

Culture & Lifestyle

VOLUME 3 : ZIRO VALLEY



THE
ASSAM
VALLEY
SCHOOL

Culture & Lifestyle

VOLUME 3 : ZIRO VALLEY







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Foreword



Travel and culture are deeply interwoven. It not only enhances one's experience but also aids in acknowledging the diversity the world has to offer. It makes one immerse in different ways of life, cultures, traditions, and beliefs. It not only broadens one's perspective and ignites curiosity, but also creates long-lasting memories. Travel is a powerful tool for cultural exchange; it provides a great opportunity for exploration, connections, and learning. The Northeast region of India offers a diverse blend of natural beauty, rich culture, and vibrant traditions. It remains a hidden gem until it has been explored. This magazine is a small, yet a defining step towards paying homage to the enchanting Northeast.

Dr. Amit Jugran

Headmaster,

The Assam Valley School

September 2024

Contents



10

**THE ASSAM VALLEY
SCHOOL TO ZIRO VALLEY**



20

**SHREE SIDHESHWAR
NATH TEMPLE, KARDO**



26

HONG VILLAGE



48

YAZALI VILLAGE

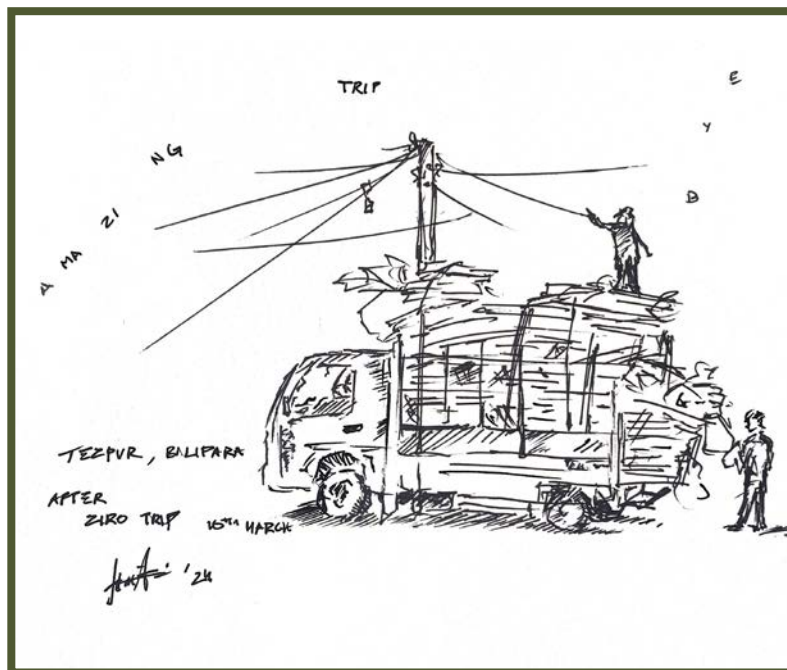
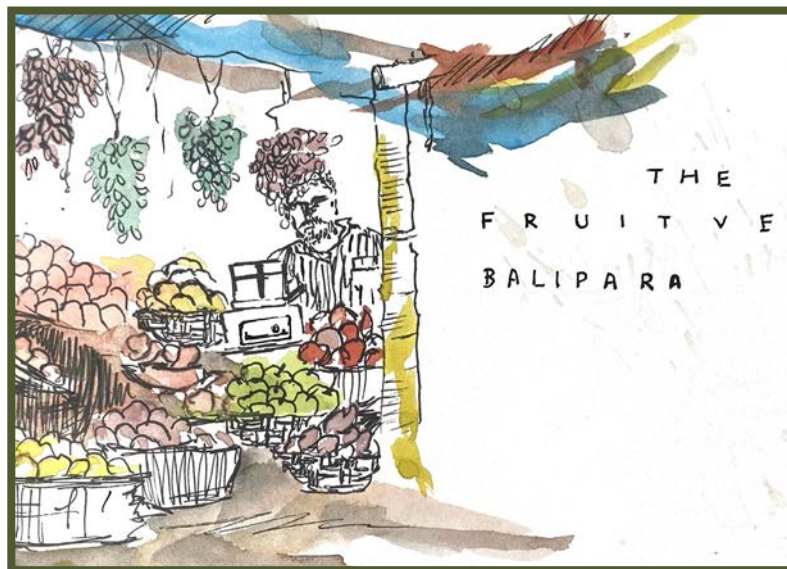
Introduction

On the 8th of March 2024, twenty-five students and three teachers from The Assam Valley School embarked on an unforgettable three-day trip to the enchanting Ziro Valley, tucked in the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. This expedition was not just a journey through breathtaking landscapes; it was an immersive experience into the rich culture and lifestyle of this unique region in Arunachal Pradesh.

As we arrived, the natural beauty of Ziro captivated us. Surrounded by rolling hills and lush green fields, the valley presented a stunning backdrop for our adventure. Throughout our stay, we engaged with the local community, learning about their traditions, music, and crafts, all of which inspired us to capture the essence of Ziro through our artwork and photography.

The students documented their experiences, portraying the vibrant crafts, intricate handlooms, and the warm hospitality of the Apatani and Nyishi people. Each photograph and piece of art serves as a window into the region's cultural tapestry, showcasing everything from the intricate patterns of traditional attire to the serene landscapes dotted with pine trees, bamboo groves and rice fields.

The trip was filled with moments of joy, discovery, and reflection. We returned with not just memories, but also a greater understanding of the diversity that makes India so unique. In Volume 3 of Culture & Lifestyle magazine, we aim to share the beauty and culture of Ziro Valley with others, celebrating a lifestyle that harmonizes with nature and tradition.



The Assam Valley School to Ziro







The Ziro Valley, a place where the cultural and natural worlds beautifully intertwine lies roughly between Panior and Kamla (Kuru) rivers of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The Apatani valley as a settlement is known as Ziro, shortened from Ziro Supung (or Silo Supung). 'Supung' refers to a place of habitation which was taken up by the Apatani tribe ancestors during their initial migration to Ziro.

Our adventure commenced with a timely departure from the AVS campus, our starting point. As we left the familiar surroundings of the town, the verdant landscapes of Assam unfolded before our eyes, setting the tone for the journey ahead. The bus ride, though lengthy, was comfortable and provided ample opportunities for camaraderie and relaxation.

Our first significant halt was at Bhalukpong, a charming town along the banks of the Kameng River. We utilized this brief respite to stretch our limbs and indulge in a light meal. While Bhalukpong is renowned for its captivating waterfalls and scenic beauty, the constraints of time prevented us from exploring the area in depth.

As we ventured further into our journey, we crossed the border, into Arunachal Pradesh. The transition was marked by

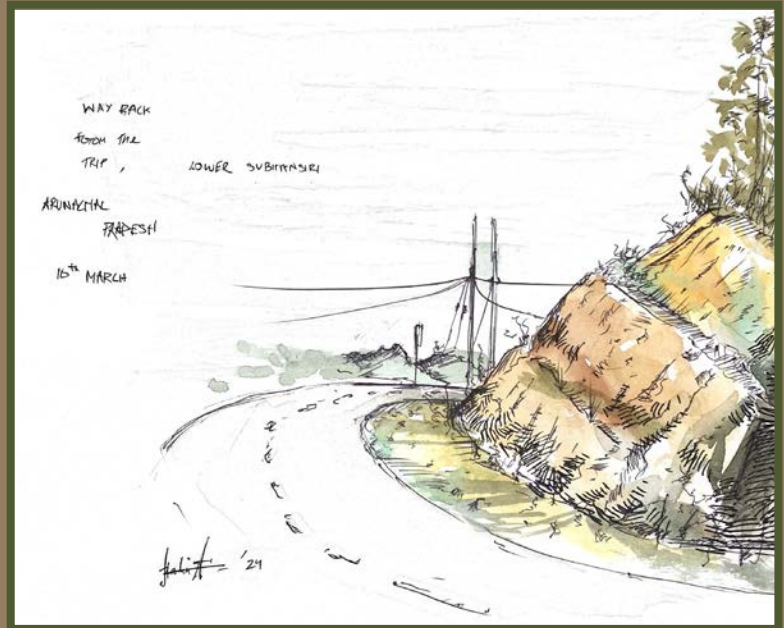
a noticeable change in the landscape. The hills became more pronounced, and the forests grew denser. The temperature also began to decrease as we ascended to higher altitudes.

After a day filled with anticipation, we finally arrived at the Sirro Resort in Ziro town. The town, though smaller than expected, exuded a quaint charm. We settled into the resort, a cozy abode nestled amidst lush green fields. The warm hospitality of the locals immediately made us feel welcome. To acquaint ourselves with our new surroundings, we decided to embark on a leisurely walk through the town. As the daylight began its descent, we returned to our hotel. Thereafter a bonfire under the stars, surrounded by good food and great company, created such a cozy atmosphere. We spent the evening sharing stories and planning our adventures, eager to delve deeper into the wonders of this enchanting valley the next day.

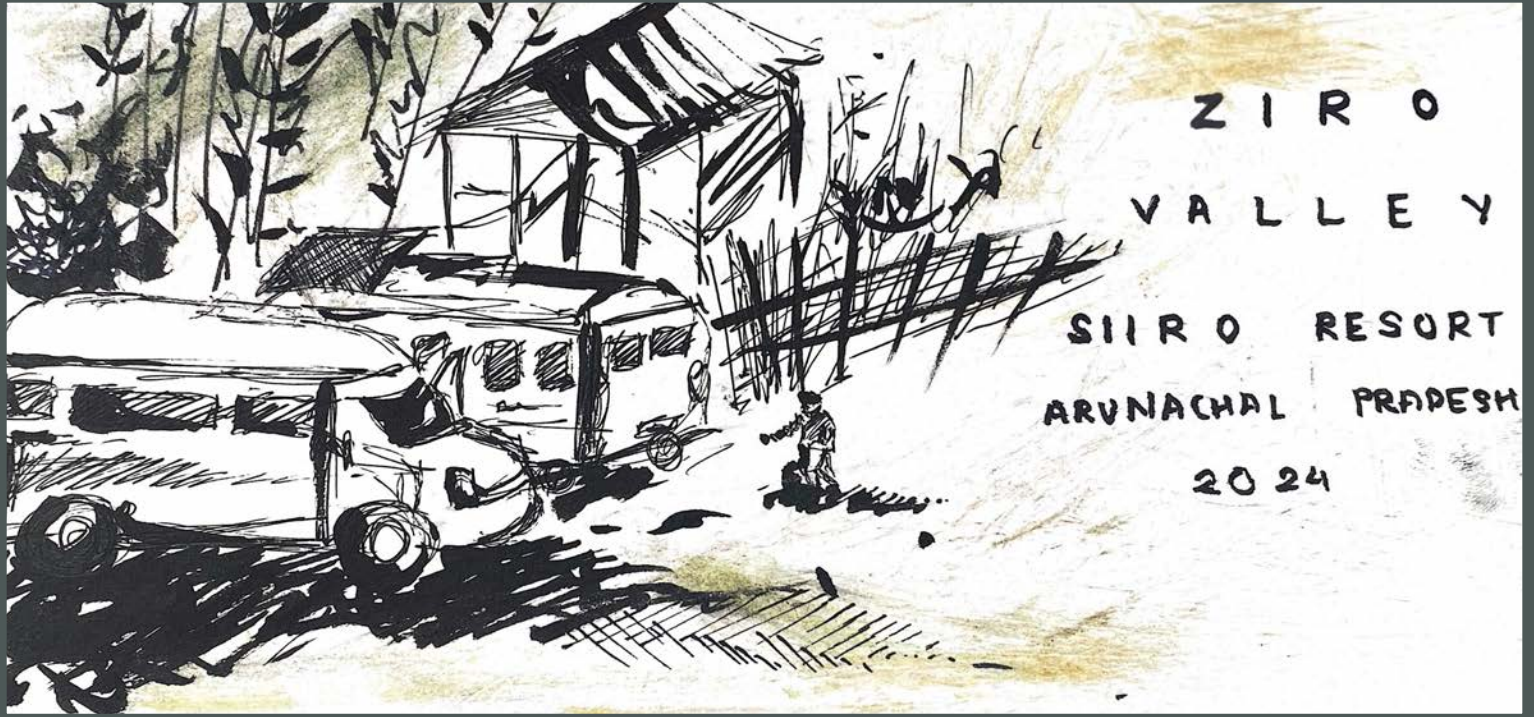














**Shree
Sidheshwar
Nath
Temple,
Kardo**





SHREE SHIV SHWAR NATH TEMPLE
KARDO ZIRO





We woke up refreshed after a much-needed rest from our travel. The crisp morning air invigorated us as we got ready for the day ahead. Breakfast awaited us, lovingly prepared by our hosts, and we gathered around the table, eager to share our excitement for the adventures that lay ahead.

The meal was a delightful introduction to local flavors — steamed rice, fresh vegetables, and aromatic tea. As we savored each bite, we exchanged stories on our first impressions of the Ziro Valley, buzzing with anticipation for the cultural explorations planned for the day. The warmth of the food mirrored the warmth of the local hospitality, setting a perfect tone for our journey into this vibrant landscape.

After breakfast we left for the Kardo Village to see the world's tallest Shivaling, and luckily it was Shiv Ratri on that day.

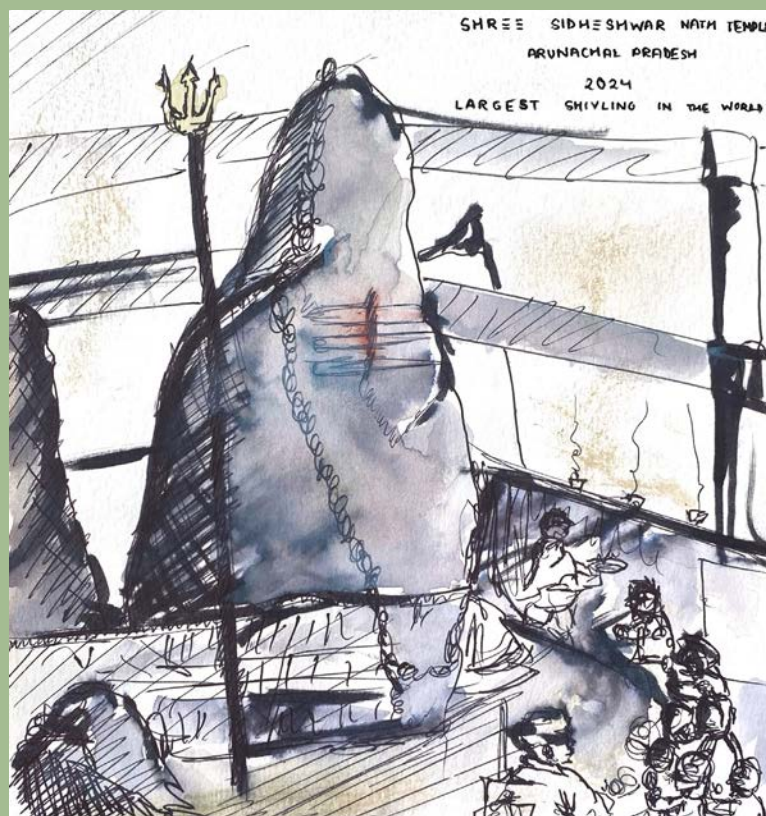




The name of the temple we visited was the Shree Sidheshwar Nath Temple. This temple was built in the year 2004 and the Shivling is 26 feet tall and 18 feet wide out of which four feet of Shiva Lingam is buried underground. Our guide told us about the story behind the Shivling. The story goes that a timber cutter was cutting a tree standing at the right of the Lingam. The tree was expected to fall just over it but nothing harmed the Lingam, and the tree landed a few meters away from the it. He was surprised and looked at the big stone rising above the ground on the right. Looking at it he realized that it was not an ordinary stone. It was a stand alone stone and the appearance resembled a Shivling. The Shivling is more than 5000 years old . Under the Shivling there is the Patal Ganga, and it is believed that it never dries out or overflows during rain. It is also believed that if you pray here you will get moksha. After we prayed at the temple, all of us had the khichdi that they served as prasad, and we sketched and took photos around the temple. It was a privilege to visit the prominent, historical and famed Shree Sidheshwar Nath Temple which is mentioned in Chapter 17, Volume 9 of the Shiva Purana and is described as the most prominent Shivalingam to be found at Lingalaya, which subsequently came to be called Arunachal Pradesh.

Near the Shivling stands the image of Goddess Parvati and Swami Kartikeya to her right. On the left side of the Shivling are sculptures of Lord Ganesha and Nandi, the bull and the divine vehicle of Lord Shiva. This particular Shivling is the youngest one in terms of the archaeological finds in Arunachal Pradesh.

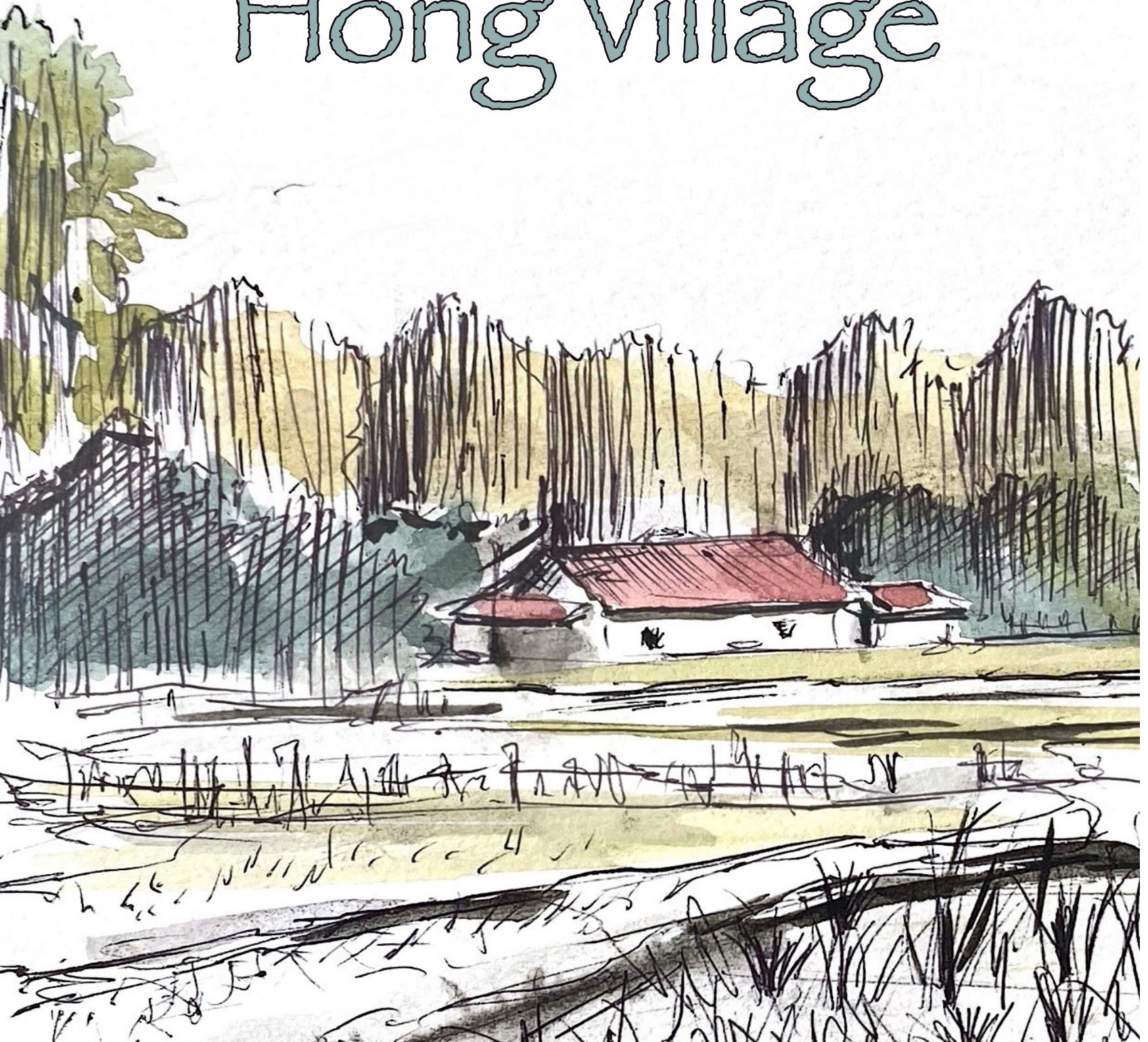
This sacred ground tagged as the Siddheshwar Nath Temple (also known as Kardo Mahadev Temple), is located at the foothills of Karada Hill in Ziro valley where it is said that Mahadeva





dwells. The temple is 6 kilometers away from Hapoli, the economic center of Ziro city, and is reachable by either walking or taking a taxi from Hapoli. A curious aspect of this particular Shiva Lingam is the availability of a constant stream of water at the bottom of the Shiva Lingam. Other than that, the Lingam's upper section is decorated with a necklace of sphatik and synthetic rhinestone beads. All of these features have always existed in their original form ever since the Shiva Lingam was unearthed.

Hong Village



HONG VILLAGE

ZIRO TRIP '24

9th MARCH

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We visited the Hong village which is the second largest village in Asia to add an authentic Apatani experience to your plate.

Donyi-Polo Religion

The Apatanis of Ziro valley follow the Donyi-Polo religion. Donyi-Polo literally means “Sun-Moon” and is an animist religion which means that the Apatanis believe that every natural thing in the universe has a soul.

Though they worship the sun and the moon, they are not nature worshipers. They believe that sun and moon are physical representations of the Supreme God which illuminate the earth. Donyi, the Sun is looked upon as a female god who is the creator of all and Polo, the moon, is considered a male god who is the guardian of all. Apatani, like other tribes of the state also believe in sun and the moon as a god and have a traditional altar in their home made up of bamboo and cane. In



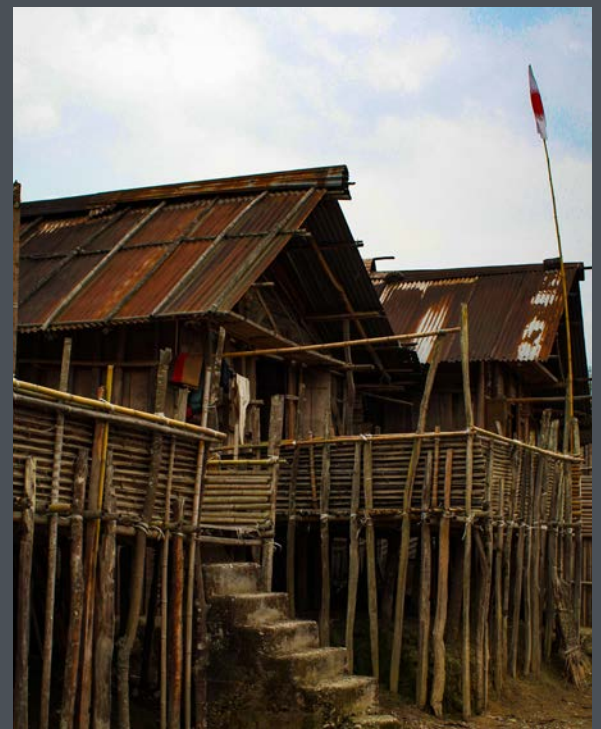




this temple they do not practice sacrifice, but they predict future through egg yolks and chicken liver.

Bamboo is considered as a lifeline. It is used to build houses and furniture. Bamboo never dies and never flowers. If the bamboo ever flowers it is considered a bad omen and they hold religious activity like animal sacrifice ward the effects of the bad omen. They believe in the Sun, Moon, Forest and other Gods . In the month of July they hold a festival called DREE . All the villages come together





to celebrate it. They offer animal sacrifice to please the spirits during this time..

Facial Tattoos and Nose Plugs

The Apatani women of Ziro Valley were once famous for their facial tattoos (Tiipe) and massive nose plugs (Yaping hullo), though the tradition is now non-existent.

The Tattoo runs from their forehead to the tip of the nose. They also tattoo their chin with five vertical lines. A horizontal line, under the lower lips, joins all the five lines of the vertical tattoo of the chin.

Two big nose plugs called 'Yaping Hullo' on either side of the nose and hollow bamboo pieces called 'Yaru Hukho' in ear lobes completes their beautification. The hollow bamboo pieces are used for putting on earrings. The Yaping Hullo is made of cane. Dry cane is cut. Both the ends of the cane are smoothed by burning



the ends and rubbing it against a hard and smooth surface so that they are smooth and even. For Nose plugs made out of cane, they pierce their nose with pins. They come in different sizes, and to color it they use natural black dye. It is believed that a girl who does not have a nose plug will not get married.

Tattoos are made to identify the people of a tribe. The tattoos are made by using needles, bamboo and a small hammer.





Later the government banned tattooing in 1950 because the people who moved out were differentiated and could not find a job because of the tattoos.

Myoko

Myoko is one of the most important festivals of the Apatani tribe. It is considered to be one of the longest running festivals with preparations starting from October and ending in



April, though the actual festival starts from 20th March and ends on 19th April. The Apatanis perform the Myoko festival to reinforce their age-old belief that by performing the rituals they can ensure fertility, both in the fields and in its people. Another aspect is the firm conviction that the festival promotes and strengthens family, clan and inter-village ties. There are many elaborate rituals and sacrifices performed during the main festival.

Housing

The paddy fields are adorned with wooden huts, resembling makeshift shelters for cultivation. The Apatani-style homes, elevated on stilts, create a captivating blend of simplicity and beauty in the village. Winding trails traverse the fields, allowing villagers to navigate their crops during planting and harvest seasons.

Each household typically features small ponds for pisciculture, adding to their self-sufficiency. We observed a traditional kitchen where pigskin is hung for religious significance, and local salt, known as tapeo, is commonly used. Altars stand outside the homes, honoring cultural traditions.

Inside, Apatani houses lack windows and chimneys, resulting in a dim ambiance. The hearth, constructed from wooden logs in a rectangular shape called 'Piri,' serves as the focal point of the kitchen. Above it, double-decker wooden racks are suspended by jute or cane ropes from the ceiling. While historically, multiple hearths filled these homes, modern families now typically gather around a single hearth in one corner of the room.

Occupation

Apatani are recognized for their sustainable agricultural practices – rice cultivation in water that also doubles up as a fish farm. Most people here practice agriculture and fishing for sustenance and not for commercial purposes. They don't use fertilizers in their fields and they are mostly known for their fish cultivation .



Food

Mithun meat and pork are mostly eaten during ritual celebrations. Chickens and their eggs are eaten as well as utilised for decorating altars and totems. While rice, boiled vegetables are the staple diet, bamboo shoots, wild boar, and small forest rodents are local delicacies. The greens and vegetables grown there are a part of their regular diet. The people of Ziro, at least the older ones, eat very healthy meals – consisting of rice, boiled greens and boiled meat or fish. None of this is cooked with salt. Salt is taken separately in a bowl and mixed with each morsel. Green chili and ginger are used in abundance. The younger people seem to have moved on to richer and spicier food, with influence from the outside world. The practice of taking salt separately might have evolved from the days when salt wasn't available here and people made salt using the leaves of a shrub to get their dose of iodine.

Totem

Apatanis believe in two types of totems, and erect them outside their houses during the festival of Myoko. Decorated with egg shells and hen feathers, the smaller of the two totems is called 'Aanggya'. The long pole like totem called 'Babo Aangya' is made of bamboo and is decorated using thin strips of cane and bamboo.





Ritual platform (Lapang)

Each village will have one or more ritual performing platforms called Lapang. The platform is raised two to three feet above the ground. Traditionally the legs were made of bamboo poles. The platform used to consist of heavy hardwood planks laid side by side.

Once thatched with grass, the roof has shifted to split bamboo and increasingly corrugated metal. With less open space and smaller houses in Ziro, the Lapang provides a convenient space for public events, discussions and ritual performances. All the houses are on the village street with front and back verandas enclosed with a bamboo railing. The house itself is raised on bamboo or wooden pillars (gradually shifting to concrete legs now). The Abya (staircase) is usually made of logs with notches.

APATANI WEDDING

We visited an Apatani wedding and witnessed the marriage festivities. They especially prepare millet and rice wine for the marriage.

Traditional Female Dress

Bilang abi (gale) - It is a 3-vertical band (white, red and blue) skirt made of cotton yarn. The upper part of the skirt is woven of white coloured cotton yarn. This is followed by a strip of red color and a stripe of blue color respectively. Length of garment is 76 cm and width 62 cm. The skirt is worn by





the young women especially during Dree celebration.

Ji abi - It is a lower garment made of two separate pieces stitched together. The Apatani women used this garment as a skirt and it has fringes at both ends. The garment is made of cotton yarn in white and black colors. The upper part of the skirt is white and the lower part is black. This skirt is used by older people, especially during Dree celebrations. The length of the garment is 150 cm and width 180 cm.

Haitey abie/hete abi - It is used as a lower garment by



women and is made of cotton fabric in white and reddish maroon color. The length of the garment is 150 cm and width 180 cm. The upper part of the garment is white and the lower part is red. The garment shows rows of black stripes lengthwise. There are typical spiral and angular patterns of brown, reddish maroon and black



colors that could be seen all through the fabric. Embroidered diamond patterns also adorn the middle part of the garment. The lower part of the skirt reveals a row of red and black stripes .

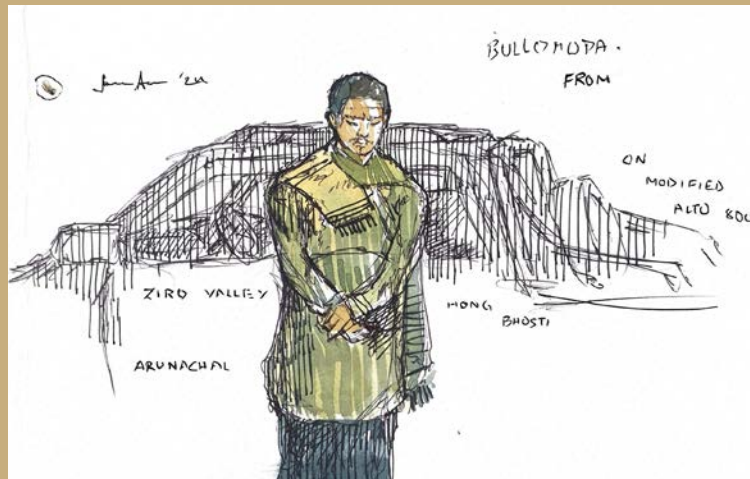
Pisa linda - It is a below the knee length red skirt woven of red wool

and silk yarn. The garment shows rows of black stripes width wise. Whole body of the skirt is highly decorated with zigzag motifs in white and yellow, traditionally worn by young and unmarried girls.

Supung tari - It is a sleeveless richly decorated white shirt used by women. The shirt is woven of cotton and wool yarn. The back of the jacket has a vertical band which is richly decorated in yellow, red, white and blue colors on a blue base. The bottom part of the jacket has a small horizontal band of the same combination. The garment has fringes at the bottom. The length of the shirt is 50 cm and width 60 cm.

Traditional Male Dress

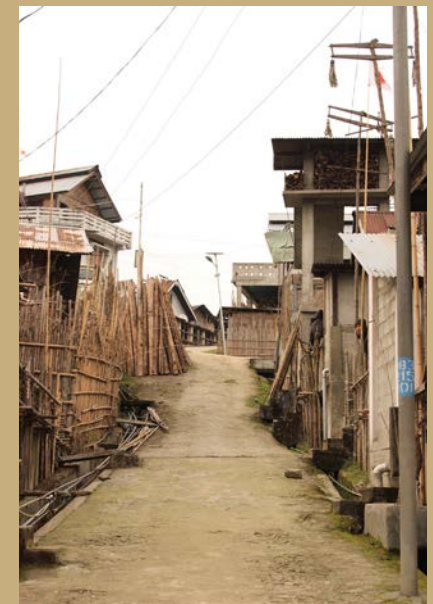
Jig-jiro - It is a fringe shawl used by men woven of a variety of simple dark-blue cotton yarn. There are stripes on the upper, lower and as well as in the middle part of the shawl in orange, yellow and red color. Length of the garment is 137 cm and



the width, 114 cm. The shawl is especially worn by priests during Myoko and Murun celebrations.

Jikhe pulye - It is a fringed shawl woven of cotton and wool yarn. It consists of two separate pieces of cloth stitched together. The shawl is of white color adorned with intricate black lozenge motifs and dots on the whole garment. It has borders in orange, yellow, red and black color on both sides and a medium size band of the same combination. The length of the garment is 135 cm and width 115 cm.

Jikatari - It is a richly decorated sleeveless jacket with a front cut open. The jacket is woven of white cotton yarn with fringes at the bottom. The two sides of the jacket show borders in orange,



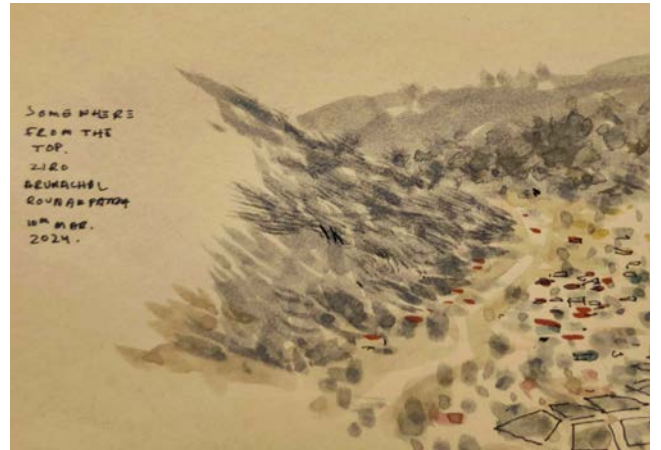
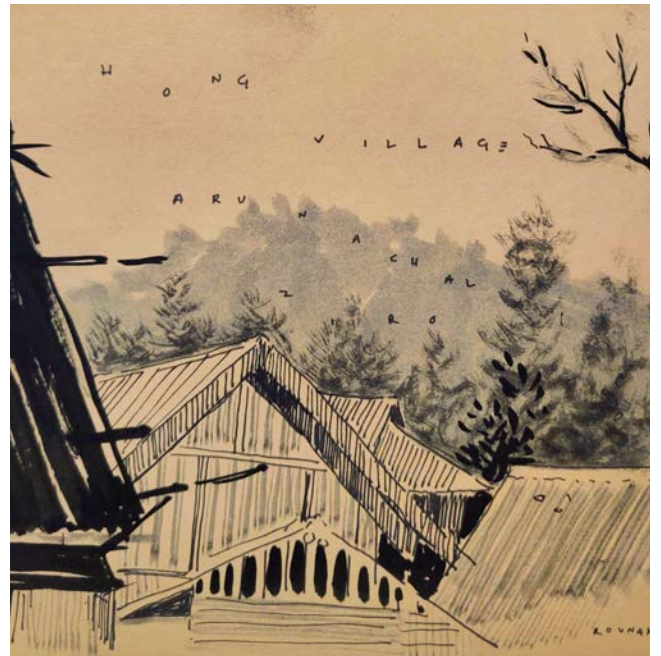
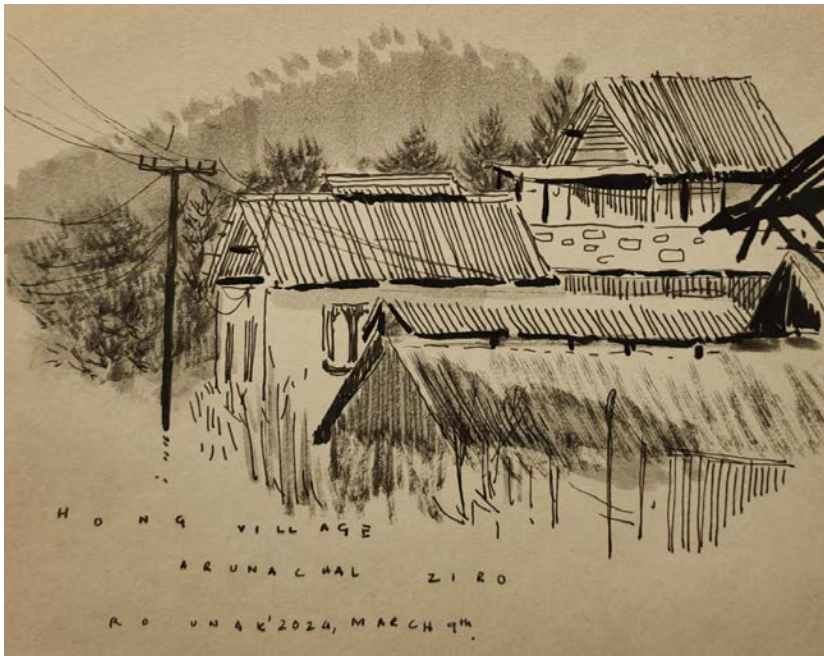


yellow and black colors. There are diamond patterns which could be in stripes of orange and yellow colors.

Jilang pulye - It is a fringed shawl woven of black cotton and wool yarn. It shows borders in orange and black at both ends. At the center of the shawl there is a medium size band length wise in white and orange colors and have lengthwise stripes in blue color on both sides of the band. Both ends of the shawl show intricate lozenge motifs and dots woven orange yellow and white. It is the most expensive piece of the ceremonial priestly attire. Jilan is required in most important rituals performed at the time of Myoko, Murung, and Subu tani.







Yazali Village





Yazali village is located in Yazali circle of Lower Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh, India. It is situated 17km away from sub-district headquarter Yachuli (tehsildar office) and 35km away from district headquarter Ziro. Yazali, one of the Nyishi villages, is a tiny hamlet on the banks of the Panyor River and looks as pretty as a backcountry could be. Nyishi, the largest tribe in the state with approximately 300,000 members, have a rich cultural legacy. Hill-Miri and Bangni were the names given to them by the outsiders specifically Britishers. As we strolled through the village of wooden and bamboo houses, it felt like we were in a different world of unmatched beauty, utter wilderness, and loveliness.

Nyishis not only believe but demonstrate organic living. Nyishi villages are the epitome of sustainable, chemical-free agricultural production and are surrounded by lush and unexplored forests. One of their most phenomenal traditions is the wearing of ornate bamboo helmets adorned with porcupine quills or hornbill feathers. While tattoos are not common among the Nyishi, women often adorn themselves with large, unique silver earrings. 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.

Nyishi houses are exceptional examples of traditional architecture. Built primarily from bamboo, wood, and thatch, these structures are both practical and aesthetically pleasing. To guard themselves from flooding and other natural threats, Nyishi homes are often advanced on stilts or platforms. The interior typically consists of a central living and kitchen area surrounded by smaller rooms. The roofs are thatched with local grasses or leaves, providing insulation and protection from the calamities. The walls, often made of bamboo, are woven into panels, demonstrating the Nyishi people's skill and originality.

