

# Weaving: The Lost Memoirs of a Civilisation

Akuma Umpo

## Abstract

This empirical study investigates the preservation of cultural memoirs within the Idu Mishmi civilisation of Arunachal Pradesh, positing that the survival of a civilisation is intrinsically linked to the continuity of its cultural core. Against the backdrop of a "global village" paradigm that threatens indigenous distinctiveness, this research utilises snowball sampling to survey 69 individuals across the Lohit, Lower, and Upper Dibang Valley districts regarding the role of traditional weaving in sustaining cultural identity. The findings reveal a consensus among 94.2% of respondents that weaving is fundamental to preserving cultural ties. However, the data indicates a significant shift in practice: while specific artefacts such as the *Thuway* (female attire) remain culturally dominant—identified by 59.4% as the most representative clothing—the *Laway* (male attire) is viewed by an equal percentage as the most dwindling tradition. Furthermore, despite the community's rich repository of functional patterns like the *Atondray* (war coat), 91.3% of respondents now restrict traditional attire exclusively to festival usage. The paper concludes that while women play a pivotal, labor-intensive role in anchoring these traditions, the preservation of Idu Mishmi culture is increasingly confined to ceremonial rather than daily existence.

**Keywords:** Idu Mishmi, Global Village, Indigenous Weaving, Cultural Preservation, Arunachal Pradesh.

## The tectonic shift

The culture represents the core of any civilisation and therefore when the culture dies, the civilisation dwindles away to extinction. The preservation of culture therefore represents the epitome of any history. In any given society, there is a desire that their practices be carried on for eternity. However, civilisations die out. If not fast, slowly. For, with the changing times, the practices change; what was accustomed practice may not be so forever.

The generations today are going through a process of dramatic shift in environmental paradigm. A time when one is often glued to the screen, where the whole world has become one big village connected in time and space, absorbing and emulating the other, the old practices were meeting a certainty of frequent turmoil. The tremors of the plutonic shift are being felt in the small community of Idu Mishmi, a society of closely knit but sparsely accommodated kinds in a couple of districts of Arunachal Pradesh.

## Purposive Proposition

The present paper is not an endeavour to elaborate on the trends around the global village and its effects on the tiny population of the Idu Mishmi. Rather, the effort of the researcher herein is to understand the varieties among the patterns in the nature of weaving clothings or artefacts that have been in the community and its usage in terms of preservative longevity of the cultural memoir. Therefore, the present paper tries to address as to how the effort of many, especially the women in the community, has played a dominant role in preserving the little community's effort to remain afloat in preserving its cultural ties.

The researcher has used snowball sampling in order to receive the inputs for the questionnaire set for the people belonging to the said community. The sampling universe was restricted to the people of three

districts of Arunachal Pradesh viz., Lohit, Lower Dibang Valley, and Upper Dibang Valley. The present research therefore is an empirical study.

## Affluent Society

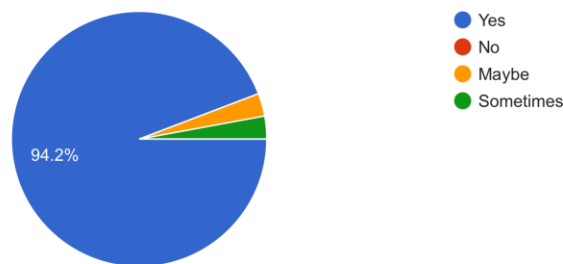
One can hold an opinion that the Idu Mishmi community is a very affluent society in terms of patterns existing in relation to clothing. There are different clothes for instance, for priests, for women, for war, for bags, for caps, for machetes, and so on and so forth. Such culturally distinctive patterns are enviable.

What one wears during the times of war is known as *Atondray*. It typically represents a clothing fabric which is made of a thicker tone. Thus, it does seem that the primary idea behind the same was to restrict the dangerous weapons piercing through the body. Hence, the fabric represents a hard shell, unlike other clothes which are made of more delicate fabrics. Whereas, *Anatubu* is a clothing worn both by the male and female sections of society. It resembles the clothing worn by the Tibetans.

## The Perspective

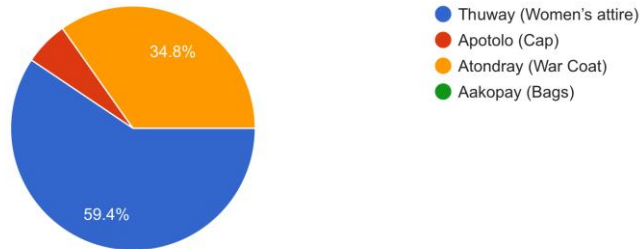
In order to have an insight into the minds of the youngsters, a survey was conducted amongst the sample size aforementioned herein. The sample size was restricted to merely sixty-nine people cutting across all differences. The first question that was posed was to understand as to whether, in the understanding of the participants, weaving played a fundamental role in the preservation of the cultural ethos. Ninety-four percent of the participants responded positively. Thus, it can be positively stated that the women play a very significant role in the preservation of the traditional life, as they are the most predominant contributors to the clothes woven and worn by the society at large.

Does weaving help our community in preserving its cultural ties?  
69 responses



The second question that was posed was to understand as to in the view of the respondents which of the mentioned items were most representative of their custom. The researcher does not mention all the rich patterns that could have been enlisted. The main idea behind the researcher's endeavour was to find out, of the enlisted items, which was most closely related to the participants' idea of their rich culture. The researcher finds that fifty-nine percent of the respondents were of the belief that the *Thuway* represented the closest clothing reminding of one's culture. *Thuway* is the cloth adorned by the females of the Idu Mishmi society.

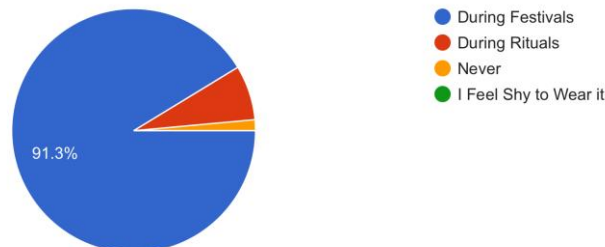
Which is most prominent clothing that reminds of your rich culture?  
69 responses



On the other hand, fifty-nine percent of the population were of the belief that *Laway*, a clothing adorned by the male section, was the most dwindling clothing amongst the enlisted clothings or practices. True to the reflection of the mass survey, one can find that *Laway* as a traditional clothing is hardly worn. Only a very limited numbers of people wear it. Such few numbers are predominantly the senior citizens of the society.

One major drawback for the society that the researcher could find in the response provided by the participants was that ninety-one percent of them were of the view that they wore community-based clothings during the festivals. And thus, extremely limited numbers of people wore the traditional attires. Hence, apart from festivities, the traditional clothing would be rarely seen amongst the youngsters of the society.

How often do you wear your community clothings?  
69 responses



### Concluding Remarks

The researcher finds from his research that the women sections of the community have contributed significantly to the preservation of the traditional notions. This is so particularly because the weaving is a female-dominated sector. Much of the clothings are woven by the female sections after much tiresome endurance. However, sadly the research can also conclude that the traditional weavings are mostly confined to the festivals. Much of the attires therefore have become subject to special ceremonial occasions.

The fewer occasions that the traditional clothing is subject, the lesser number of their being woven. And as a result, the females who are in the business of making local attires would have to take some other profession. Further, one finds that due to very limited numbers of weaving of the local attires, there is exorbitant pricing of the local attires. The fewer occasions of clothing being worn, is also a resentful representation of the society at the risk of dwindling away to extinction.

## References

1. **Baruah, T. K. M.** (1960). *The Idu Mishmi*. Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. **Bhattacharjee, T.** (1983). *Idus of Mathu and Dri Valley*. Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh.
3. **Cooper, T. T.** (1873). *The Mishmee Hills*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
4. **Dalton, E. T.** (1872). *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.
5. **Elwin, V.** (1988). *The Art of the North-East Frontier of India*. Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh.