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# The Traditional Jewelleries of Apatani Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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**Abstract:** India has a rich culture of tribal communities. Each tribe have their own traditional jewellery which reflecting their ethnicity and customs which is integrated in their daily life. India has the longest continuous tradition of jewellery. Around 1,500 BC the Indus Valley people made their earrings and necklaces with gold, beads and other metals. The tribal Jewellery of Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh reflects the socio-cultural tradition of the community. It communicates the wearer's status, wealth, spiritual belief and functional habits etc. They can be distinguished from their rich culture of jewellery. All the men and women are worn jewelleries in numerous quantities. Among the Apatanis, beads are classified into two categories, the 'original' and 'duplicate'. The originals are supposed to be oldest and came from Tibet. The duplicates are from the plains, these are less prized. The precious Tibetan beads are reserved for ceremonial wear, major festivals, feasts and other public occasions. They wear numerous quantities of necklaces, bangles belts, head dress and nose rings. The beads used in the jewellery are very precious and exquisite. Every bead has its own value and importance according to its colour and lustre. Each jewellery has its own particular name and specifications. This paper attempts to explain the diversity and beauty of the various and ornaments of the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh in great detail.

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**Keywords:** Apatani Tribe, Tradition, Jewellery, Beads, Festival, Ziro Valley, Arunachal Pradesh

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## Introduction

Man has always loved to be decorated with jewels. Jewellery is a universal form of adornment. In the early date it was worn as a defence from the dangers of life or as a mark of status or rank. People have paid dowries with jewellery. It was also created to be used as currency for trading goods. Tribal Jewellery pieces are normally not in uniform shape and symmetrical. The vast majority of fine tribal jewellery from India is made of silver, beads, stones etc. The materials are locally available and quality is varying among the different cultures, artisans, and across time. Tribal Jewellery has

travelled around the world from country to country, and generation to generation – these irregularities are part of its appeal, heritage, and importance. In most tribal cultures, Silver is the familiar metal and gold applied only cautiously, usually as a delicate decoration. More recently, melted coins have been integrated as common attribute of tribal jewellery.

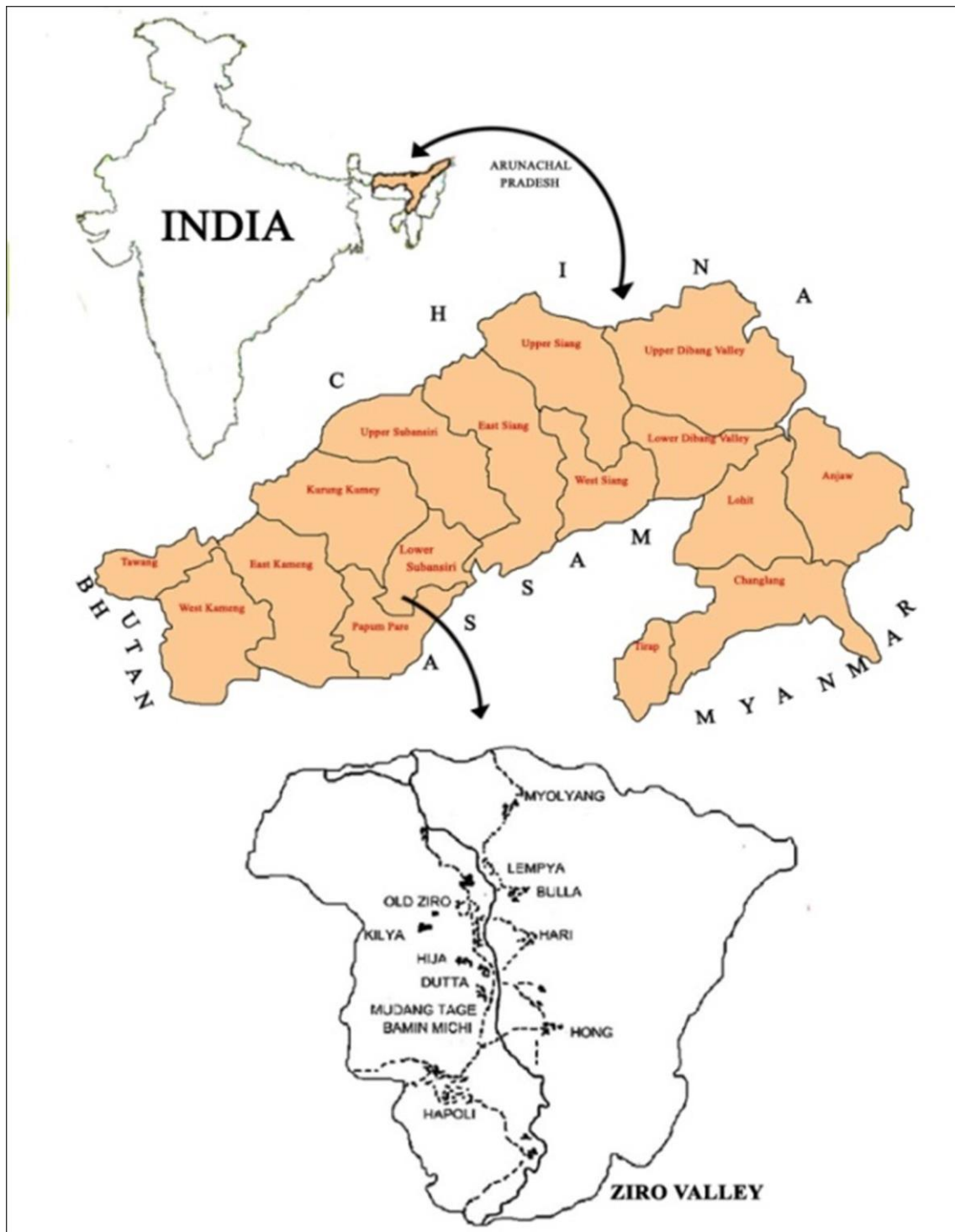


Figure 1: Location of Ziro Valley

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the twenty-nine states of India. Located in the most north-eastern position among the states in the north-east region of India. The state consists of 26 major tribes and a number of sub-tribes. The Apatani are the tribal group living in the Ziro valley in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh (Figure 1). They have exotic culture and tradition. Ornaments are very popular among Apatani people. Jewellery in the form of necklaces, nose rings, ear rings, and beads has always been of great importance among them. The beaded necklaces have the Tibetan origin and they are considered it as family heirlooms. It is also considered as symbol of pride. On festive occasions Apatani women wear heavy beaded necklaces in numerous quantities and are composed of several layers. The priest is also wearing jewellery in numerous quantities in the religious and ceremonial occasions. These jewellery are interconnected with their material culture and tradition. These jewellery have abundant history of origin, trade and barter. It is the general practice that only married women and widows wear heavy and expensive strings of beads necklace at the festivals, ritual etc. At some festivals (*murung* and *miida*), after the sacrifices, these spectacular sets of necklaces are hung on a wall inside the sponsor's house, for everyone to see. Tibetan beads which enhance female beauty are thus a public display of the sponsor's wealth and his clan's fertility.

## **Methodology**

Ziro, the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh has been selected purposively on account of existence of traditional jewellery of Apatani tribes. Ziro consists of seven villages namely Hari, Bulla, Hija, MudangTage, BaminMichi and Hong village. The respondents were women because traditional jewellery is mainly worn by women. The respondents were selected from the age group 65-85 years, because, the old generation was more aware about traditional jewellery practices.

## **Tools for Data Collection**

The primary data is collected through personal investigation with the help of pre-structured questionnaire and participatory method. Available literature was collected from District Library Ziro. The investigator collected the information from the available literature and direct discussions with the people. The field studies were conducted with the help of Mr.Hage D.Apa, Ms.Aku, Mr.Hage Pengi, Ms. Hage Thado Naniya and Ms. Tamo Dumi Samples are selected through random sampling technique. The data collected from field study is accompanied to the secondary data. The data of the secondary sources are collected from the publications of Directorate of Textile and Handicraft Industry-Itanagar, District Museum Ziro, Government of Arunachal Pradesh craft centre Ziro. Besides this, many existing literatures on the Apatani tribes as well as on related topics are consulted for proper analysis of the study.

## **Sampling and Sample Size**

Fifteen Apatani women from Hong villages were selected randomly. The respondents were women because traditional jewellery is mainly worn by women. The respondents

were selected from the age group 60 to 85 years, because, this group has more knowledge about the old traditional jewellerys and beads.

## **Result**

The Apatani tribe have distinct varieties of jewellerys which are made up of precious stones and beads. They wear large amount of jewellerys in their daily life and some special jewellerys in the festive occasions. It has a very long history associated with these beads and most of the precious beads were come from Tibet. They were not the manufacturer but involved in the trade of jewellery.

## **The History of Jewellery**

The geographical location of Arunachal Pradesh, between Burma on the east, Tibet on the north, and the plains of Assam on the south, expected that these beads circulated through the region as part of a vast network of trade means connecting South Asia with the rest of the world, not only its neighbours Tibet and China, but also Europe, Africa, East Asia, Egypt and Mesopotamia (Blackburn,2004).

This bead trade in northeast India was only one part of a complex trans-Himalayan trade, which was largely conducted through trade from at least the early 1600s. To these annual trade fairs, set up by the Ahom rulers at several locations in the plains of Assam close to the hills, came Tibetans, Bhutanese and Indian traders, for whom Arunachal tribesmen acted as distributors and caretakers. The items traded along the Assam valley, were varied according to the specific location and exchanged in large quantities.

The beads made in the Indus Valley between the second and first millennium BC were merchandised into central Asia and western China. When beads reached northeast India, they move in the regional section of the international trade system. This regional network moved goods back and forth across the Himalayas, largely through Bhutan but also through Arunachal, as well as along an east-west axis (Blackborn). The carnelian shell and glass beads began to move from Calcutta up to Nagaland about 1700. Many of these were glass beads, imported from Venice, Germany, Bohemia, China and UK, and modified by Indian craftsmen. In 1820, the first perfect description of beads in Arunachal, noted large necklaces of blue beads that looked like turquoises, but upon closer examination it was clearly fired glass (Wilcox 1832).

By the mid-nineteenth century, when India became a consumer of goods, the import of glass beads into India greatly increased (Francis 2002). A huge amount of foreign beads came into India on the Cambay coast of Gujarat and was merchandised onto the northeast by Marwari merchants. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the beads merchandized to Arunachal people by Tibetan pilgrims were manufactured in Birmingham and Germany, and these were reached in southern Tibet by the route of Calcutta, Darjeeling and Lhasa. By this date, India started manufacturing of beads and started supply glass beads to the northeast (Dunbar 1932).



Figure 2: Apatani old women with nose plug and tattooed face

The most valued beads originally come from Tibet. Tibetans were not the manufacturer of beads but they were involved in the trade. The definitive origins of these precious stones were the remote area of Himalayan region. The history of these jewelleries dates back around 2600 BC. The carnelian beads have been produced by Gujarat since 2600

BC in Indus Valley. The glass beads originated from China and Europe. The cowries and shells have the origin of Indian Ocean like Gujarat coast and Bay of Bengal. From Nepal and Bhutan the Indian and European beads crossed the Himalayan region through Tibet. After that they could be traded or exchanged to the Himalayan southern slopes through transactions with the Tibetans, as were also Chinese beads.

### **Traditional Nose Plug**

Tattooing and the stuffing of large nose plugs (*Yaping hullo*) popular among the women in the earlier days, to make them less attractive to belligerent neighbours, thus sparing them from abduction because Apatani women are extremely pretty and beautiful. To stop this practice, the elder decided to start tattooing the face and introducing nose plugs from a very young age to make them look less attractive. The nose plugs are made up of polished bamboo stick. First a pair of pins inserted into the nostrils. The holes would grow until they were large enough to locate a pair of a permanent bamboo plugs. They consider it as an ancestral beautification.

The tattoos contain thick line that starts from the forehead to the tip of the nose, and then five thinner ones along the chin (Figure 2). The ink was made up of dark blue pigment is mixed with pig's fat and soot from the fireplace. In the earlier days all the Apatani girls underwent tattooing around the age of five or six. Over the years, this practice became a visual recognition of being an Apatani woman. In the early 1970s, the tradition of inserting the nose plugs and face tattooing were banned by the government.

### **Traditional Jewelleries**

Apatani have an extensive collection of jewelleries and beads, each of which is described by a separate term and often has a story or belief involved in it. Each jewellery has its own religious and festival importance. Jewellery is called *Tasang* in Apatani language.

### **Different Types of Beads Used in Jewellery**

*Bimpu* - '*Bimpu*' is a generic term for medium-sized glass beads. The shapes vary from cylindrical to roundish. They are differentiated mainly on the basis of their hues. The shapes of *Bimpu* varies in its size and shape. They are distinguished mainly on the basis of their colour. There are mainly four categories of *bimpu*. They are *lanchan bimpu* : slightly transparent red glass bead *ji bimpu* : slightly transparent dark blue glass bead. *jiji bimpu* : slightly transparent green glass bead *horpu bimpu* : transparent white glass bead (Figure 3-5).

*Bimpu ami* is a special type of glass beads black base colour with white dots, originated from Venice around 19th century. Apatani call it as "*eyed bimpus*". It is usually known as 'skunk beads'(Figure 6).

*Bimpu tasan* is a necklace composed of as many as 20 types of beads displayed on a dozen or so strands (Figure 7). Generally it has 8 or 10 strands. While wearing this, the

black coloured beads should come on the wearer's left side. Lanchan Tasang is layered red beaded necklace (Figure 8).

*Tado* are small, cylindrical dense yellow beads used to make necklaces known as *Tado Tasan*. *Tado* has two shades light yellow and dark yellow. *Akho Tado* is the lighter shade and *Aper Tado* is the darker shade. It has generally ten layers (Figure 9-10).



Figure 3: *Lanchan Bimpu*



Figure 4: *Jiji Bimpu & Ji Bimpu*

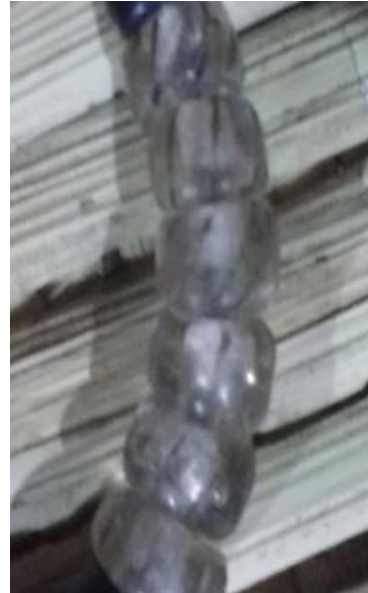


Figure 5: *Horpu Bimpu*



Figure 6: *Bimpu Ami*



Figure 7: *Bimpu Tasan*



Figure 8: *Lanchan Tasan*

*Nyime perun* literally means 'Tibetan soja bean'. It is a small, cylindrical dark blue bead. It is originated from Tibet. It is used to make necklaces known as *nyime tasan* or *ji tasan*, consisting of several strands of those dark blue beads decorated with yellow and red beads (Figure 11).

*Lebu ralin*, is simply a glass beads of bright red colour which is used to decorate *ji tasan* necklaces at certain intervals. Apatani women using it as daily wear (Figure 12).

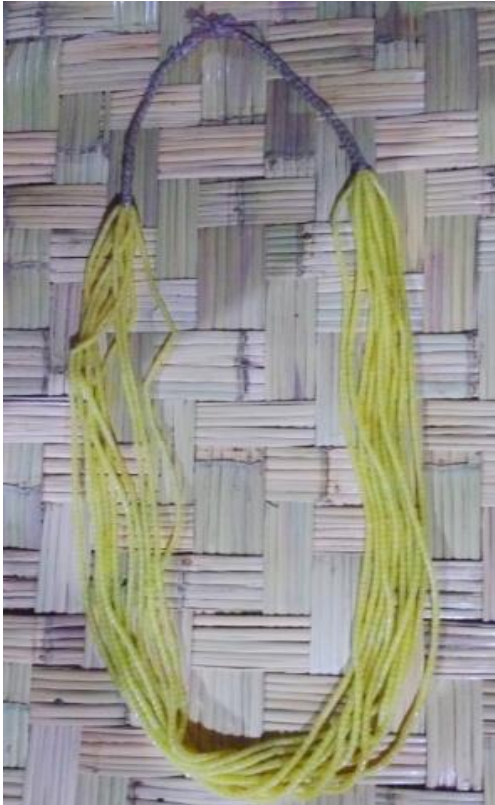


Figure 9: Akhos Tado



Figure 10: Aperos Tado



Figure 11: Nyime Tasan or Ji Tasan



Figure 12: Lebu Ralin



*Khiinii miru* is a circular black and white banded agate. It is believed that this beads were from the well known mines of King Solomon. Later this type of stone is commonly known as 'Sulemani agate', or 'Solomon agate'. It is historically from Western Asia and may date back as far as 2500 BC. According to 'Bhaisajyaguru', "the Medicine Buddha", this stone has some magical power and medicinal properties (Figure 13).

*Bukhe Ripo* are very unique beads worn by women, either combined with glass or carnelian beads or the whole necklace made from the same stones. It is cylindrical in shape mainly oblong or cylindrical in shape and pierced lengthwise. The beads are engraved with geometrical patterns like circles, ovals, squares, zig zags and lines etc. Colours range from brown to black (Figure 14).

The origins of these peculiar beads were produced by Persians on Mesopotamian and Indus Valley Civilizations era between 2700 BC to 1000 BC. They are two types of agates natural and fossil agates. A natural agate are black and browns with white banding and fossil agate from terrified wood, showing different shades of brown, some with different colour variations. The motifs were created by carved using hand.

Today, the carved stones were found in Tibetan area. So it is known as "Tibetan agate beads". Through barter exchange system it was obtained by many inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh. A very rich symbolism is also associated with these stones, mainly based on the number carved designs or motifs on it.



Figure 13: *Khiinii Miru*



Figure 14: *Bukhe Ripo*



Figure 15: *Piifa Papu*

The Tibetans and Monpa Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh considered it as precious stone and it will protect people from detrimental situations, bring good luck and some medicinal values also. So that they are wearing one or two beads around their neck. The value of the bead is determined by the number of eye motifs carved on it. The stone with odd number of eyes like 9 and 13 is considered as most valued one.

*Piifa papu*, also known as 'Peking glass'. These are are large round beads of greenish colour. Many of them originate from Poshan in North eastern China and found in various shades of green, from dark green to whitish green). They also do not normally combine *Piifa papu* with other beads on necklaces (Figure 15).

*Page* beads have a very typical shape. Its shape is more like the shape of pumpkin. They are glass paste beads of various hues like blue green and yellow. It is originated from North China. From the Tang dynasty onwards, China has acquired a worldwide

reputation and a leading influence on the art of glass beads making. The Chinese used lead-barium formula which makes it more brilliant, easier to cut and easier to re melt and also softer and heavier.

The Taniis use *page* beads for making various necklaces, mixed together with other beads for numerous layers. A single strand bead of light-blue colour is known as *sampyu page*. It is one of the favourite necklaces of Apatani.

The *page* beads are categorised based on its colour and size different types of *page* beads are:

- santer page* : light blue/turquoise, big
- sampyu page* : light blue/turquoise/emerald green, small
- saro page* : dark or light blue, slightly transparent/medium size
- sankhe page* : blue or dark blue, slightly transparent, small
- horpu page* : crystal-like, transparent, medium size
- bilun page* : terracotta, brownish yellow, slightly transparent, medium size
- pike page* : yellowish-brown, brownish, slightly transparent, medium size
- halan page* : light blue, small (Figures 16-22).



Figure 16: Santer Page

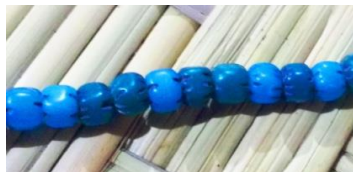


Figure 17: Sampyu Page



Figure 18: Saro Page



Figure 19: Sankhe Page



Figure 20: Horpu Page



Figure 21: Bilun & Pike pages



Figure 22: halan page



Figure 23: santer



Figure 24: sampyu

*Tasan* is a rounded blue bead. The Taniis use turquoise-blue round, cylindrical beads to make large necklaces worn by women known as *santer tasan*, *sampyu tasan* and *Pike tasan*. For the ritual occasions it is compulsory to wear *Bimpu Tasang* and *Sampyu Tasang* Together. *Santer* is a larger light blue bead, *sambyu* is a medium size blue beads and *Pike tasan* is a transparent glass bead of brownish yellow colour. These were imported from Tibet and very popular among the Tibetans as among most indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh (Figure 23-27).



Figure 25: *Sampu Tasan*



Figure 26: *Santer Tasan*



Figure 27: *Pikey Tasan*

*Lebu* is a carnelian and agate beads mostly hexagonal and cylindrical in shape. The single raw long necklace with *lebu* is called *lebu Tasan*. The biggest pair are situated at the lower position. Due to iron oxide contained in the stones it has very distinctive colour of reddish orange shade. Some beads are transparent also. The *lebu* beads are:

- Gara or Garya* : short cylindrical non-faceted carnelian or agate bead. Mostly used as spacers between *lebu* beads.
- Yasi lebu* : transparent carnelian or agate bead of off white or beige colour.
- Rinyo lebu* : diamond shape brownish bead, usually positioned towards the middle section of the row (Figure 28-32).
- Riite* : a short necklace of white beads worn by children (Figure 33).



Figure 28: *Lebu*



Figure 29: *Gara or Garya*



Figure 30: *Yasi Lobo*

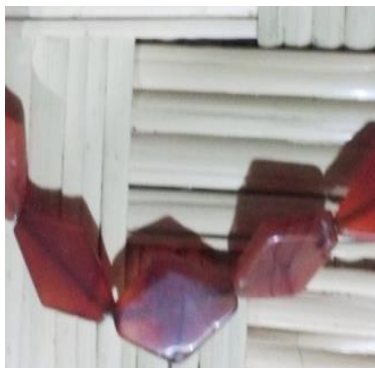


Figure 31: *Rinyo Lebu*



Figure 32: *Lebu Tasan*



Figure 33: *Riite*

*Sampu* is a general term for shell beads, also inaccurately called "conch shell" beads. *Sampu tasan* is a single strand necklace consists of 70 to 80 of *sampu* beads. The shell beads seem to have reached the Subansiri area via Tibet. The Taniis use the shell only as a bead for necklace fasteners, not as ritual objects as in Tibet. It is the only shell used by them as body ornament. Three different types of *sampu* are:

*Sampu/sampo* - These are large, chunky disk-shaped white beads which make up the middle and lower section of the necklace. The *sampu tasan* necklace has teeth beads called *Patii Ahi* (Figure 34-35). *Patii* means tiger and *Ayi* means teeth. In the olden days it was original tiger teeth, now it is made artificially.

*Sanje sampu* : These are usually flatter, smaller and more cylindrical in shape. They are situated at the upper section of the necklace.

*Hiiku* : The biggest and spiral shaped valuable ornaments of Taniis. One single bead can cost upto Rs.15000-20000. It is normally found by pairs, they are found in the lowermost section of the *sampu tasan* (Figure 36).



Figure 34: *SampuTasan*



Figure 35: *Patii Ahi*



Figure 36: *Hiiku*



Figure 37: *Liring*



Figure 38: *Liring (old)*



Figure 39: *Mich Tasan*



Figure 40: *Akhor Tasan*

*Liring* is a single strand necklace worn by women. *Liring* means copper. It is a copper jewellery, it is using as single piece, no other jewellery are wearing with *Liring*. While wearing *Lring* the blue beads should come on wearer's left side. *Mich Tasan* is copper

jewellery worn by women in the olden days. *Akhor Tasan* is a beaded jewellery worn by women (Figure 37-40).

### Fasteners

*Sango Tape* is shell button for fastening the necklace at the nape of the neck. They are circular, square or rectangle in shape. Square fasteners have rounded corners. *Sampo tasan* is a long rectangle shaped shell using for fastening (Figure 41).



Figure 41: *Sango Tape*



Figure 42: *Tai Kobyang*



Figure 43: *Ami Kobyan*



Figure 44: *Papu Kobyang*



Figure 45: *Kan Kobyang*



Figure 46: *Piillo Kobyang*



Figure 47: *Ropu Kobyang*



Figure 48: *Cop Kobyang*



Figure 49: *Gokhe*



Figure 50: *Kob Kobyang*



Figure 51: *Kapun Kobyang*



Figure 52: *Kopii Kobyang*

### Bangles

Apatani men and women using heavy metal and brass bangles in their festive occasions. *Kobyan* is a ceremonial brass bangle worn by Apatani women. These ornaments were worn during special occasions like festival of *Muruňg*, *Subu* or *Myoko*.

There are different varieties of *kobyan* worn by women. They are *Tai Kobyang*, *Ami Kobyan*, *Papu Kobyang*, *Kan Kobyan*, *Pullo Kobyang*, *Cop Kobyang*, *Gokhe Kobyan*, *Kob Kobyang*, *Kapun Kobyang*, *Kopii Kobyang*, *Kori kobyang*, *Arii Kobyang*, *Pulu konyang* etc. *Tapi Kobyang* – It is a wristlet made of plaited bamboo worn by young Apatani girls (Figure 42 - 56).



Figure 53: *Kori kobyang*



Figure 54: *Arii Kobyang*



Figure 55: *Pulu Konyang*



Figure 56: *Tapi Kobyang*



Figure 57: *Yaru Lachang*



Figure 58: *Ruti Hiiran*



Figure 59: *Larin*

## Earrings

- Yaru Lachang* : It is an earlobe ring of intricately plaited cane. Both men and women wear earrings as a decorative piece.
- Ruti Hiiran* : It is a metallic earloop which is an exotic piece of adornment for an Apatani women.
- Larin* : It is an earring. It is worn by priest during religious and rituals. It was common till twenty years back women from rich families with *larin* hanging from their ears (Plate 57-59).

Figure 60 shows the Apatani woman with tradotopnal jewelleryes in the festive occasion. Figure 61 shows the Apatani priest in his traditonal ornaments in the religious rituals.



Figure 60: Apatani women in her traditional jewelleryes



Figure 61: Apatani priest in his traditional attire



## **The Present Scenario**

There is another serious problem added to it which is the problems of imitation of traditional ornaments which are manufactured and made available in the market. Thus the indigenous flavour of these ornaments is lost. The historical processes of making these tribal ornaments are nowhere to be found as they were imported from other neighbouring countries. But in today's modernised era, all the ornaments are made through machines losing the antique touch to them. However, the tribal people still try to maintain that rustiness by burying the ornaments under the soil or make a person wear it on a regular basis to make it look ancient.

These tribal people used to exchange ornaments with animals and eatable items and vice versa. It seems from research that the cost of domestic animals was higher than that of ornaments and eatable items. But today the cost of ornaments is much higher than that of animals. The sudden increase of ornaments has alienated the majority of the people from their own traditional ornaments and only a few Apatanis who are well off have control over them.

## **Conclusion**

Jewellery shows a person's wealth and also signifies a person's financial status since antiquity. Not just wealth but ornaments are also worn for beautification as they are not just attractive but also hold their own distinct rusty and earthly charm to them. During a festival, the amount of *tasang* and ornamentation on an Apatani person's body symbolizes their pride as a tribal. In early ages a person's economic background was not judged by the amount of money he had, instead the society considered a person with lots of domestic animals and ornaments as a rich person. They believe that their jewellery provides them physical and spiritual protection. Amulets and many other ornaments are thought to have mystical powers that can increase fertility, femininity, masculinity, bravery, wisdom, vitality, health, crops etc.

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