



Arunachal Tattoo

PARUL DUTTA

Tattooing is a noticeable institution among the Aka of Kameng the Nisi (Dafila) and the Apatani of Subansiri, the Tangsa, the Nocte and the Wanchoo of Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh.

Among the Aka, girls are tattooed generally at the age of ten years or so, for happy and prosperous life after death, they say. Three straight lines are drawn on the chin and one from the forehead at the parting of the hair to the lip of the nose. Skin is punctured along these lines with thorns called *khus kaba*. The perforations are smeared with the sap extracted from the green leaves of barley diluted with water. It is believed it helps in healing. It leaves a green tinge on the scars. The wounds heal at about eight days. After the operation girls abstain from fish and meat till the first birth. There is no special operator for tattooing. Any woman who has acquired it of her own or volunteers for it, does it.

Though prevalent, tattooing is not a social compulsion with the Nisi. When done, it is on the cheeks and the chin. On the cheek, straight lines start from

the two corners of the lip and slant towards the cheek bone. The tattoo on the chin is for the women. It has three straight lines starting from a point just below the lower lip and going down at about a 45° angle between the two exterior lines and the third bisecting it in between—all terminating at the base of the chin.

Tattoo is considered a property which cannot be stolen in this world. The Nisis have specialists among them. They are paid in cash or kind; the rate is five Tibetan beads for operation on boys and not less than 10 on girls. The design is first marked in charcoal. The person to be tattooed sits with the face turned upwards. The implement is a thorn of the *Tangyat* creeper fixed on a split bamboo. With this the operator pierces the skin along the charcoal marks. Immediately afterwards, the sap of a wild plant is applied to the wounds. It is

repeated after three days. The scars take fifteen to twenty days to heal and leave permanent black marks behind.

The Apatani society enjoins that tattoo is a must although the younger generations now a days tend to disregard it. The marks locally known as *ankhidu*, are drawn on the forehead, the nose and the chin. The mark on the forehead and the nose, called *tere terpa*, is for the woman only and is a straight line about a quarter inch thick which starts from the top of the forehead and runs down to the tip of the nose along the ridge. On the chin it is known as *gam terp* and is for both the sexes. The design is again in straight lines, one vertical for the man and four or five for the woman.

The usual age for the operation is three to four year. The process is the same as with the Nisi and equally painful. The thorn here is *tare*. The design is drawn in charcoal and deep incisions are made on them with the thorn. The wounds are allowed to bleed for some time when a paste of mustard oil and soot scraped from the bottom of cooking pots is rubbed vigorously into them. This paste is called *putchan*. Fifteen to twenty days heal the wounds and the black of the soot remains permanently fixed.

Though an obligatory social custom,

no ceremonial ritual is performed on the occasion.

The Tangsa, like the Nisi, have tattoo but not as a compulsory social practice. During tours in the Tangsa area in the year 1956-59, I came across a few Tangsa men with tattoo marks on the forehands. I was told that they have adapted it during the World War II from soldiers who passed through their area. This fashion seems to have taken root and young people sometimes get their arms tattooed. But for this they have to engage operators from across the Patkoi.

Just the contrary is the case with the Wancho, their neighbours. Apart from being a most admired and cherished bodily decoration, tattoo with them is of important social significance. Tattoo marks indicate the stages in a woman's life and the social status and achievements of a man. The repertoire of designs is consequently rich and varied. A member of the family of a chief, for instance, flaunts elaborate intricate patterns while a commoner has to be contented with the simplest possible.

The art is known as *hu* or *chu*. It is a general term; marks in different parts of the body have special names: on the face, it is called *thun hu*; on the chest, *kha hu*; on the neck, *ding hu* or *chakhu*

hu; on the back *tok hu*; on the navel, *chung hu* or *chum hu*; on the thigh *betang hu*; and on the calf of the leg *chichin hu*. The men tattoo the face, the neck, the chest and the calf; the women the chest, the arms, the back, the navel, the thigh and the calf. Tattoo on the face is a male prerogative and is done mostly in broad spectacular designs (fig. 1) Stylized human figure is the usual motif in the chest for man. The minimum number of the figure is two and the maximum, as many as the operator can squeeze in (fig 2). Diamonds in thick double lines arranged in the form of the neck ornament used by them are for the neck and the back (fig3) The arms have zigzag lines forming a band around them.

A woman gets tattooed four times in her life. The first is *chun su* at the navel. It is done at the age of six to seven years at the time of betrothal or just before it. The design is of two lines crossing at right angles at the navel. Sometimes there are three lines also. In the case of a chief's daughters, lines in zigzag are added at the ends of the lines (fig. 5 A, B, C.)

With the attainment of puberty the calf of the leg has to be tattooed with line drawn around and zigzag or diamond design over the tibia. Girls belonging to a chief's family have the painful pri-

vilege of additional and more elaborate designs. (Fig. 6) Formal betrothal precedes this operation, After it the girl may go about freely with the boy to whom she has been engaged. A nominal nuptial also is performed before it. After the second tattooing has been done, a boy intending to marry the girl proposes to her parents. He sacrifices a pig, prepares rice-beer and sends these to the girl's house along with a basket of cooked rice. The girl's parents throw a feast for the parents of the boy. The clan members also are invited to it. The tattooing is done after the feast. It is called *nausa chuchu* and the ceremony *chuchu nyak*.

The third tattooing is done in the thigh above the knee after which a girl goes to live with her husband. In some villages it is performed when the girl first conceives. The design is very simple: parallel lines running up from the knee (fig7). Chief's daughters have eight additional small dots arranged in two rows on the top of the lines on the right thigh. (fig. 8). This is a big occasion and is celebrated with pork, rice and beer. One leg of the pig goes to the *morung* to which the girls belong. All the clan and *morung* members are invited to it. The youngman concentrate on the beer while the old partake of all the items of the menu. This tattoo solemnizes consummation of

marriage. After it the girl starts living with the boy as his wife. This third tattoo is called *jaku su*.

The fourth and the last tattooing is on the chest in the husband's house in the seventh month of pregnancy or after the birth of the first child. The design is an M in three lines sprawling over the breasts (Fig. 9). Girls of the chiefs' families get their forearms also tattooed. The design is complicated :- one row of diamonds surmounted by several zigzags with three lines running up towards the back over the scapula (Fig. 10) It is simple for the commoner (Wangsu) Girls. (Fig. 11). The operation is preceded by a big feast in boy's house. The boy presents ten chickens and three spears to his parents-in-law. These presents are know as *nausa-chum*.

Male tattoo is a more serious business. It is related to war and only those who could establish their bravery by taking trophies of heads and bringing them to the villages for prosperity could aspire to it. Along with it, they went up in spe-

cial estimation and girls would give their highest choice to those with these insignia of heroism. The days of inter tribal wars are no more but still the social value of the tattoo associated with it lingers. So to win the decoration mock battles are staged. But ideas are changing and the art and love of it, robbed of the basic source of inspiration is also sure to die out.

The importance of tattooing in the society naturally gave rise to specialists. Every village has its specialists who are as a rule women. Before undertaking the operation, the specialists take a special diet of rice and pickle of bamboo shoots. They observe genna for one day and wear leaves of wild plant called *chunian* on the ear. They get one leg of sacrificed pig, one basket of cooked rice and four tubes of bamboo beer as their fee at the second tattooing of the girl. At the third tattooing they receive all these three times and one metal armband, *chukamse*, in addition. At the 4th she is remunerated as at the second.

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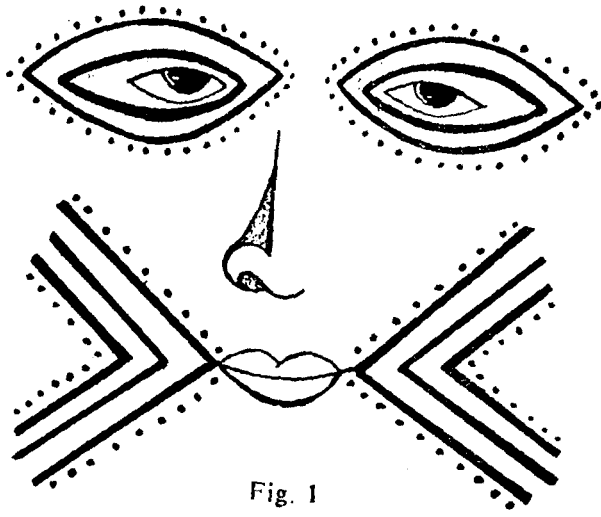


Fig. 1

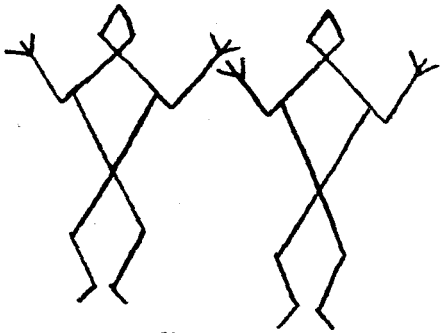


Fig. 2

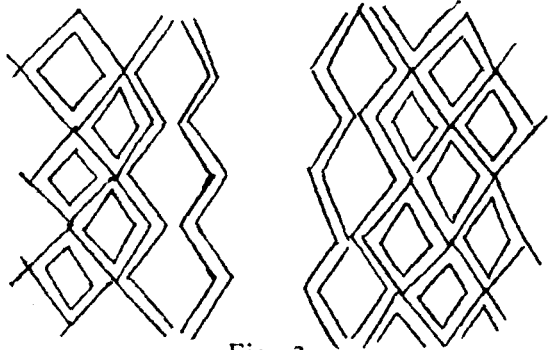


Fig. 3

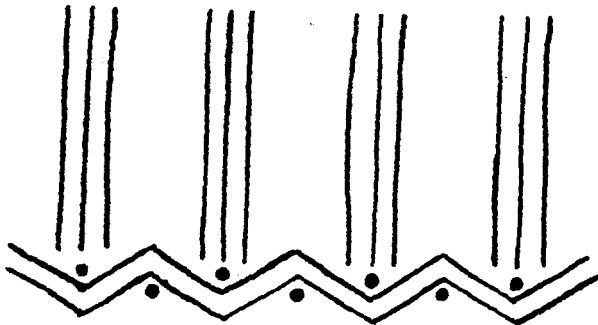
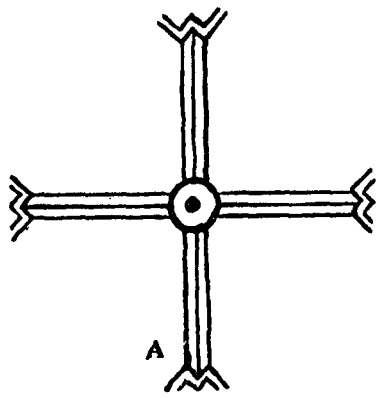
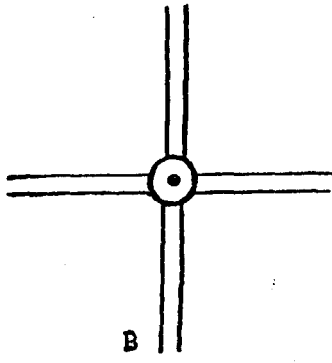


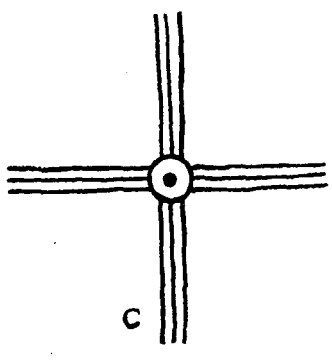
Fig. 4
ARUNACHAL TATTOO



A



B



C

Fig. 5

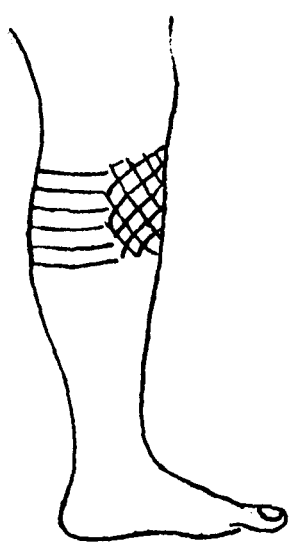


Fig. 7

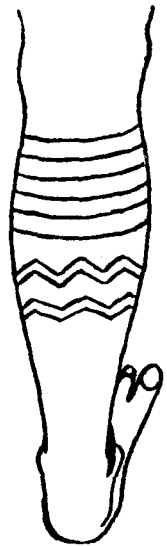
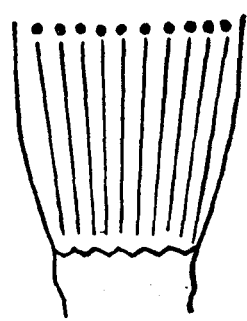
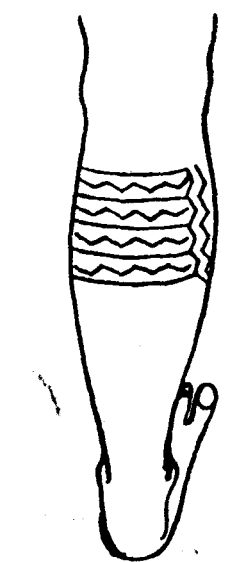
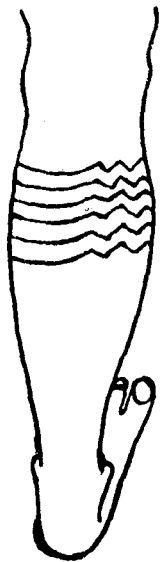


Fig. 6



LEFT THIGH

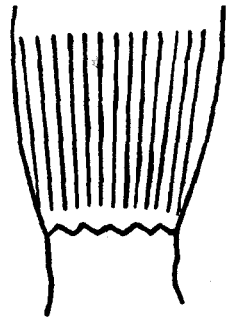
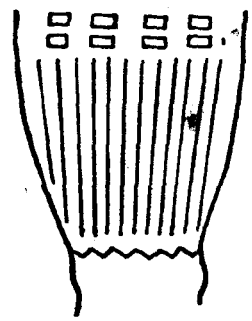


Fig. 8



RIGHT THIGH

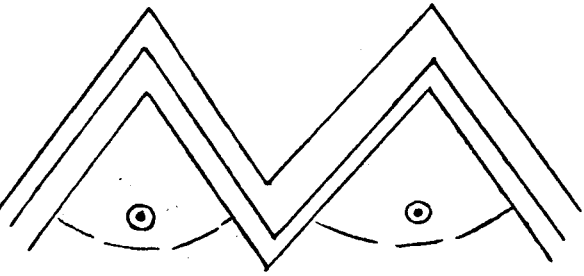


Fig. 9 (b)

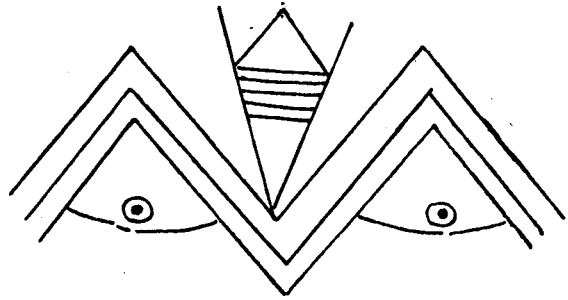


Fig. 9 (a)

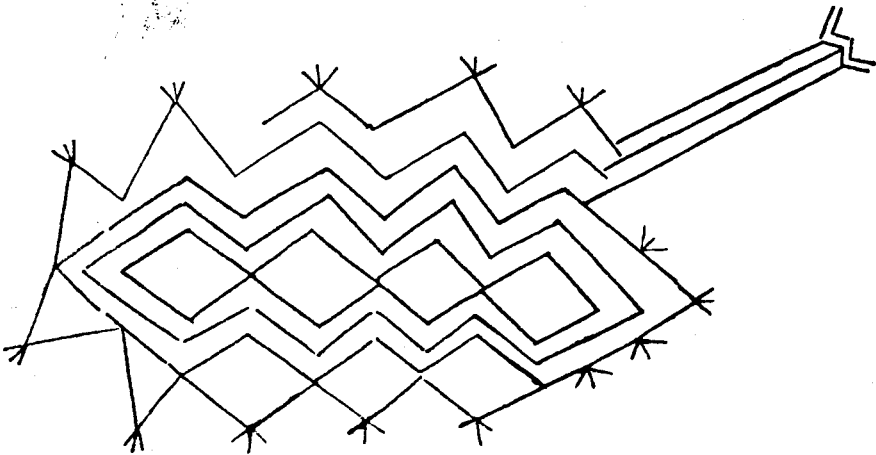


Fig. 10

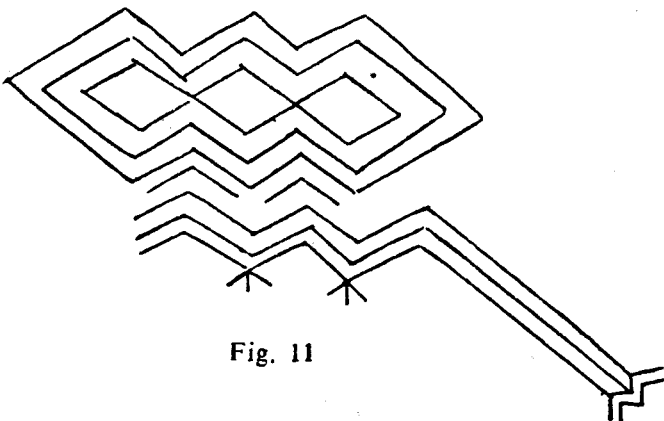


Fig. 11

Indigenous Transport System In Arunachal Pradesh



A. K. DAS

Transport in Arunachal Pradesh poses problems which have taxed even modern technology, So it is easily appreciable that the systems evolved locally have remained at that stage where power and skill of the muscle have played the fundamental role. Yet it is a marvel that without any metal and only with cane, bamboo and animal traction available only in a few fringe areas, how the people have displayed considerable inventive power to evolve very efficient systems.

The traditional transport system may be considered under (1) Roads and communication (2) Transportation of goods and (3) Mode of travelling.

(1) Roads and Communications :—

(a) Tracks : Though tribal communities in the areas lived in self-contained village independent of each other, yet there were regular movements up and down for trade.

There have been from the earliest past well established routes for this. The early explorers made use of these. The general direction of these routes were north and south linking the village to the sources of supply and markets' for the local produce in Tibet and plains of Assam. In the district of Tirap only the routes ran east and west to Burma and India. Usually they ran along the rivers—moving away from them and passing over cliffs, only when the banks were too steep for them. When even that was not possible they ran through the beds of the rivers — where shallow and sometimes miles of water had to be waded, Ups and downs across the hillocks frequently extremely stiff characterized gradient shorter cuts being preferred to longer alignment with easier going. The Mishmi tracks are still noted for such steep climbs and descents. As villages were all perched on high hill tops or slopes, approaches to them meant fatiguing climbing.