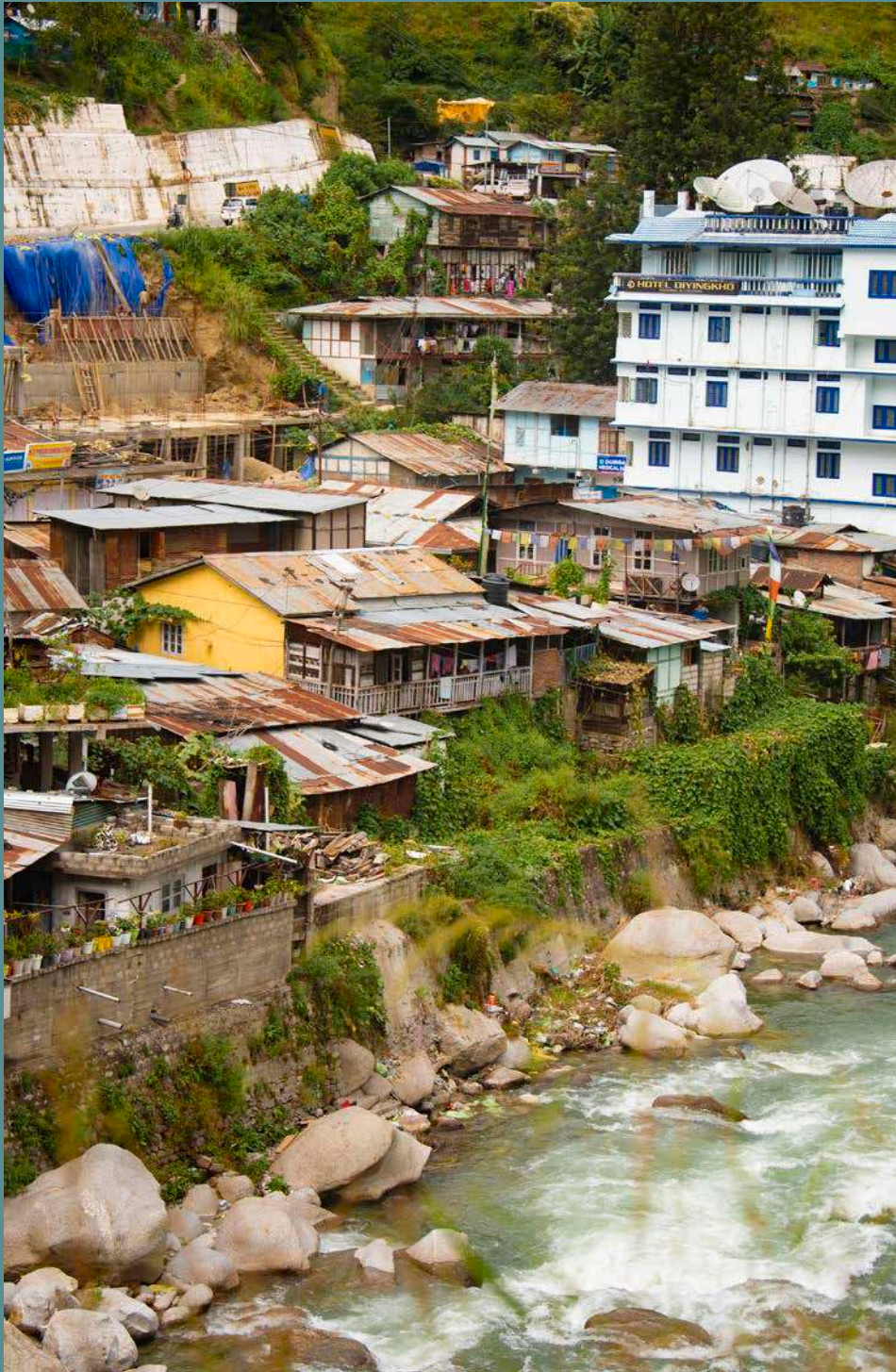






Tenga valley is a typical hill station with a cluster of houses — bamboo, brick, cement and in all colors. At the market in Tenga Valley, the students explored the local handicrafts and tried the local food.





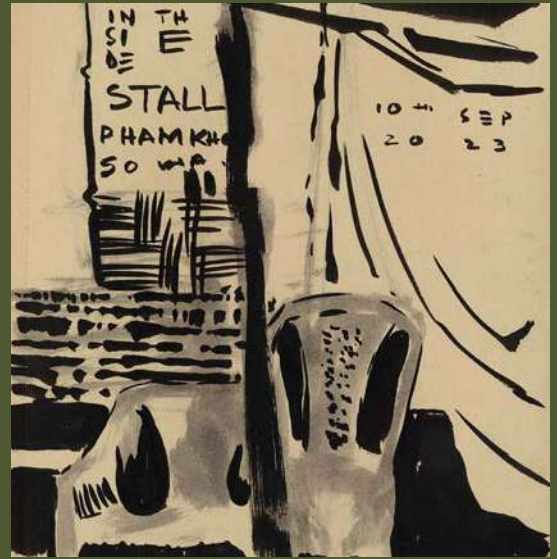
PHAM-KHO-SOWAI  
FESTIVAL  
SINGCHUNG VILLAGE





Pham-Kho (a harvesting festival) is a popular festival of the Bugun people which is now celebrated on 10th September every year. Pham-Kho-Sowai literally means "mountain" and "river" or "water", which are considered vital component required for human survival. The benevolent gods manifest in the form of the mountain and river, giving life to the people. Therefore, the Pham-Kho festival is a harvesting festival celebrated by Bugun (Khowa) community of Arunachal Pradesh. The festival has many stalls put up by the local people. In the stalls they showcase their traditional clothes, food, bags and necklaces. Although the Buguns are agriculturists as they practice shifting cultivation and keep domesticated animals and birds such as cow, horse, pig, sheep, goat, fowl and very rarely mithuns, they do in fact hunt and chase wild prey using an assortment of weapons ranging from spears, traps to bows and arrows. Here two men dressed in traditional Bugun clothing can be seen with their swords by their sides. A rare bird, the Bugun liocichla, was named after the tribe.









T E N G A L L E Y

-ANVITA'23



Tengal valley  
Kash nest hotel





A Gaon Bura of the Monpa people during the Pham-Kho- Sowai Festival on the left. The Monpa tribe primarily inhabits the Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Gaon Buras are the most important village level functionary. They are responsible for all the developmental and law and order related duties in the village. They are the representatives of the Government in the village, and hence are bound by all the Government instructions issued time to time.





The traditional village council of the Bugun (Khowa) is known as Nimiyang (Council of Elders), which looks after every aspect of village life, may it be decision-making, utilization of local resources, conflict resolution or regulating the society. Each family is represented in the Nimiyang sessions by its head male member. Women may witness proceedings of the Nimiyang sessions, but can only contribute if its male member is absent.

Children from the Bugun tribe in their traditional attire. There are some popular Bugun folktales and one of them is given below.

Once upon a time, a proud monkey with a long tail loved playing tricks on others in the jungle. This caught the attention of the other animals who wanted to teach the monkey a lesson. One day, the monkey saw a bat by the river catching fish and was amazed at its success. Curious, the monkey asked the bat for its secret. Seizing the opportunity, the bat devised a plan. It told the monkey to hold onto a branch while dipping its tail into the river, promising that fish would bite and the monkey could pull them out. Trusting the bat, the monkey offered its tail. Cleverly, the bat tied a heavy stone to the monkey's tail and threw it into the river. The monkey, thinking it had caught a fish, pulled with all its might but couldn't free itself. In the end, the monkey lost half of its tail, and this is why monkeys are said to have short tails today.







The Buguns are one of the earliest recognized tribes of India, majority of them, inhabiting the Singchung Sub-Division of West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. The Bugun wear colorful clothes. Both men and women wear a loose endi cloth of knee length. All members wear a waistband and a coat. The tattoo-like pattern is made on the cheeks as facial decoration since the early times in the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The common design is normally dots with cross lines. With the modernisation, the tattoo culture has shifted significantly. The traditional patterns are replaced by modern motifs and the pain-inducing practice of tattoo making has been relaced by drawing with black liners.



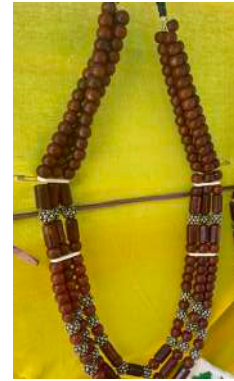


Buguns have their own folklores, songs, dances, music and rituals. Cane and bamboo are employed to construct shelters, homes, baskets, fishing traps, suspension bridges, and even sacred artefacts. Carrying and storage baskets form the bulk of the basketry range. The carrying basket is usually a large, typically tapering or conical form with straps and is used for carrying firewood, vegetables and fruits or water (in bamboo tubes).







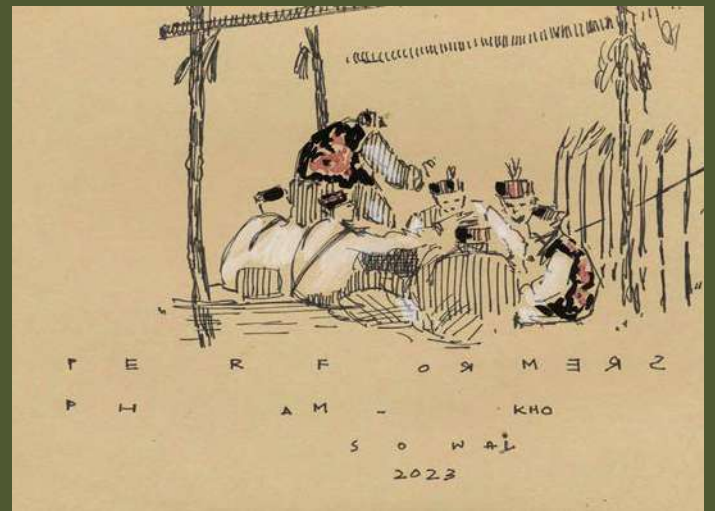


The traditional attire also includes gajra which is made up of glass beads to put it in the hair near the pony tail. These type of necklaces and very old glass beads have been used by the tribal village women of the remote tribal areas in Arunachal Pradesh. The most common necklace is the arulaya, which consists of forty to sixty white beads strung together. Another kind of necklace is the lekapon made of small white beads in twenty strands.

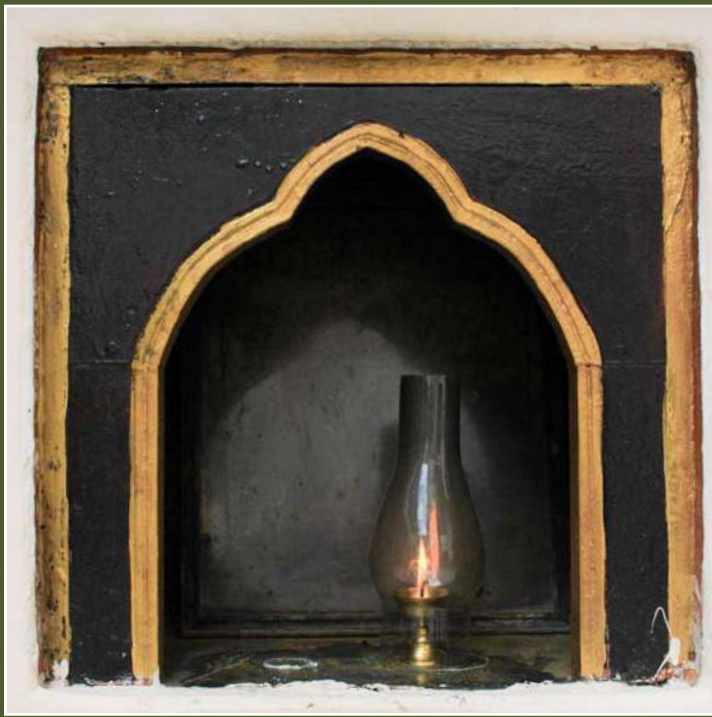


A Bugun Woman wearing traditional Bugun apparel at the Pham-Kho- Sowai Festival. While both sexes adorn themselves with silver ornaments, the men wear a very long white garment and a very high hat, resembling a Turkish Fez. The women wear a skull cap, sometimes decorated with beautiful patterns. White and checkered jackets are worn as well, usually accompanied by another singlet. Women put a Gajra made up of glass beads in the hair near the pony tail. Jewellery is worn by both males and females in the form of pendants, rings, earrings. Necklaces for women are called Mukho. Necklaces are made up of brown small beads (local name Dujung), brown long beads (long name Dujung diong), silver beads (local name Pok pok), white beads (local name Mun mun), and beads with dots (local name Mukhu mayak). Necklaces for men are called Mukhojoy, with the yellow coloured beads. The bag for men is called Thou.

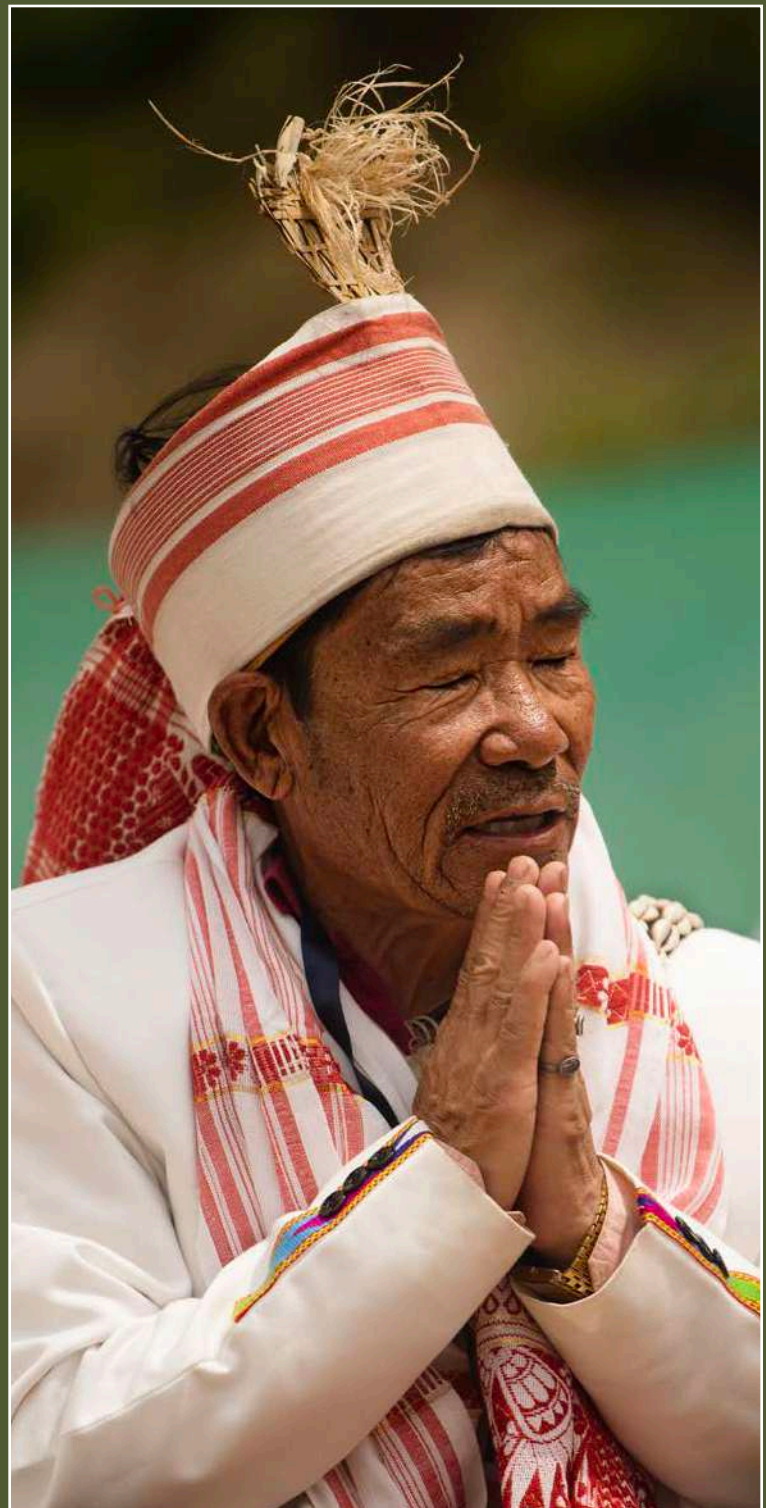




P E R F O R M E R Z  
P H A M - K H O  
S O W A L  
2023



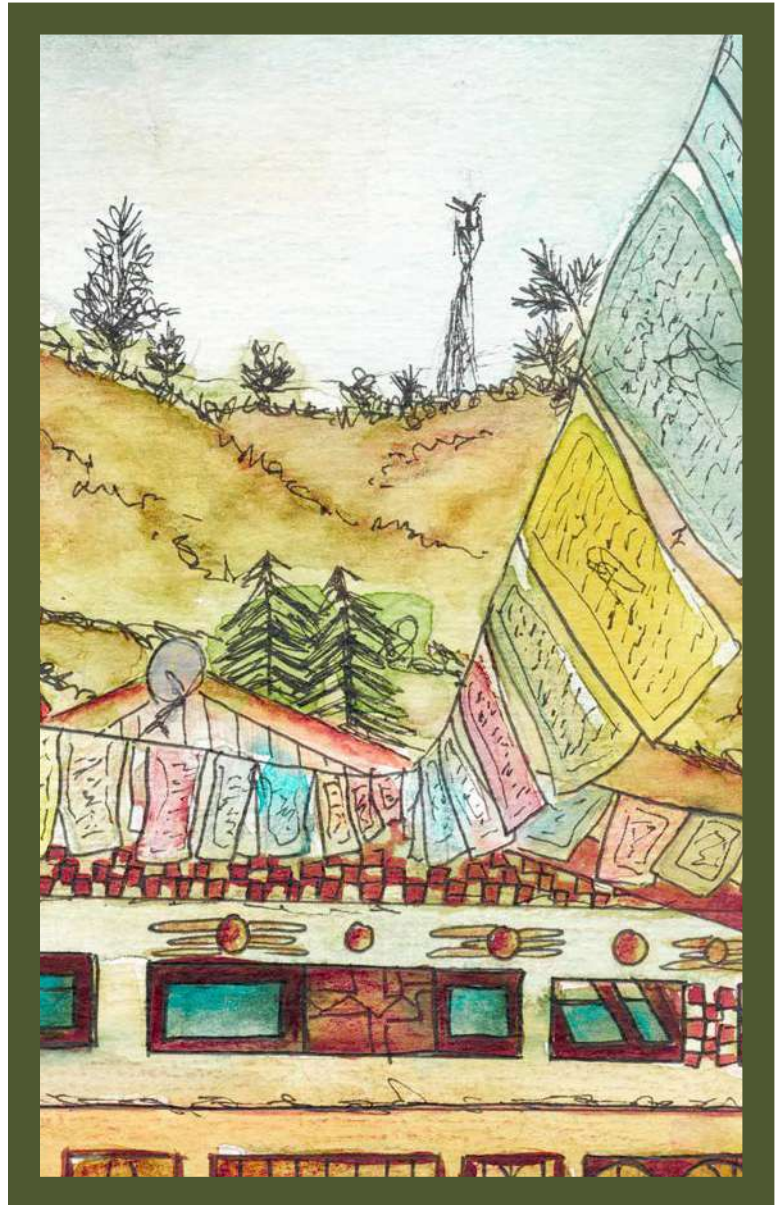
Religion and culture of the Buguns have been influenced by the Sherdukpen people. Sherdukpens, believers of Gelugpa Buddhism, also introduced Tibetan religious traditions to the Buguns. Like most other Himalayan tribes of Arunachal, the Buguns originally believed in animistic beliefs and nature worship. They were originally believers of the indigenous Donyi-Polo religion until they were exposed to the Tibetan faith. Though they have formally declared themselves to be Buddhists, a majority of them continue to believe in their old faith.



The Monpa are generally adherents of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which they adopted in the 17th century as a result of the influence of the Bhutanese-educated Merag Lama. A religious ceremony is being conducted by priests of both the Monpa tribe and the Bugun tribe during the Pham-Kho-Sowai Festival.



The locals of Tenga Valley offering prayers during the Pham Kho Sowai Festival.







RECEIVING  
The GUESTS  
PHANKHO SOWA  
18th Sep' 2023  
Rovuna Puli  
Anurocher.



"THEY DANCE"





Gasyo-Syo which literally simply mean "To Dance" or "Lets Dance", is a popular dance form of Bugun (Khowa) Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. There are many forms of Gasyo-Syo like Gek, Gidingdak etc. It is performed usually at every festive occasion like birth, marriage ceremonies and festivals like Pham-Kho-Sowai.

Bugun Music and dances are accompanied by traditional musical instruments like Thabam (Drum), Khenkhyap (Clappers), Beeyen (a single stringed fiddle), Gong (Mouth Organ made by bamboo & a string) and various types of Fly (Flute).

Aji lhamo is the one of the most prominent folk dance forms practiced by the Monpa Tribe of Tawang. It is basically the Tibetan version of the Hindu Epic Ramayana. There are mainly five characters in this Dance Drama. Nyapa is the Central character and Nyao is the Rival character. The Monpas perform Arpos dance in which about twenty-five dancers, wearing helmets and carrying sword and shields like ancient warrior, depicts how the ancestors of the tribe conquered their enemies. The performance concludes with a dance number called Gallong Chham in which about ten dancers perform wearing very colourful costumes and sumptuous headgear.

P H A M

K H O

S O W A I

2023 .



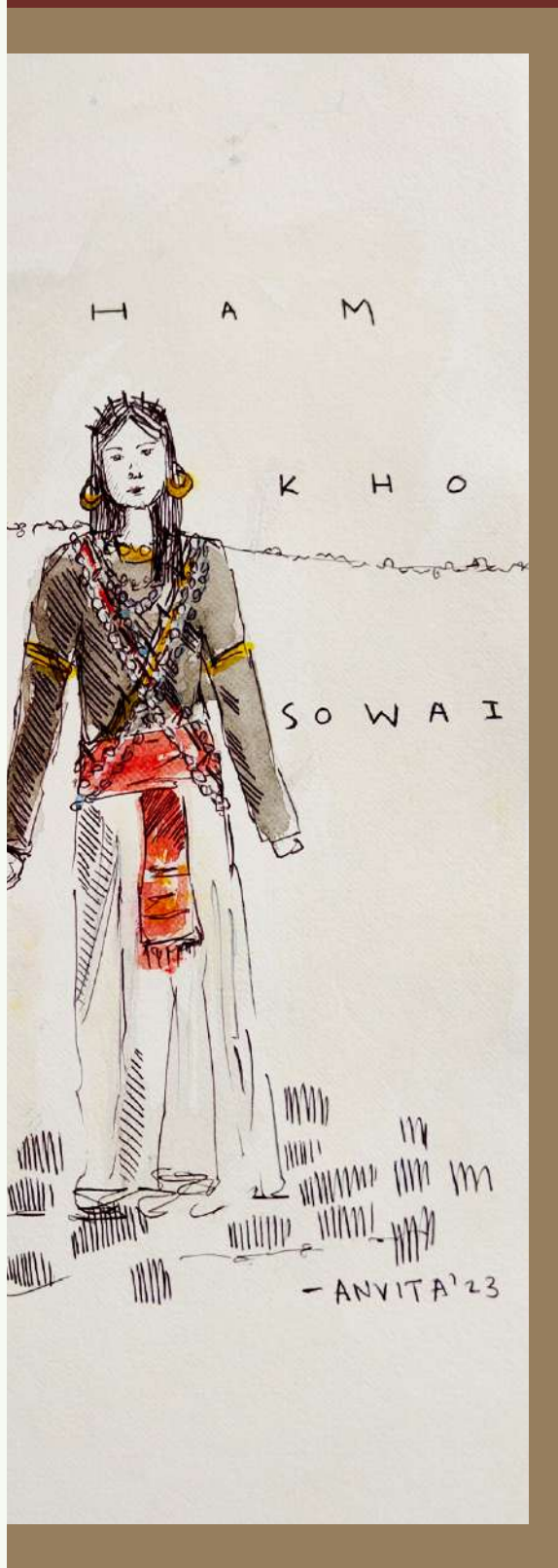
BUGUN  
TRIBE .

L A I R I N G D I

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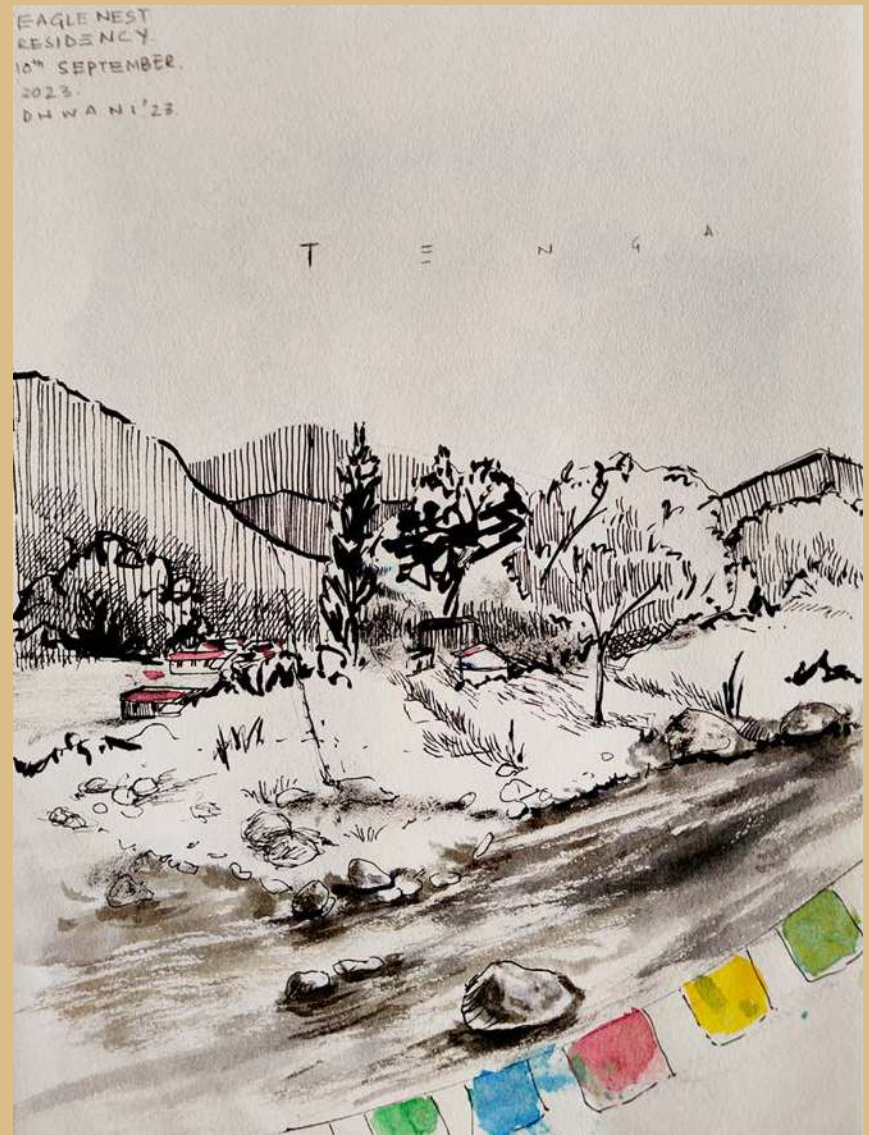


The traditional dress of the Monpa is based on the Tibetan chuba. Both men and women wear headwear made of yak hair, with long tassels. The women tend to wear a warm jacket and a sleeveless chemise that reaches down to the calves, tying the chemise round the waist with a long and narrow piece of cloth. Ornaments are made of silver, corals and turquoise. Sometimes a person wears a cap with a single peacock feather in a felt hats. Influenced by the totem worship of primitive Bonism, Tibetans started to express themselves by wearing animal masks called Monpa masks.









Among the Monpa Tribes the traditional Food Thukpa is most popular. Thukpa is basically a noodle soup mixed with meat, chillies, etc. Thukpa made of maize and beans is called ashum thukpa and made by yak meat or chicken is known as sha thukpa.

Momos are served with soup and hot chamin. Non-veg momo is made from maida and pork, yak meat, packed fish, chicken and mutton and veg-momo is prepared by the use of maida and leafy vegetables (cabbage, man patta, onion leaf).

The traditional food Khura is a Monpa pancake made of buckwheat

flour which is usually eaten with tea or vegetable curry. It is prepared by mixing sugar, water and buckwheat flour in a haying (local bowl). Afterwards the mixture is toasted in a langya (pan).

Zan is the staple food and is prepared by adding millets or another flour to boiling water in haying. It is consumed with vegetables, meat or chamin along with the addition of fermented cheese or soybeans as condiments.

Putu is the Monpa version of noodles made out of buckwheat flour. The making of Putu is quite a time-consuming and cumbersome process. It is made using a special noodle maker called the Pulitzer Sheng. The Putu is usually eaten with a stew made of vegetables, fermented cheese and chillies.

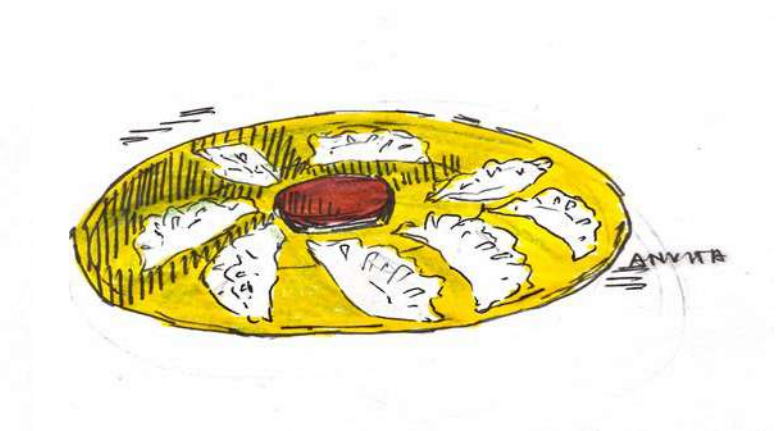
Tsizingkyola is best eaten with thin chamin. Khazi is cooked rice mixed with finely chopped maanpatta, a local vegetable (similar to spring onion leaves), chamin and salt. Gyapa-khazi is the Monpa version of the pulao. This dish is prepared by mixing rice, fermented cheese, small dried fish, chili, butter ginger etc. Bresi is sweet rice. This dish is usually served during ceremonial occasions with melted butter and then seasoned with raisins and sugar.

Khapse is made by the Monpa society at the festival of Losar (New Year). This is prepared with flour (maida). It is made into eight shaped rolls and fried in soybean oil.

Chhurpi is a popular staple food prepared by Yak milk. As per age this is divided into 3 types- Chhurchirpen, chhursingba and chharpupu. It is a paneer-like product made by yak milk after fermentation.

Yak meat and Yak fat is used in many different dishes.





# FOOD OF TENGA VALLEY





