

## IN-BETWEEN SOUND AND LANDSCAPE: INTER-COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH DREE FESTIVAL AMONG THE APATANI PEOPLE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper has developed over a span of four years since I first visited Ziro valley in 2017, guided by reflections and insights that I came upon while revisiting the field in recent years in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The dree ritual was historically an individual household ritual for Apatani people who owned cultivable land for better crops and good harvest before 1967. However, presently Dree is celebrated in a common ground and all villages come together to celebrate it. Through this ethnomusicological study with active fieldwork participation, archiving and tools borrowed from historical ethnomusicology, I have attempted at studying the gradual shift of ritual space within the Apatani community leading to an emerging performing space which is able to accommodate and nurture the diverse range of cultural practices of *miji-migung* (oral tradition) traditions, traditional dance forms, story-telling and other friendly sports for recreation within the celebration of an egalitarian Dree festival. Diary entries from C.V.F Haimendorf's field notes on "Dri"<sup>2</sup> helped me to conceptualize further the drastic change in the structure and historical location of the Dree ritual and the specific role played by the *Nyibu* (ritual specialist and performer of *miji*) within the Apatani community. Dree festival among the Apatanis has projected a history where the feeling of nationalism and identity in post-independent India is being not only practised but also been creating a new emerging performance space and soundscapes among the Apatani people of Arunachal Pradesh, which could be better conceptualized as a process of glocalization and inter-community sustainability.

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## Introduction

Dree is the major harvest festival of the Apatani people who are primarily an agrarian community. Apatani people are bearers of a living oral tradition with a vocabulary count of over twenty-eight thousand words. They celebrate, worship and make sacrifices for nature, paddy fields, forests and its people throughout the year in the form of rituals and festivals like *Dree*, *Myokó* and others. *Miji-migung* (oral tradition) plays a central part in every Apatani ritual around the year. *Miji* comprises of sacred chants with gendered specific roles attached to them along with *migung* songs which are recreational and also helped to learn about mythology, historical events, important ancestors, lullabies, hymns on relatives of Apatani (the first man), and the myriad of simple and complex social realities. Historically and at present, *Myokó* festival among the Apatani people is celebrated for a month. The rising sense and feeling of native nationalism post 1960s in North-east India also might have inspired the Apatani people to celebrate the Dree ritual in an egalitarian fashion.

According to academicians and writers from the Apatani community like Mr. Gyati Rana, *Bihu* among the Assamese might have inspired the Apatani people in the 1960s to adopt a new form and structure to the Dree ritual while adding new relevance within the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Modern Dree celebration resulted in accommodating older community practices like recreational singing, oral narration competitions (*Ayu and Bswi*) and other activities together into a democratic festival of celebrating and praying for a pest-free harvest.

## Review of Literature

The traditional ritual platforms in the Apatani valley are called *lapang*. A chapter on Ritual platforms in Stuart Blackburn's book "The Sun Rises" published in 2010 states, "Every village has several of these ritual platforms, each of which belongs to a clan or group of clans. When a clan splits into two exogamous groups, one group constructs a new *lapang*. Raised about one meter above the ground on thick wooden posts, the platform consists of a number of heavy hardwood planks laid side by side. The largest platforms are about twelve meters long and four meters wide-roughly the interior space of a house- while the smaller ones are half that size. Today, when the *lapang*'s are repaired, its wooden posts and planks are replaced by concrete supports and slabs. Some *lapangs* are now protected from the sun and rain by a wooden structure supporting a roof of galvanized, corrugated iron sheets. The primary purpose of the *lapang*, however, is as a stage for Murung<sup>3</sup>. Significantly, the *lapang* is central not only to a Murung festival among the living but also to its parallel event held in the underworld. In three different sections of the Subu Heniin chant, *nyibu* lists the spirits and their *lapangs* in the land of the dead, where they will receive a share of the sacrifice" (p-28).

**In the Introduction:** Ethnicity, Identity and Music, the author says, ‘as ethnomusicologists have recently come to insist, music and dance in these kinds of rituals mustn’t be just seen as static symbolic objects which have to be understood in a context but are themselves a patterned context within which other things happen’, (Stokes 1990, x). Stokes also goes forward to describe Music as just not only a marker of pre-structured social space but the means by which this space can be transformed. In his introduction, Martin Stokes puts emphasis on the role and importance of Performance and Place; Ethnicity; Identity and Nation-state; Hybridity and Difference; Ethnicity, Class and Media, Gender and Identity. Stokes elaborates on Gender and Identity, as a final area in which boundaries are ‘performed’ in music is that of gender. Stokes also mentions ‘music as intensely involved in the propagation of dominant classification, and has been a tool in the hands of new states in the developing world’. He tries to talk about the feeling of nationalism that is imparted by traditional living traditions, which play a huge role in forming identity and nation-state. Stokes clearly talks about this identity building through ‘Performance and Place in which music informs our sense of place’. In “Modernity at Large: *Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*” (Appadurai 1996, 32) expresses that according to him the ‘new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order. Appadurai further explains this order to be composed of different interrelated, yet disjunctive global cultural flows. Appadurai subdivided these ‘global cultural flows’ into five categories, namely ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas, and ideoscapas. According to him, the individual ‘global cultural flows’ carries out huge exchange and mobility of art, news, culture and ideas across the globe and these flows interact and facilitate each other. Jeff. T. Titon (1984: 9) “like all of the expressive culture, music is a peculiar human adaptation to particular circumstances”. According to Titon, “each world of music can be regarded as an ecological system, with the forces that combine to make up the music culture in a dynamic equilibrium. A minor change in any part of the ecosystem affects the whole of it. I draw upon literature by Blackburn (2010, 2008) and Christopher F.V Haimendorf (1962) to historically contextualise the Apatani people of India as oral practitioners. The Apatani people reside in the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. A beautiful description of the Ziro valley is included in the book *Himalayan Tribal Tales- Oral Tradition and Cultures in the Apatani Valley*:

“Located at five thousand feet in the eastern Himalayas, the Apatani valley is about four miles long and two across, although thin fingers of land stretch a little further on the eastern perimeter. Paddy fields cover every available square foot, with islands of gardens, bamboo grooves and millet patches on higher ground. Hundreds of brown wooden granaries, popped up on thick posts, squat like square boxes in the fields. Ziro Valley presents an example of how the co-existence of man and nature has been perfected over the centuries by the Apatani civilization. The Apatanis are one of

the major ethnic groups of the eastern Himalayas who have a distinct civilization with systematic land use practices and rich traditional and ecological knowledge of natural resources management and conservation acquired over the years through oral traditions and learning practised in the region. The Apatanis are among the few tribes or communities in the whole world that continue to worship nature. It is their relation with nature that regulates their cultural practices. Each of their traditional practices is, in a way, the celebration of nature”, (*Blackburn, 2008, 1*).

### **Why did I choose the Dree Festival?**

After the completion of my first M.A, I was planning on re-visiting Arunachal Pradesh in the pre-context of the resonance that I had been surrounded by since I listened to artists like Oumou Sangare, Lobi Traore and Fatoumata Diawara. I contacted my friends from school days and upon discussing my interest in listening to traditional music, one of my friends told me that the Apatanis were going to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> year of Dree in July 2017, which is their harvest festival and that I would surely come across traditional music in there.

Ziro has recently become a popular place associated with musical tourism among contemporary musicians and music enthusiasts across India due to the popular Ziro Festival of Music or ZFM since 2012 when it was first started. According to a post published by VOGUE India, Isha Singh Sawhney (2014) writes, “It takes a certain infallible dedication to travel almost two days to Ziro-a small, an idyllic village in Arunachal Pradesh, home to the Apatani community, and now the Ziro Music Festival”.

Ziro Festival of Music is an outdoor music festival held every year around the last week of September in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh. It was interesting for me to come across people who were both Apatanis and non-Apatanis while I was on the way to Ziro, who assumed that I was going to the Ziro Festival of music and after I told them that I was going to attend the fifty years of the Dree Festival, they were taken aback and asked me and my cinematographer friend if we worked for any media house or news channel.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

- To understand the current significance of traditional musical performances of the Apatanis within the community and within the larger framework of the state of Arunachal Pradesh?
- To identify the main factors involved behind the evolving patterns in the practice of traditional rituals in the Dree Festival.
- To study the ways in which the traditional music and dance practices are transmitted within the community. And to enquire about the musical sustainability perspectives that can be beneficial from an ecological point of view.

- To locate from the changing 'ritual space' in the modern-day Dree festival among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh?

### Methodological Approaches

And for my objectives, I tried to explore the possible intersectionality of gender within the cultural practices of the Apatani people in practising, performing and transmitting through the Dree festival. Another major objective was to understand the historical relevance of the Dree festival among different age groups among the Apatani people. Throughout this paper and during the fieldwork process I tried to understand the initiatives taken up on the community level to shape the practice of Dree in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I carried out performative ethnography as a tool for the dissemination of community knowledge systems that deal with the practice and transmission of singing and dance styles through the Dree festival among the Apatani people. I visited Ziro in July 2017, to witness the Apatani community's 50<sup>th</sup> Golden Jubilee Celebration of their agricultural Festival called Dree. In my quest to visit the fifty years of the Dree festival in Ziro, I left Kolkata in India on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2017. It was a rainy afternoon. It is approximately 1392 kilometres to Ziro valley from Kolkata. I took a train to Assam and from there got on another train to Naharlagun, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh. Throughout the way, till I reached Arunachal Pradesh, it was raining constantly. After reaching Naharlagun, I stayed at a hotel for a few hours before I hopped on a shared transport towards Ziro. The total travel time by car should have been three hours but it took me almost ten hours to reach Hapoli due to heavy rains and unavoidable landslides along the road, which slowed the journey, and I was stuck for almost three hours at one point where the rain eroded the roads. And I finally reached Ziro on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June at 11 pm.

I have interviewed several individuals who were participating in the festival from various age groups from twelve years to seventy years of age, to understand the status and awareness amongst the people regarding the festival, performance, history and the evolution of the traditional musical performances within the Apatani community. The sample size for my research

Furthermore, I wanted and reached Ziro at least a few days before the Dree festival started, not only to figure out the proceedings during the festival but also to witness how people got together within the Apatani community to help each other organize while contemplating the Dree festival. According to Everett C. Hughes as mentioned in the *Introduction chapter* to Bruce Jackson's book "Fieldwork" (1987) "fieldwork refers, to the observation of people in *situ*; finding them where they are, staying with them in some role which, while acceptable to them, will allow both intimate observation of certain parts of

their behaviour, and reporting it in ways useful to social science but not harmful to those observed” (1960: v).

I was looking for a research assistant from the Apatani community who could speak Hindi, English and Apatani and could accompany me to the festival and was looking forward to celebrating Dree in its mother town Ziro valley. Nobin Victor (Christian name) or Victor Doliyang (Apatani name) helped me as a key informant and introduced me to the village elders in Hong Lemba (a village in Apatani) and Hija lemba. For my interviews during the festival dates between 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> July, I introduced myself to individuals who were taking part in the festival along with elder people from the audience. It was essential to incorporate the narratives of people from the neighbouring communities, about the transition in socio-cultural practices during Dree over the years.

Purposive sampling is the method I opted for selecting my participants. I interviewed people from both genders who were taking part in the festival in different cultural programs. The medium of language was Hindi and English. I was initially conducting the audio-visual interview, but I realized that the presence of the camera was making people conscious and uncomfortable while answering questions about religion and the effects of English education among the people in Hapoli and greater Ziro valley. In Bruce Jackson's 1987 introduction to fieldwork, he emphasizes the participant observer who “*constantly redesigns his study as he uncovers new data*”, (p, 4). Jackson has also quoted Becker and Geer, saying that the interviewer while redesigning his study “engages in analytic activity most of the time that he is in the field. The analysis is often carried on unsystematically, without any consideration of its underlying logical structure or rationale. The observer's ‘hunches’ and ‘insights’ are in fact truncated and unformalized acts of analysis” (1960: 270-71).

I maintained field notes from each day, starting from the day I got on the train from Kolkata (my home town) till the end of the festival on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017. I made diagrams of instruments that were historically a part of the Apatani community music in the past from people who described about them like Mr. Bulo Delay from Hong lemba.

I also met the organizers festival to not only get the brochures but also take their permission on a verbal level, which actually helped me in the process of the festival for getting access to the green room and also attaching my recorder directly with the mixer from the sound console when I particularly wanted to record the *Ayu*, *Bswi* and *Miji* chants without the surrounding ambience.

I visited London in June and spent almost my whole time in the Archives and Special Collection at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) and also looked for related books and publications and records on Arunachal Pradesh and the Apatani community in British Library.

## Musical Resonance and Quest

Long before I was introduced to musical genres like Blues, Bebop, Bossa, Samba, Malian music, Jazz or Brazilian music from around the world in the music college I went to in Chennai, I was introduced to traditional songs from Arunachal Pradesh. Over the ten years, I lived close to Itanagar, the capital of the state, where every year I came across traditional festivals that were celebrated by students and teachers from different communities on the university campus where I lived with my parents. I witnessed *Dree*, *Nyokum*, *Mopin*, *Losar* and *Myokó* among others. This experience of listening to traditional songs and participating in the dance, which resembled human chains while swaying in circles while repeating the song after the lead singer who stood in the middle while chanting verses and songs in multiple languages that I never learned in school. But nevertheless, I followed after the lead singer like everyone else moving in circles and participating in the festivals not knowing or asking for the relevance and meaning of every song or even the words that I chanted. I participated, because I wanted to and also because everybody was welcome. I never heard this music on the television nor did I come across people who sang these songs in social gatherings outside the traditional festival days.

## Listening with an open ear

While describing the sonic characteristics of Ziro, during the Dree festival of 2017, I would want to compare and contrast the sounds that we don't hear in the Ziro Valley, which a western musical enthusiast and musical scholar would commonly associate very easily with the everyday ambience that is shared within multiple cities and towns in India.

In Ziro, we do not hear the city bustle or honking of cars and public busses. We cannot hear the crows, crowing over the city, we won't hear repeated honks by *tuk tuk*'s or announcements of train timetables in and around train stations echoing in the air. You won't hear vegetable vendors calling out to people as they go around the estates while dragging around their vegetable carts with them. We cannot hear the loud mopeds used by milkmen going around distributing milk at doorsteps. The traditional houses and villages in Ziro valley do not have doorbells and hence we won't be able to hear the doorbells from adjacent houses as compared to life in cities. We would also not hear the Azan from any neighbouring Mosques or the sound of bells from temples. All of the above sonic characteristics attribute to major cities in India like Kolkata, Delhi, Bombay, Chennai, Hyderabad, Guwahati and many others but not around Arunachal Pradesh and especially not in Ziro.

All I heard was the chirping of birds when I got down from the train in Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh. On the way to Ziro, the shared transport that I availed of blasted

Bollywood songs, which originated from Bombay and other popular Assamese songs that were played by the driver of the car. The place where the car stopped for tea and snacks was surrounded by hotels and restaurants, which had Nepali songs amongst other Bollywood songs being played subtly. On the remaining way to Ziro, I have stranded the way for almost three hours due to a landslide caused by rain, and finally reached Hapoli close to midnight. When I reached the small town, it was very quiet with the occasional barking of dogs from distance accompanied by distinct sounds of insects from within the bamboo and pine trees around. I stayed the first night with my friend from Kolkata named Amir who accompanied me from the beginning and Nobin Victor who joined me from Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh. Victor is an Apatani himself, who is a post-graduate in anthropology from Rajiv Gandhi University in Arunachal Pradesh. He was my primary informant and field manager.

#### **From 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2017: The Golden Jubilee Celebration in Hija Festival grounds.**

The main Dree ritual started at around 10.30 a.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July in the Hija village festival ground. There were a lot of announcements being made from the gallery, which was right opposite from across the proscenium stage. The main 'ritual space', where the *nyibus* gathered was almost at the back of the gallery (refer to Sketch 1). There were around seven to eight *nyibus*. Some of them had an assistant who is better known as *bo's*. There were seven temporary altars made up of bamboo, which were decorated individually by the *nyibus*. They were decorated with leaves and grounded rice powder. In the beginning, only one *nyibu* was chanting. After twenty minutes into the process, everyone started chanting. It was astonishing to realize that they were not chanting the same verses or words. Each *nyibu* was chanting distinct *miji* verses. It was interesting to note, how only around forty to fifty people gathered for the actual Dree ritual, whereas the majority of approximately four to five hundred people were in the main Dree Grounds, witnessing some traditional dance event. The announcements on the microphone could also be overheard at times while the *nyibu's* continued with the chanting. I asked Mr. Nobin Victor (Apatani field assistant) about the *nyibu's* who were chanting rigorously without stopping to which Nobin informed me that, since it was the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Dree festival celebration, they had so many *nyibus* chanting together.

For me, it almost sounded as if I was inside a beehive and though the chants were over-lapping each other, it almost sounded like a drone, along with all the other sounds of the festival in the background. This chanting was followed by individual chicken sacrifices by the *nyibus*. After the chicken sacrifice, the blood of the chicken, while it is still alive is sprinkled on individual altars along with pouring rice beer and sprinkling rice powder. The *nyibus* had a brief discussion and then two of the *nyibus* approached the



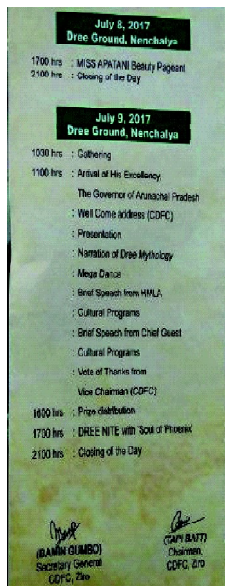
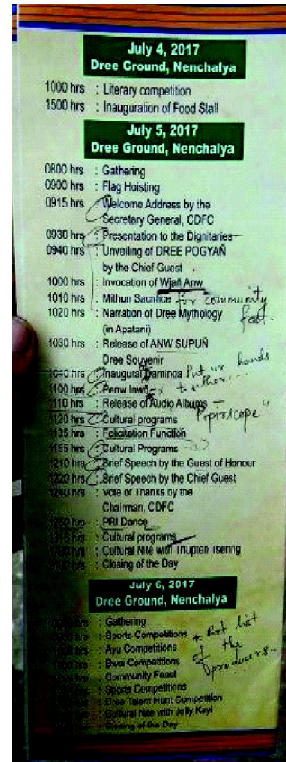
*mithun* (*Bos Frontalis*). The *mithun* is the main offering of the festival. At first, the *nyibus* offer the animal some salt. After that, both the *nyibus* began chanting in unison, but they both sounded muffled. None of them took an initiative to make the sound any clearer. After chanting for twelve to fifteen minutes, suddenly out of nowhere, one of the *nyibus* draws a huge Apatani sword on the *mithun's* neck. Within seconds, he hit one more time and this time the sacrifice was done and streams of blood started pouring out of the sacrificed animal. Later that day, the *mithun* is cooked and served with rice to everyone who was attending the festival.

### **The Dree Festival 2017**

Dree is a fertility festival of the Apatanis held annually on July 5<sup>th</sup>. The word 'Dree' has multiple meanings in the Apatani society. It is derived from 'Diiri', which means purchasing or borrowing food items when in scarcity or as to the existing stock in anticipation of lean days. In other words, Dree is named after Diiri Piilo, a month in the Apatani calendar. The dree ritual was historically a household ritual for Apatani people who owned cultivable land and to abolish the Dree spirit itself, which is known to be the foremost spirit, which comprises all the pests in the valley.

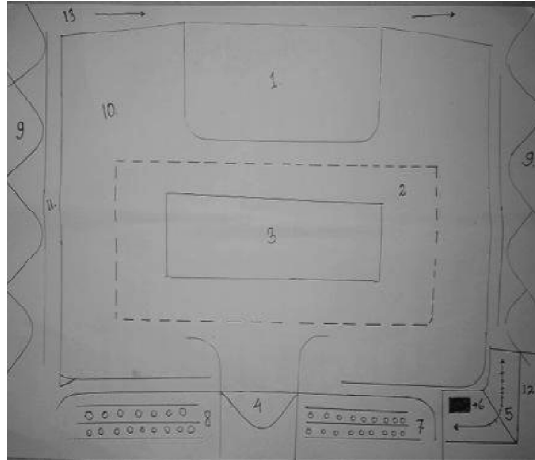
The Dree festival started on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2017 on the Dree ground in Hija village, which is also known as *Nenchalya*. The two events that comprised the day were a literary competition and the inauguration of the food stalls for the festival. The major important dates for the festival were scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2017. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, the gathering was scheduled at 8 a.m. followed by events like flag hoisting, welcome address by the secretary general, other presentations by the chief guest, *mithun* sacrifice at around 10.10 am. That was followed by narration of the Dree mythology in both the Apatani language and English for non-locals and visitors from outside the community. The day was packed with events that commenced one after the other like the release of audio albums, felicitation function and various cultural programs. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, there was a competition on *Ayu* and *Bwsi* which also had a participant who was *nyibu*. *Ayu* and *Bwsi* are part of the *migung* repertoire of Apatani oral traditions. The *Ayu* event was for the male population whereas the *Bwsi* was for female *migung* practitioners. The competition was added to the 50<sup>th</sup> Golden jubilee celebration to showcase the oral tradition and the practice of the *nyibus* who have the knowledge of chanting on any given topic of the Apatanis at length. The topic of the competition was declared just at the beginning of the competition. The topic was to sing verses for the "origin of the Ziro valley" and was the same for everyone. The souvenir for the Dree festival 2017 depicts the different kinds of programs that the festival accommodated for the golden jubilee celebration.

Souvenir for Dree Festival program 2017. This souvenir illustrates the events and program schedules for the 5 day long Dree celebration. The 50 years (Golden Jubilee) celebration had special program on *Migung* (historical songs on important events, ancestors, origin stories, folk songs) singing competitions for both men (*Ayu*) and women (*Bswi*). Apart from that it also had special events like cultural night with Arunachal idol from Tawang, i.e., Thupten Tsering, release of audio albums by local artists, fashion show, Inter-community sports competitions and others.



Souvenir for Golden Jubilee celebration of Dree Festival program 2017 in Ziro. This souvenir illustrates the events and program schedules for the 5 day long Dree celebration. The 50 years (Golden Jubilee) celebration had special program on *Migung* (historical songs on important events, ancestors, origin stories, folk songs) singing competitions for both men (*Ayu*) and women (*Bswi*). Apart from that it also had special events like cultural night with Arunachal idol from Tawang, i.e., Thupten Tsering, release of audio albums by local artists, fashion show, inter-community sports competitions and others. The celebration ended on 9<sup>th</sup> July in the presence of the Governor of the state of Arunachal Pradesh along with vote of thanks and special music band ‘Soul of Phoenix’.

### Sketch 1: Distribution of performing and ritual space in Dree Festival in 2017



(Sketch prepared by the researcher)

1. This is precisely the proscenium stage that is built every year for the Dree festival. It is around three to four feet in height and around six to seven meters wide. It has a green room with a backstage. Most of the modern singing and dancing competitions were held on the stage. The *Ayu* and *Bswi* competitions were also held on it on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July. It was also used for the fashion show competition on the final night. This space is also used as a gallery for older village headman and *nyibus* to sit and watch the other traditional cultural programs happening in the '2' and '3' sections of the above sketch.
2. The *daminda* dance was performed in this space. There were seventy-eight women who participated in the *daminda* dance. The '*pri-dance*', was also performed in this space with more than a hundred participants from all age groups led by one senior *nyibu*.
3. There were a few modern Apatani dances performed in this space along with a game of tug of war on the finishing day.
4. This space was on the first floor and was part of the concrete gallery (7, 8) by the football field. This space was for VIP's and announcements and speeches for addressing the crowd. The elevation of this space is the highest on the whole ground.
5. This is the space for the actual Dree ritual to be performed by the *Nyibus*. It was performed on the second day according to the program list, i.e. the 5<sup>th</sup> of July. The marks on the arrow in this section represent the altars on which the *nyibus* were offering the sacrifices. The altars were removed after the 5<sup>th</sup> of July.

6. This darkened spot was where the main sacrificial animal was tied. The *Mithun* (*Bos frontalis*), was not only offered salt and water but the two *nyibu* chanted around the animal for around twelve to fifteen minutes before sacrificing and offering the animal to the spirits and ancestors.
7. This place is one of the galleries for sitting. However, this was for locals, tourists and for media. This place was for almost everyone.
8. This area was also a sitting gallery but it was reserved for participants for the *daminda* dance and there were a lot of students from respective schools in their school uniforms. This place was used for participants and their families throughout the festival.
9. These domes-like structures on both sides of the Dree ground were mostly food stalls. A few shops were selling traditional handlooms made by the Apatanis. There were also a few temporary alcohol shops serving local rice beers along with the other foreign liquors. There were no bookstalls.
10. This place is part of the ground but a lot of people or audience gathered around this place who didn't find a place in the gallery to witness the festival. They are mostly comprised of youngsters.
11. This is basically the pathway made from bamboo and wood and is a little elevated from the ground. The elevation was due to extensive rain during the festival.
12. This space has something to do with the Dree ritual. This is where the old *nyibus* took a rest in between chanting and while other *nyibus* were preparing for the animal sacrifice. It was also used by *nyibus* to keep their belongings while they were chanting or were participating in the ritual.
13. The whole of the northern section of the sketch is the road of the Hija village that connects with the Old Ziro and Hapoli road.

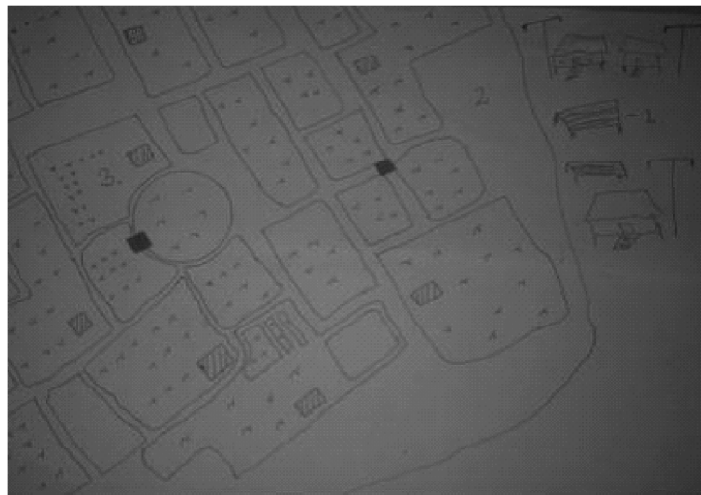
### **Dree celebration before 1967**

I am going to describe the Dree ritual as mentioned from the accounts of Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf's field notes and diaries that I had the opportunity to go through at the Archives and Special Collection at SOAS in 2019. I went through a total of 8 diaries/field notes written between 1945 and till the late 1970s by Haimendorf while visiting Ziro in the present Lower-Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The diaries had hand-written notes on a myriad of topics from field diaries and events of selected days and events within the Apatani people, detailed accounts on *mithuns* and other livestock that Apatani individuals owned, along with extensive accounts on clan structures and the *lapangs* associated with these individual ritual spaces. I came across a brief description of "Dree" as mentioned in

his diary. According to Christopher Von Fuer Haimendorf's description of "Drii" from 1954; in the earlier times, the *nyibu* decided on a date around June/July, when he would perform the Dree ritual for land-owning Apatani farmers, who appointed the individual *Nyibu* for the ritual. Since it was a household ritual, the members of the individual household used to accompany the *nyibu* to the *lapang* (elevated platform associated with rituals and meeting spot for elders) and then followed him to their respective paddy fields for the rest of the ritual, which comprised of chanting *miji* verses which are associated with smearing rice powder and pouring rice beer on the ritual alter built for the minor animal sacrifices. The Dree ritual was performed multiple times by the same *nyibu* appointed for multiple plots of land by the respective individual landowner.

Reflecting upon the description of Dree from Haimendorf's diaries, it further points me to the hypothesis that; there were around ten villages where the Apatani people resided in the then Ziro valley. If one village had around ten to fifteen Dree rituals, then all the ten villages would at least have around a hundred rituals performed within two months. It is evident from the diary that the number of *nyibu* was higher before. At the moment, according to Blackburn's 2010 publication, he reported less than sixty *nyibu* in the valley. There was no description of the word "Drii" in Haimendorf's diaries or other connotations with the harvest ritual "Drii". In the diagram below, I have sketched a ritual space with respect to the paddy fields and the position of the villages during the Dree months between June and July.

#### Sketch of the *Dree* ritual space before 1967



(Sketch no. 2, prepared by the researcher on ritual space among the Apatani people during Dree before 1967 as described by Haimendorf)

1. The *lapangs* were associated with Dree before it started being celebrated in the form of a festival. The *nyibu* used to chant *miji* (sacred chants) on the *lapang* before going into the individual field to offer sacrifices and prayers.
  2. This area is the open land or path between the village and the cultivation fields.
  3. The multiple boxes, which are marked with tilted lines on most of the larger cultivable patches of land, are where the Dree ritual used to be performed by the *nyibu*. There used to be several Dree rituals close to each other but were done by selected *nyibu* from their individual clans among the Apatanis.
- 3.1: In the above sketch, there are darkened boxes. These imply to Dree ritual space where the *nyibu* performed for two or more smaller patches of land together.

### **Transformation of the ritual and performance space in the Dree Festival after 1967**

According to the book *“The Sun Rises”* the author describes Dree as one of the major festivals among the Apatanis and says it is quite different from *Murung*, the other major festival. The author further wrote, *“It is celebrated each summer largely as a social event in the administrative centre of Hapoli, not in villages. Nyibus chant to avert disease or bad weather, which would harm the paddy fields blazing bright green in July, and there are minor animal sacrifices. Most of the attention is however given to the football matches and dance competitions held on large public grounds in Hapoli. Once a minor agricultural rite, conducted by individual families when and where they liked, Dree is now (and since 1967) packed into a single day in one location. Separate celebrations in other locations are banned because they would undermine the single, community-wide event”* (Blackburn 2010, 7). Between 1967 to 2017, the space of the Dree ritual has transformed into a festival, which, engages the whole population in Ziro to create a collective space for cultural interaction and learning.

### **Analyzing the present through the past**

Going from the description of the Dree festival as an event to how ‘ritual’ is conceptualized for analysis, we need to look into Catherine Bell’s eminent work in ritual studies. The study of ritual began with a prolonged and influential debate on the origin of religion that gave rise to several important styles of interpretation- evolutionary, sociological and psychological- from which new fields of scholarship emerged” (Bell 1997, 3). The questions that surrounded Bell’s argument were whether religion and culture were originally rooted in myth or ritual. The definition or argument about performance is that “performance must be construed as a ‘broad spectrum’ or ‘continuum’ of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainment, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music) and everyday life performances to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and



class roles and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media and the internet, (Schechner 2002, 2006, 2013, 2).

I am really moved by Richard Schechner's book "*The Future of Ritual*- Writings on culture and performance", where he concludes the book with these lines, "The future of ritual is the continued encounter between imagination and memory translated into doable acts of the body (Schechner 1993, 263). As we have heard this proverb by pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus, "change is the only constant". I truly believe that change has been a part of the festival culture in general, as it has to adjust new events and programs within the pre-existing ones as demanded by the community and influenced by factors like media promotion.

The Apatani people always had the concept of an elevated platform where ritual and other sacrificial rites were performed called the *lapang*. There are several hundred *lapangs* in different Apatani villages around Ziro valley. And in their tradition, the *lapang* is not only a meeting point for the living but also for the ancestors and the local spirits. Yet, again there is a newer performing space evolving through the Dree festival among the Apatani people in Arunachal Pradesh. Phipps (2009, 368) quotes James (2006) that [D]espite the pressures of the developmental modernizers who expected them to become assimilated or else disappear, these communities are using public cultural festivals as a space to celebrate, renew and reinvent their cultural traditions. These festivals have varying origins; some in deep-rooted traditions while others are innovations in the missionary, nation- building or cultural revival mode. All exist at the intersection of tribalism with local and national political contestation and are variously touched by the social forms of globalism.

In ritual, 'as ethnomusicologists have recently come to insist, it is important that music and dance in these kinds of rituals are not just seen as static symbolic objects which have to be understood in a context but are themselves a patterned context within which other things happen' (Stokes, 1994).

In the introduction to "Ethnicity, identity, and music: the musical construction of place", Stokes mentions 'music as intensely involved in the propagation of dominant classification, and has been a tool in the hands of new states in the developing world' (Stokes 1994, 1-27). Where data exists, music researchers may also wish to examine past musical cultures, recreating through their analysis of former practices and repertoires, (Stock 2002, 153-154). Tan Sooi Beng (2015, 109-133) compared 'performance' to a community forum or rather a platform where the audience engages in a spontaneous conversation.

One aspect of traditional ritual performance that has been enthusiastically maintained by the community is dance, the single area of traditional rituals in which all can participate. The power of dance, in union with music and sacred text, to incorporate individuals into the larger community, (Shelemay 2015, 347).

## Concluding Remarks

I agree with Stokes's characterization of music as just not only a marker of pre-structured social space but also as the means by which this space can be transformed. The Dree festival is one of the best living traditions in which the ritual and performance space for Dree historically used to be at individual households before 1967 and the *nyibus* used to decide on a day and time during the month of June-July where they would perform the sacrificial rites close to the individual's cultivation field, whereas at present *nyibus* from each village represent in the main Dree ritual and perform in front of the commoners and not anywhere close to the fields. I think music through festivals is also used in the revival of oral traditions within indigenous communities across the world. Dree festival among the Apatanis has a very similar history where the feeling of nationalism and identity in post-independent India is being not only practised but also been creating a new emerging performance space and soundscape among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh, which could be better conceptualized as a process of glocalization. It is also important to mention that the participation of women in traditional dances that I witnessed during the Dree festival portrayed the embodiment of moves and forms, which reflected ways of cultivation that they still practice in the paddy fields. Among the entire dance performances that I came across during the festival most of them were by women of all ages. Another important phenomenon that I witnessed among the participants during the festival was the engagement of older women in traditional singing practices that accompanied the dancers without any modern instruments and arrangements making it authentic sonically and visually. Through the process of writing this article, I came to the understanding that traditional musical dances and performances are going through a transitional period. This could be resulting in a 'revival' of musical and dance practices through the Dree festival, which has led to the formation of multiple performances and ritual spaces and soundscapes in comparison to the older structure of celebrating Dree as a ritual.

## Notes

1. A version of this paper was presented in the International Workshop on "Indigeneity", Orality, and Liminal Ontologies: Methodological Pluralism and Approaches to Culture', Diphu, Karbi Anlong, India 14th to 17th January 2020, Organized by University of Tartu in collaboration with the Centre for Karbi Studies, the Nordic Centre in India, the Marginalized and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre, and the University of Tartu Asian Center, with support from Karbi Anlong Autonomous Council, India.
2. In Christopher. F. V Haimendorf's handwritten diary, Haimendorf had spelt modern Apatani Dree festival as Drii. I came across this collection of diaries in Archive and Special Collection in SOAS, London, in the year 2019.



3. Murung is a ritual among the Apatani people held during the month of January every year. The Murung ritual has always been a household ritual and is performed by *Nyibu* on a *lapang*. The *miji* and *ayu* that are chanted during the ritual are among the longest ones and need an experienced *Nyibu*.

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Purab Riddhi Chaudhuri

**Some Pictures from the Golden Jubilee Celebration of Dree in 2017 in Hija village in Ziro Valley**



**(An Apatani Nyibu (Late Nada Kena of Hija village) while performing the Dree Ritual in Hija Village on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017, picture courtesy- Purab Riddhi Chaudhuri)**



(Apatani women gathered to serve rice beer and grounded rice to participants during Mega dance during Dree 2017 on July 5<sup>th</sup>, picture courtesy- Purab Riddhi Chaudhuri)



(Apatani women coming back to gallery after performing the Daminda dance, during Dree 2017 in Hija Village, Photo courtesy Md. Amir Mondal)





(During Mega dance of the Apatani people during Dree 2017 on 5<sup>th</sup> July, photo courtesy- Md. Amir Mondal)



(Picture courtesy- Md. Amir Mondal, during modern Apatani dance by younger generations during Dree 2017 in Hija Village)



(The Dree Flag of the Apatanis, during Dree 2017, Photo courtesy- Purab Riddhi Chaudhuri)



(Apatani Nyibu in traditional dress along with accessories and equipment's during Golden Jubilee celebration of Dree festival on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2017 in Hija village)