

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANU MALHOTRA



# SOUL SURVIVORS

APA TANI | KONYAK | TIBETAN NOMADS

*I dedicate this book to the Apa Tani, Konyaks and Tibetans.*

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*For Priyanka, Arya, Kabir, Nikhil and my other nieces and nephews – Priti,  
Niti, Arman, Viraj, Vedika, Ishaan, Himani, Ananya, Anjali, Aliya,  
Sofiya and Shahid – to inspire them to “journey.”*

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# FOREWORD

by KISHORE SINGH

ART CRITIC AND WRITER



Kishore Singh

I'M AMUSED AT THE IDEA OF ANU MALHOTRA as a portrait photographer. She's a filmmaker, one I have worked with – romantic, sentimental, shrill (uh-oh!), demanding, affectionate, but the idea of her taking pictures is absurd – she doesn't have the personality for it: she's a changeling, impetuous, impatient, tyrannical. Chimera-like, she can morph in different places, demand different things, fling her temper like a weapon, then murmur soft words like a salve. She's Durga in high season, creating and destroying schedules, multi-tasking, inhabiting a world inside and outside time, someone you fear as much as you revere, organised and disorganised, she's both myth and reality, a Kali on the highway, and goddesses in wrath don't pick up cameras and take pictures.

At least, not the kind I'm seeing: somewhat bewildered, somewhat bemused. Pictures that will haunt me long after I've gone home, portraits that will stay with me in my moments of silence and meditation, photographs



that have successfully glimpsed into the innermost intimacies after piercing through but retaining the outermost shells. Do they not say that photographers steal souls away?

I could – I will – describe the pictures, or at least some haunting, timeless images. People, yes – I will come back to that – but first, a hint of smoke wreathing around a pipe, a cockily perched hat, a modestly draped shawl...a gesture made timeless, a glance that is coy, a stance that is confident...little things that create a picture, a mood, an ambience.

But then, you're tempted to ask, how difficult is it to make a picture when you're photographing the exotic?

Stupid question.

So, let's start at the beginning.

Anu Malhotra is a filmmaker, she wields a mean camera, she's not above taking charge when the going gets tough, she can slay as much with her fury as with her fondness.

But this isn't about Anu, it's about her pictures.

I close my eyes and I think of the photographs I've seen – pictures that are in this book, pictures that are part of this exhibition – and here's what I recall. A crinkling of the eyes. Lips that are laughing. A child suckling at a mother's breast. A young lad looking like he owns the world. An old woman's skin parched into deep scars, like the fissured earth, that she wears like a trophy.

I see them in parts, and in the whole. A sky bleeding colour, a trail of clouds, a horizon, hills and huts – all of an insignificance. For all that matters is a fleeting

moment when her camera – one she's slung about her shoulder in the middle of a frantic film shoot, and which is an extension of her senses – has captured a meditative moment, a contended smile, an unconscious glance. A freeze frame that singularly, uniquely, captures an instant in time, a nano-second that is a flash reflection of a human being's entire life.

It ought to be impossible, you might argue. A life reduced to just a moment in time and place. But a photograph can do that in the right hands, in the right place, at the right time – a Shiva's eye that notices rather than scars, that records and reports rather than ruptures.

An Apa Tani woman sips her glass of tea, a long tattoo splitting her forehead, nose-blocks flaring her nostrils, part of a vanishing tribe, but it is not her endangered status that makes her unique but a frame as perfectly possible as the one in which another tribal walks through a picture, basket balanced on her head, conscious but oblivious of Anu's camera, part of her canvas and, for that moment, of her world. The content smoker, the carefree barter-trader, the worker in contrast to the gallant Galahad, enacting tribal rituals, a child in training, others at play, they are of a world at once familiar and alien, but exuding a human spirit that is no different whether in Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh, or in New Delhi – an exuberance of the human spirit that binds us all, but also individually identifies us.

The headhunter ought to be a scary reminder of times gone by – but isn't. This is the Konyak – fiercely tattooed face and hat with curving hornbills meant to terrify, but those times are past, making these pictures a body of work that is less narrative, more documentative in nature. Here is a tribe that is ancient, with practices that remain relevant in a fading page of history, where



Anu Malhotra with Apa Tani Woman  
Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000



Anu Malhotra with Konyak Headhunters of yore  
Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001



Anu Malhotra and Crew with Konyak Men  
Wanching Village, Nagaland, 2001

changes are swift, but where cultural moorings and pride predominate. Spears and hornbills hats, necklaces festooned with skulls, part of an ancient cult but living in a world that has since embraced modernity, yet not split by the chasm, festooned in shawls and jackets loomed in the village, part of ritualistic orgies that celebrate tribe loyalties and living practices that seem at once ancient and contemporary, based not on ownership but sharing.

And somewhere in the Tibetan plateau, where the air is light enough to make you giddy, a people proud, beautiful, handsome beyond belief, rulers of their individual realms, their own monarchs, tribal yet cosmopolitan, tolerant of unfamiliar cultures and of strangers, confident beyond belief, shepherds and herders who need nothing more than the sky for a roof, the earth for a bed — how, then, did they learn to be so sophisticated?

Pictures, I ask Anu, taken over years? She chuckles.

Over months? Laughter.

Weeks? Days?

Not moments, she says, not seconds, these are photographs taken when there was no time, pictures taken beyond time.

I am disbelieving too, so it's okay for you to nod your head and say, these creative types, this is just how they say these things.

But what Anu explains is that she was not there, in Arunachal Pradesh and in Nagaland and in Tibet to take pictures, but as a filmmaker — directing, shooting, arguing, creating timelines, following and being tripped over by stories that might or might not turn out to be

episodic. But she also does what no one else — and there are other filmmakers, other photographers, who come to these remote parts — cares to do. She makes friends. She talks to these people as though they are her allies, she eats with the tribes, she lives amidst them, she is respectful of the elders and one with the youngsters, she is obsequious but also detached, and she romances them all personally while she flirts with them through her camera.

It is for this reason that Anu's camera isn't voyeuristic. But it is penetrative, diligent, mischievous. It is frank and opinionated. It cajoles and seduces. It is both conscious and unconscious, but never self-conscious.

That's because her photography — yes, even her portrait photography — is spontaneous, a consequence of her work as a documentary filmmaker.

Directing, scripting, setting up scenes, shouting directions, cajoling, pleading, making things happen, she will pick up her camera when the right person walks into the frame, when the light turns perfect, when there is a contemplative smile, a glint in the eye, a swagger, a stance, and with a whirr of the camera she has captured a portrait of a person or a people who are an endangered species, fast disappearing off the map, lost tribes giving up their native sophistication for urban deception, sacrificing a way rooted in tradition for opportunities in a modern world, kings being reduced to serfs, rulers to the ruled.

These are social consequences of a changing world, worth a book/song/film/lament, but in that instant when they become her subjects, they are all individual people — not just people with names and personalities, with homes and addresses, but people with a strong sense of the land, people with sang froid. And they make

good portraits because they are beyond guile and deception: they are what you see, not something posed, but something exposed. Anu's obtrusive presence but unobtrusive camera eludes their understanding of the world, and maskless, they parade before her lens as she captures their most private thoughts: the unstinted gaze, the demeanour and poise, the soft smile, the flash of anxiety, the ease of gratification — a hard life well lived.

In these portraits, several things come together. The exotic, true — it cannot be taken away, what we perceive as outlandish, or bizarre, but which is no more than the ordinary for them — but also a disappearing breed of people who will not long walk this planet, so few you can count them on your fingers, people who sport tattoos and wield spears, who might yet hunt their prey, whose clothes speak of a proximity to the land they call their home, whose nose blocks are a sign of beauty, who inspire admiration not fear. But to see in them just glimpses of a faraway land and a forgotten people would be to do them and Anu disservice. They may be confined to the farthest fringes of the land, but they are mostly Indians — and people — all.

For Anu, though, they are never just the subject of a photograph, whirr-clicked and forgotten. She may not have talked to them (though chances are, she has), she might not know their names (but check her shooting diary), she might never experience their lives (but she could tell you their life-stories), she might not have intended to have their portraits in an exhibition or a book (though they were always meant to be a part of her films), but in freezing them into frames and locating them in both history and geography, she has made them timeless.

This is not award photography. Her subjects did not sit for their portraits. There were no additional light

effects, no subterfuge, no enhancements for reasons of vanity: these are pictures impulsively taken on the spur of the moment of a people unaware that their innermost thoughts — and souls? — were about to be turned into icons, making the unfamiliar somewhat more familiar. They are far from the perfect frames, but each is complete in itself, made beautiful because of a soft shaft of light falling in a particular way, of a ruddy cheek matching the tone of the sky, of clothes elegantly worn, of an artlessness turned into high art.

But it is always the person or people at the centre of the picture, those on whom the camera is focused, who really make the portraits happen. Impetuous these images might be, infatuated even, but they combine a seriousness with a playfulness, a sense almost of jubilation and candour and delight, at the ease between the camera and the subject. They might document, but they also enchant; they might record, but they will remain forever ephemeral. For Anu's roving camera captures the spirit — difficult as it might be — and the image, but it does so lightly, with a nonchalance and a caress.

The camera is an interloper, but only for a moment. In the very next second, the magic might have gone, along with the perfect light, that wry turn of the lip, the twitch of the eyebrow, the spin of a prayer wheel, that whiff of smoke. But for now, there are these images — of a place not far away from us, for these are portraits of a people, a tribe, a region that is only a heartbeat removed from our realities.

In exposing that moment, Anu's camera allows us a glimpse into her world of sole survivors.

Or, maybe — just maybe — that should be Soul Survivors.



Anu Malhotra with Tibetan Man  
Ngamring, Tibet, 2002



Anu Malhotra



# PREFACE

by ANU MALHOTRA

FILMMAKER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

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## *The Peace of Wild Things*

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

Wendell Berry



Anu Malhotra

**E**VERY JOURNEY IS A SEARCH, A QUEST TO UNRAVEL THE SELF... My earliest memories of “journey” are embedded in my childhood, when my parents would pack up my brother and me in our tiny sky blue Fiat and set off. We travelled by road from Jorhat to Delhi, from Delhi to Srinagar, from Chennai to Bangalore, Mysore, Ooty and other travels by road. Those journeys took days, with leisurely stops at scenic areas to picnic or sightsee; we ate in dhabas and visited friends living in towns enroute.

I grew to relish such adventurous journeys, so when I had the opportunity to traipse again around India, doing my travel shows, ‘Namaste India’ and ‘Indian Holiday,’ in the 90s, I was ecstatic.

For me, the journey is the destination. Exploring lesser-known places and wilderness areas, interacting with unique cultures and experiencing our amazing living

traditions, was like time-travelling through “Incredible India!”

From tracking tigers and lions in the jungles of Kanha and Gir, scuba diving in Lakshadweep to motor-biking in the Himalayas; from smoking ceremonial opium and dancing with the Konyak headhunters, drinking rice beer with the Apa Tani to witnessing Shamans conducting divinations and exorcisms; it has been a wonderful and transformative journey. The diversity and paradoxes I have encountered across this amazing country still never fail to amaze me.

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*Their easy laughter and an eponymous lightness of being seemed a contrast to the stressed - out faces and cluttered lives in my cosmopolitan world.*

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What delighted me the most was the richness of communities that were yet to succumb to urbanisation. Even though they were not rich materially, the richness of spirit shone through their eyes. “Why are they so happy?” was the question I asked myself, over and over again, as I found this similarity all over the country. Their easy laughter and lightness of being seemed a contrast to the stressed-out faces and cluttered lives in my cosmopolitan world. I felt that I was discovering Cameronian Pandoras all over India! Thus began the unravelling of the urban myth that I had grown up in...

Post 2000, I focused on exploring some of India's indigenous cultures in the documentary format, which allowed me to spend longer periods filming, thereby giving me a deeper insight into my quest. I began with producing a series of seven documentaries, titled “Tribal Wisdom,” of which I personally directed two. I wanted to document, for posterity, some of our own indigenous cultures, as most had not been filmed, as well as to satisfy the adventuring itch of the explorer



Anu Malhotra  
Rohtang Pass, Himachal Pradesh, 1998



Anu Malhotra with a Nyibo (Shaman)  
Lempia Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000



Anu Malhotra with Konyak Children  
Wanching Village, Nagaland, 2001

within me! The weeks that I spent with the Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh and the Konyak of Nagaland are some of my most memorable and exciting travel adventures so far.

My first documentary, *The Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh*, was mostly filmed in the villages around Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh. I had a busy few weeks exploring the region, spending time with families in their bamboo huts and exploring villages, while documenting their customary way of life. I chatted with Ekha and his family around their hearth, trying to work in the field with his wife Mumpa, following Ekha for a hunt, witnessing a shaman sacrifice, a death ceremony, the tribal council and even a wedding... it was an incredible experience!

What fascinated me initially about the Apa Tani was the nose plugs that the older women wore. Later, I got used to them so much so that the younger women, though pretty, looked strange without them. To me, the women with nose plugs looked very distinctive. In fact, some women tried very hard to make me get my nose pierced and place the flat coin within the nostril: "You are quite attractive, but with nose plugs you will look ravishing," they would tease me.

The Apa Tani women, like most women in agrarian societies, have a very tough physical day, rising at dawn to begin with household work, then spending the entire day in the fields, and returning home at sunset to more chores. However, they are so relaxed when they work, singing, chatting, laughing and gossiping through it all. No stress! Their children are brought up to bear responsibility from a young age, looking after siblings, helping with household chores or gathering firewood. It was always a delight to witness the kids

at play, laughing in full *masti* while playing with their handmade toy carts.

The Apa Tani brought home the importance of leading a physically active and outdoorsy life. People were strong and healthy, even the oldest among them; and, city diseases like cancer and diabetes were rare. Dancing with them at a death ceremony, I learnt from the Apa Tani that a life well lived should be celebrated, not mourned. From their institution of the "buning," I realized the importance of how strong community bonds are important to keep us rooted and secure, and how a sense of belonging can enhance our wellbeing.

In 2001, a year later, I was back in the North-East. This time in Nagaland, to film with the Konyak. The Konyak were made famous as the "fierce headhunters" by Prof. Heimendorf in his book, *Naked Nagas*. He also talked about their practice of wearing only jewellery and no clothes, except for a loincloth. The practice of head-hunting, that is, taking heads off enemies, was fairly common in this area over a century ago. With modernity making inroads into their culture, the practice was completely aborted decades ago. "But you never know," Mr Shingwang, the Assistant District Commissioner, would tell me with a twinkle in his eye, which would send delicious shivers down my spine. I was ready for another adventure!

The basic lifestyle of the Konyak was much like the Apa Tani. However, their cultural manifestation revolved around their ancient belief in the concept of "fertility," which underlies most of the Konyak living traditions. During my stay, I was given a deeper understanding of their ancient headhunting practice and why it had enjoyed cultural acceptance for most of the tribe's his-

tory and how it formed the bedrock of the Konyak sense of self-belief.

The ancient Konyak traditions sensitised me to ways of marking identity that did not stem from material belongings. Once, the identities were etched on their very bodies; oral hygiene came from teeth blackened with soot, rites of passage like puberty and betrothal were marked by tattoos on the legs. Though these practices have been dropped for long, seeing the older men with tattoos on their chests, wearing goat's horn or leaves in their ears, or women smiling with soot black teeth was poignant. Now, I not only knew the origin and relevance of these practices in the old days, but also knew that I was probably meeting the last generation of a forgotten world.

This community taught me that everyone has a space in a harmonious society. The village elders were deeply respected by the youth for their experience and wisdom, which is put to good use in the Tribal Council. The spirit of community service was astounding; when a fire consumes a large part of a Konyak village, people from sister villages rush in with supplies and construction materials. In a matter of three days, they construct huts and rehabilitate 30 families. And all this was done voluntarily, and as a matter of duty, I observed in awe.

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*A line I kept using in my film script was “time slowed down to a leisurely pace of yesterday,” to give my viewers a sense of what the experience was for me.*

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A line I used in my film script was “time slowed down to the leisurely pace of yesterday,” to give my viewers a sense of what the experience was for me. Life in the Apa Tani and Konyak villages was unhurried and relaxed. People went about their tasks *aaram se*, with time to chat, rest and even stare – it brought back my



Anu Malhotra  
Chandratal Lake, Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, 1998



childhood memories of languid days where, unlike our frantic today, there was time to play, laze around, and just be; as also time to connect with nature and with each other. I realized, after weeks of filming outdoors all day, how my body loved being active and my senses delighted in the fresh air and vast green landscapes, the sun on skin, the silences, the bird calls, the easy ambience. The “lightness of being” was rejuvenating.

In 2002, my husband and I went for a three-week trip to Tibet with eleven others. Going to Mount Kailash had been our desire for very long and I was delighted to finally visit “Shangrila.” My photographs celebrate the unmistakable richness of this land and its people, enroute to the extraordinary journey through the Tibetan plateau to Mount Kailash.

and living in harmony with the environment were important in my unravelling. My photographs reflect my affection for these gracious people whose dignity and beauty I shall always cherish. To me, they are my Soul Survivors.

*It has been a decade since the three films, and as I look back and reflect upon that phase of my work in the context of the wider body of contemporary thought and publications about the North-East, I believe that my films and photographs are a part of a larger project: a project that explores, documents and preserves, in both archival and more living forms, the ways of life that are fast disappearing. Where few written and even fewer photographic/ film records exist, I have put together some. Where customs are opaque and self-contained, I have attempted a conversation, a glimpse, a point of entry. And finally, what unites the three sets of films and photographs, the*

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The energy of the vast expanses in Tibet was intoxicating. The adventure of traversing through magnificent landscapes, their silence and beauty made my spirit soar. Tibetan nomads also gave me a different insight into ownership and acquisition; they travel about freely, content with just “a bag of needments” but owning the infinite sky above and the vast land around.

The Tibetan nomads were fascinating in their dignity and sense of aliveness. I value the lessons and wisdom that I have acquired from these cultures. Some of these lessons, especially about the wisdom of being physically active, breathing clean air, being in nature, connecting to the natural rhythms of the earth and the seasons, eating a wholesome diet, inculcating moderate consumption, the sense of being a part of a community

*three journeys, is a realisation, uncanny and serendipitous, that the people talking through my camera are perhaps the last bearers and witnesses of their respective age-old customs. The land beneath their feet is transforming rapidly and irreversibly: they are, in more ways than one, the sole survivors.*

*Anu Malhotra*

ANU MALHOTRA, NEW DELHI, APRIL 2011



# SOUL SURVIVORS

“A CELEBRATION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT”

THE VISION

**S** OUL SURVIVORS IS A CELEBRATION: It is an appreciation of alternative wisdoms; of ways of life that stand in contrast to the urban mainstream; of customs and institutions that have remained valid over centuries and, of peoples that have intrigued and instructed hundreds of curious explorers over time.

Soul Survivors is an attempt: It seeks to relativise the value we attribute to some of our customs and material possessions and to encourage us to look deeper: both within ourselves and at our relationship with the cosmos around.

Soul Survivors is a record: It has documented in visual and written form, the customs, opinions, cuisines, costumes and quotidian rhythms of these peoples, both for those outside to whom their cultures have been lost for centuries and for their generations to come, and for those who are increasingly finding themselves in irretrievably altered surroundings.



## SOUL SURVIVORS IS A CONTRIBUTION TO:

- Heighten awareness about these three cultures and their wisdom traditions
- Provide support to organisations doing developmental work in these regions.
- Promote indigenous arts and crafts and offer “art with soul” for your homes!



# APA TANI

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OF ARUNACHAL



Apa Tani Nyibo (Shaman)  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000

# APA TANI

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## OF ARUNACHAL

*"There is a dreamtime,  
A land of fish and stars –  
It is from there  
That we have come  
To live on this earth."*

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ANCIENT TANI BELIEF





Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000





Children playing  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000



Sacrificial Mithun meat distribution  
Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000

Arunachal Pradesh, “the land of the dawn-lit mountains,” is one of the few unspoiled wildernesses in India. Bordering Bhutan, China and Myanmar, this scenically spectacular region is engulfed by subtropical rainforests and lush green valleys. The largest among the seven North-Eastern states in India, it is four times the size of Manipur, Mizoram, or Meghalaya, and twice as large as some European countries, including Switzerland, Belgium and Denmark. 26 tribes spread across 3,649 villages inhabit this verdant state. The central belt is home to several tribes collectively known as the Tani group, who claim common ancestry from a legendary forefather, Abo Tani, the first human being on earth. The Apa Tani are the tribes that are settled in seven villages on the plateau of the lower Subansiri region.

#### **I WALK AROUND RERU IN WONDER.**

The entire village is built mostly with bamboo and cane; long Apa Tani huts sit cheek by jowl on stilts with tiny balconies in front. Legang Techang, my local guide and interpreter tells me, “We are largely an agricultural community so our villages are built in tight clusters to preserve land for cultivation and forests.” In the interiors, the huts adjoin each other. This makes the villages susceptible to fire, which is a frequent hazard and lively fear.

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*We sit around the hearth chatting when Mumpa hands me another glass of rice beer, “Oh no, tastes like nail polish,” I think but graciously accept this most important tribal brew.*

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Legang’s friends Ekha and his wife Mumpa warmly welcome me into their hut with rice beer and rock salt. The interior of Ekha’s hut is very dark except for the glow of the distinctive Apa Tani hearth, which has a huge overhanging wooden drying rack stocked with firewood. We sit chatting around the hearth when Mumpa hands me another glass of rice beer.

Legang explains that the highly esteemed rice beer (also called *Opo*, *Apong*, and *Chang*) can be made of rice, millet, barley or tapioca, and its origin and use are closely associated with myth and ritual. "A house is considered lucky if its women make good rice beer, we use it freely while working in the fields, at festivals and ceremonies, so it is an important ingredient of our customary life," says Legang.

I notice that the walls of the hut are made of multiple layers of flattened bamboo mats. Ekha informs me that this ingenious bamboo architecture keeps these huts warm in the winter and cool in the summer; it also effectively keeps the rain out. Smoke wafts easily through the roof while driving out the damp of monsoon and the chill of winter.

Legang points to a long line of horns adorning one wall. "Those are horns of *mithuns*, our typical oxen which are sacrificed for various pujas, ceremonies and festivals. It's a sacred act for us and the horns symbolise the energy of fertility, which we like to display."

Next day, Ekha and Mumpa take me for a walk around the village. During the morning, the village wears a deserted air as most women are out working in the fields, except for those with infants, who are busy with household chores. The village elders are also active doing odd jobs during the day. Age may have weathered their faces but certainly not their spirit.

I notice that the older women are wearing nose plugs, flat coins placed within the nostrils, while most of the younger ones are not. Mumpa informs me that in the ancient days, the beautiful Apa Tani women would fall prey to neighbouring tribals and therefore nose plugs, called *yappin-hoollo*, were devised to disfigure them

and tattoos were put on their faces as marks of identity. However, in time, they became desired as marks of beauty. In the 1970s, the Tribal Council banned both the plugs and the tattoos. So, I realise that I am probably meeting the last generation of women with their distinctive nose plugs and tattoos.

As evening settles over the Apa Tani plateau, the village resounds with the sounds of Apa Tani children playing with handmade toy carts, sticks and stones. Some, as young as three years old, have siblings tied on to their backs. It's amazing how little they need, compared to children in the city, to keep themselves busy and happy.

Back in Ekha's hut, we settle down for some more rice beer for which I am now acquiring a taste. Legang explains that Apa Tani society is divided into clans and their sense of relationship is very strong. "We have a very interesting institution called the "*buning*," which is a relationship of friendship. It is a network of friends spread across villages, who are there to help you with anything from a *mithun* to rebuilding your huts." Ekha himself has eight "*bunings*" living in different villages and tells me that every person in the village has a number of these close friendships, which sometimes continue through generations and seamlessly pass on from fathers to their children. The Apa Tani consider it their moral duty to provide for their *buning's* needs. That is how this wonderfully networked society puts someone back on their feet after an accident or a fire; houses are collectively rebuilt within days and materials for rituals arranged in a jiffy. "What an amazing support system," I think. Their strong bonds of friendship are certainly enviable.

It's dawn and the Apa Tani villages rise to another day. Today, Ekha and Mumpa have invited me to spend a



Apa Tani Woman busy with household chores  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000



Apa Tani Nyibo (Shaman), Nani Tatu, wearing a bear-skin costume  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000

day with them in the fields. Paddy is the lifeline of the Apa Tani plateau and most men and women work in the fields all day. I notice a bunch of six women waiting for me. Mumpa tells me, “We work together in groups, from one person’s field to another and so on.” It takes an hour to walk to the fields. While I swear, Mumpa and her friends sing! They walk gracefully through the irrigated tracks while I clumsily try to keep up. Soon,

Over the next couple of weeks, I discover some remarkable Apa Tani living traditions, the most important being their belief in *Donyi-Polo*, a faith based on *Donyi* – the sun, and *Polo* – the moon. They are the symbolic powers through which the supreme spiritual being is manifested. This practice holds that all life is sacred and that the universal spirit resides in every being, in rocks and stones and trees. It is a way of life that

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*I reflect that being secluded from the outside world for centuries, they have developed a totally self-sufficient and self-reliant economy, which is comparable to that of any other modern community.*

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the ladies are in the midst of a hard day’s job, ploughing the fields with hoes, while I (thankfully) film and photograph. The ladies invite me to help out and I try, making for muddy comic relief.

We take a well-deserved break for lunch, which comprises boiled rice, chilli powder, eggs, bamboo chutney and of course, gossip! This is the Apa Tani staple diet and though meat or “Yo” is an important part of their diet, it is only cooked for special occasions. They hardly eat any vegetables and, interestingly, oil is rarely used for cooking. I am ravenous and the lunch is delicious, especially along with the refreshingly cold rice beer!

The women inform me that the Apa Tani only grow one crop of paddy a year, allowing for soil rejuvenation, and the fields are cleverly irrigated to collect rainwater, which is then distributed equally. I reflect that having been secluded from the outside world for centuries, they have developed a totally self-sufficient and self-reliant economy, which is comparable to that of any other modern community. They have achieved this by utilizing their resources in an ingenious manner and maintaining the tenets of traditional practices which are rooted deeply in environment-friendly ethics.

involves a close and harmonious relationship between man and the natural world. *Donyi-Polo* worship has no written scriptures, no idol worship and no fixed place for prayer. The only symbol is a bamboo altar found outside most homes; while the village Shaman, called the *Nyibo*, is their link to the divine. The *Nyibo* acts as the intermediary between man and the world of spirits, and converses with them in a state of trance.

I have many questions, so, one day, Legang takes me to witness a shamanistic ritual in Reru. We walk into the forest and as we approach a bamboo grove, I hear distinctive rhythmic chanting. Two *Nyibos* are conducting a chicken liver divination in front of a long bamboo altar. Legang explains that the *Nyibo* decides, after examining the chicken liver, which rituals are to be performed to propitiate the spirits for the wellbeing of a particular family or a community, and also which animal is to be sacrificed. It is to him that people turn when illnesses strike, bad weather ruins crops, or in an emergency.

Another day Ekha informs me of the death of one of his elderly relatives, Khoda Moryang. He and Mumpa are going for the funeral and invite me to attend. They give me a blanket to take with me as a gift. Ekha informs me



that death in tribal society is an event that is shared by all. Relatives pour into the house of the deceased and keep a wake that can last for many days. The bereaved family prepares food and beer, and fires are lit to accommodate guests all through the night. It is also customary to sacrifice a *mithun* at the funeral. The meat is then distributed to all who have come.

As we walk into the hut which is jam-packed with people, I see an old lady's body lying on the ground. She is surrounded by her presents - alcohol, blankets, shawls and tobacco - which will be buried along with her, to be enjoyed on her final journey. Rice beer is generously served and the atmosphere is one of celebration. Legang explains, "Her death is not being mourned as she has lived a full life of ninety years. Now she is on her next journey, where she will be reunited with all her ancestors and will watch over her loved ones here as a benevolent spirit." The women present are singing songs, called the *penge* or songs of lamentation that are sung as impromptu verses by relatives or close friends of the deceased. To commemorate the life of the deceased in these songs, they recall the days of childhood, remembering various incidents of the person's life and the time that they spent together. This honest and pragmatic approach to life is an eye-opener and a point of reflection for me.

*Another wise tradition of the Apatani is their Tribal Council, or Buliang, consisting of members of the clan council... The Buliang settles all problems and disputes arising in the village.*

After accepting a gift of *mithun* meat, I go along with the funeral procession. The body is tied to a single piece of bamboo and carried to the grave. All Apa Tani clans do not have a graveyard; the burial can take place anywhere in or around the village. The process of preparing the grave begins early in the morning and goes on until

afternoon. All along, whistles are blown as a mark of respect. First, a grave of appropriate size is dug; another inner chamber inside the grave is prepared, which is where the body is placed, along with all the belongings. The chamber is then closed using bamboo to ensure that wild animals are unable to access the body. A bamboo structure is erected to mark the grave, and this is decorated with sliced bamboo. I plant a sprig of bamboo on the old lady's grave.

Another wise tradition of the Apa Tani is their Tribal Council, or *Buliang*, which consists of members of the clan council. Ekha takes me to film the *Buliang*. We walk towards a *lapang*, a wide platform built on stilts where eight men sit and discuss a village issue. It turns out to be an animated argument, where views are expressed vehemently and emotionally. I notice that the men keep placing tiny pieces of cane in the centre and sometimes remove them singly. Ekha explains, "They are arguing the matter point by point, so they can keep tabs on the merits of the case."

The *Buliang* settles all problems and disputes arising in the village. *Gaon burahs*, or village headmen appointed by the government, are expected to oversee all the disputes. "You see, the *Buliang* consists of our village people, so they understand the issues and are better

equipped to sort it out in a manner that is acceptable to both parties." Ekha tells me, "Our punishments are usually fines, like a gift of a *mithun* or money to the aggrieved party." I know by now that Apa Tani communities live fairly harmoniously, and serious or violent crimes are still absent in these areas.



Two Apa Tani Nyibo (Shaman) conducting a divination  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000



Two Apa Tani Men  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000

I am enjoying my time with the gracious Apa Tani. Their active outdoorsy lifestyle, clean air, fields and forests are invigorating. My days are packed with “action.” I follow Ekha and his friend on a hunt into the forest one day, attend his cousin’s *murung* puja, a traditional family ritual, on another, and am granted further insights into their essential Apa Tani way of life.

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*For me, the Apa Tani I met will remain a picture of simple and hardworking people—happy and content.*

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Finally, I get invited to a wedding in Lempia village. The Tage family warmly welcomes me as they prepare for the wedding. Their hut is crowded with family and friends, *mithun* meat is being cooked and rice beer prepared for the *Mida*, the final marriage ceremony, of Rupa Tage to Hage Komo. The Apa Tani have to perform three different ceremonies for a marriage to be official. The first two are the equivalent of an engagement and require the groom to give a bride-price, which is normally a *mithun*. However, a couple is considered married only after the *Mida* is performed.

Soon, the wedding procession arrives—the couple, relatives, *gaon burahs* and *Nyibos*. Rupa and Komo have been living together for the last six years and have three children. They had a love alliance, which is more common than an arranged one amongst the Apa Tani. Inside the hut the ambience of merry-making prevails. Guests are first greeted with rice beer and rock salt, and I happily accept my share; as, by now, I have acquired a taste for both. Soon, it’s time for the traditional Apa Tani lunch; boiled rice and *mithun* meat are served on pieces of carved wood.

Since, traditionally, meat has been the prime currency, it is still symbolically crucial in any ceremony, especially in marriages. Several pieces of *mithun* meat and



especially preserved dried bacon are presented to the groom's family, as representatives of both sides negotiate in a sense of fun. The groom's negotiator will try to get the largest piece of dried bacon, and many pieces are inspected before acceptance. This continues until many choice portions are collected in huge baskets as gifts for the bride, the groom and all their relatives.

Of course, today, money has also been added to the dowry. Until some years ago, these negotiations were centered on the *mithun*, but the convenience of paper currency is preferred today. After spirited negotiations, Hage Komo collected Rs 10,000 but this is almost like a repayment to the groom of the bride-price given in the engagement ceremony. The families are now united in bonds of equal measure, obliged to always help each other. The baskets of meat are finally packed. Rupa and her procession will carry these *Mida Yaggs* and walk through the villages showing off the *Mida* presents.

At the wedding, I meet a few Apa Tani boys who study at Hindu College in the University of Delhi. They are here for the wedding, and I find that they are a little apologetic about their culture. I realise that the richness of the Apa Tani culture may be fading for the new generation as the ancient traditions and rituals are nothing more than a social obligation for the youth. However, I reflect that it is these very traditions, customs and rituals that bind them together and give the community a strong sense of identity and togetherness. Integration into the modern world poses a great challenge to their rich cultural heritage, and must be negotiated with care.

For me, the Apa Tani I met will remain a picture of simple and hardworking people - happy and content. The treasure they own are the well-earned lives that smile on their faces and the light that shines in their eyes.

ANU MALHOTRA, 2000

*Almost a decade after I shot my documentary on the Apa Tani, I detect that their society of today is marked by an increase in migration and unemployment. As Mamang Dai points out in her recent book Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land, the state cannot provide much work to its educated youth outside the traditional forest industry, and they are getting increasingly engulfed within the political strife that now characterises this "conflict zone." It is a generation that is fast moving out of its traditional habitat and livelihood. Customary laws are entering into a confrontation with the modern legal system, and being found increasingly inadequate in the face of new crimes. So far, the state's isolation has been the chief preserver of its magnificent environment. However, with the increase in demand for timber and plant resources, the natural threshold limits of forest systems are being crossed. The commercial extraction of timber has led to a marked reduction in forest area, raising urgent environmental concerns. I cannot help but observe that some of my fears about the Apa Tani youth losing out on their valuable traditions through the onslaught of modernity have come true. I hope that my confidence in the resilience of these time-tested ways of life will also be actualised.*



Death ceremony  
Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000



Apa Tani Man  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
48" x 18" Colour (A 001)







Apa Tani Man  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
36"x 14" Colour (A 002)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
36"x 14" Colour (A 003)



Apa Tani Woman and Child  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
12"x 18" Black & White (A 004)



Apa Tani Woman and Child  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
12"x 18" Black & White (A 005)





Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
 12"x 18" Black & White (A 006)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
 12"x 18" Black & White (A 007)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
36"x 14" Colour (A 008)







Apa Tani Nyibo [Shaman]  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
24" x 18" Colour (A 009)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
24" x 18" Colour (A 010)





Apa Tani Boy  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
36" x 14" Colour (A 011)





Apa Tani Nyibo [Shaman]  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
12"x 18" Black & White (A 012)

Apa Tani Woman  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
36"x 24" Black & White (A 013)







Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
48" x 19" Black & White (A 014)



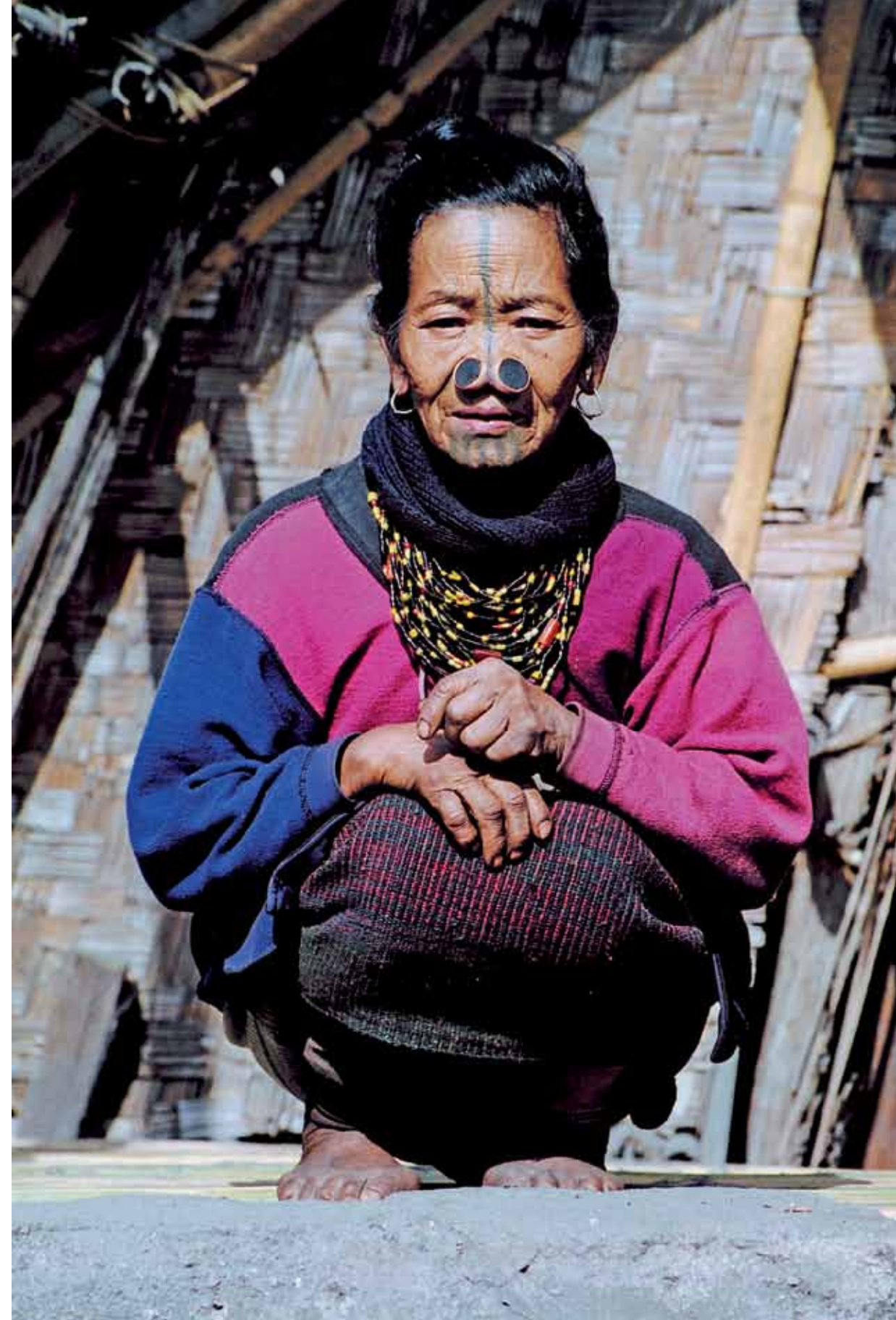
Apa Tani Boy  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
48"x 19" Black & White (A 015)

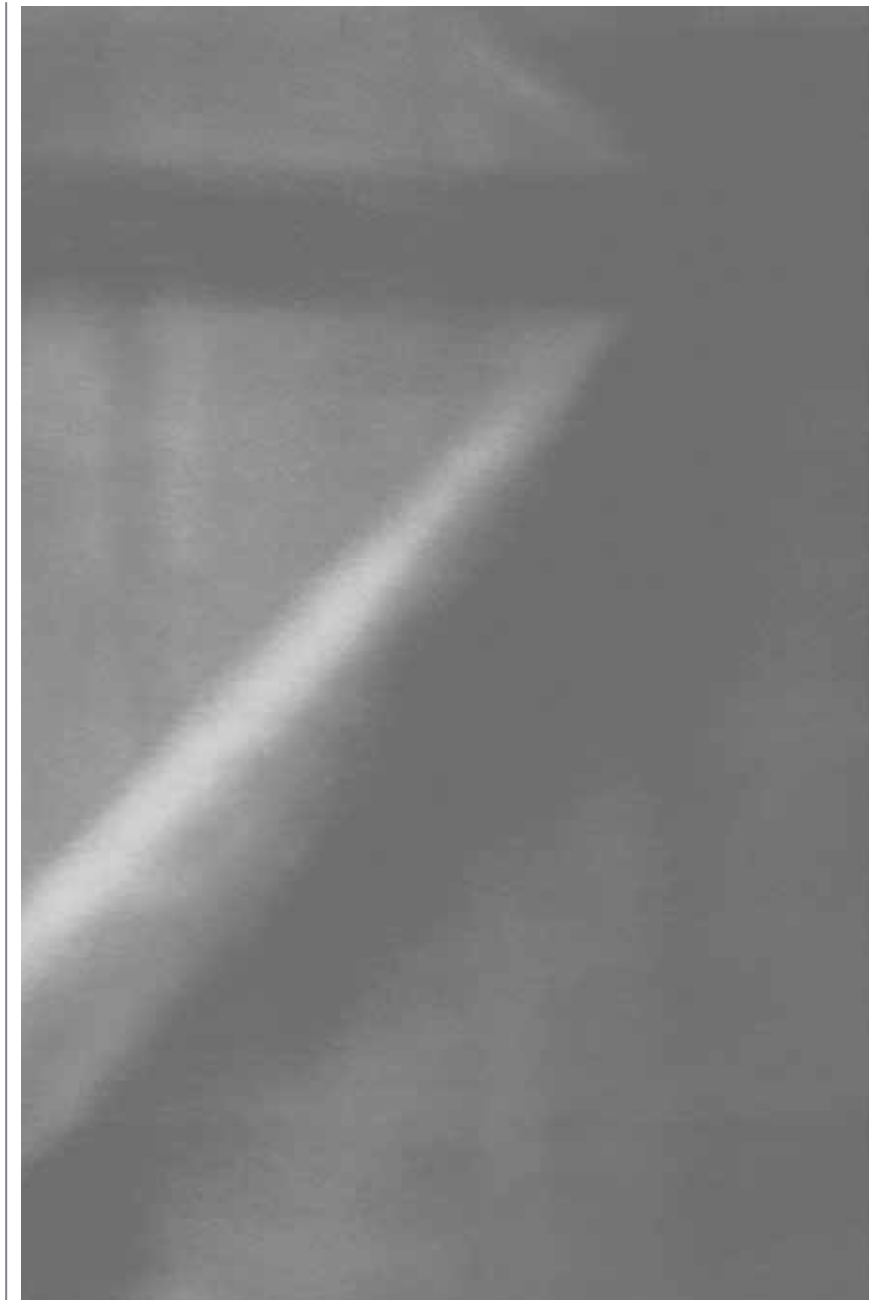




Apa Tani Woman and Child  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18" x 24" Colour (A 016)

Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18" x 24" Colour (A 017)





Apa Tani Man  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
48" x 19" Black & White (A 018)







Apa Tani Nyibo [Shaman]  
*Lempia Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
15"x 21" Colour (A 019)





Apa Tani Man  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
15"x 21" Colour (A 020)





Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
48" x 19" Black & White (A 021)





Apa Tani Child  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
24"x 36" Black & White [A022]





Two Apa Tani Women  
*Lempia Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
30"x 18" Black & White (A 023)



Apa Tani Kids

*Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*

18" x 24" Colour (A 024)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18"x 24" Colour (A 025)





Apa Tani Man

*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*

15"x 21" Black & White (A 026)



Apa Tani Nyibo [Shaman]  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
24"x 18" Black & White (A 027)



Apa Tani Girl  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18"x 24" Colour (A 028)

Apa Tani Kids  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18"x 24" Black & White (A 029)







Apa Tani Man  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18"x 24" Black & White (A 030)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
24" x 18" Black and White (A 031)





Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18"x 24" Colour (A 032)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
36"x 24" Colour (A 033)









Apa Tani Woman with a Child  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
 36"x 24" Black and White (A 034)

Apa Tani Man  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
 18"x 24" Black and White (A 035)



Apa Tani Girl

*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*

36" x 18" Colour (A 036)







Apa Tani Man  
*Hija Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18"x 24" Colour (A 037)



Apa Tani Woman  
*Reru Village, Arunachal Pradesh, 2000*  
18" x 24" Colour (A 038)





KONYAK

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OF NAGALAND



Konyak Headhunter of yore  
Longmein Village, Nagaland, 2001

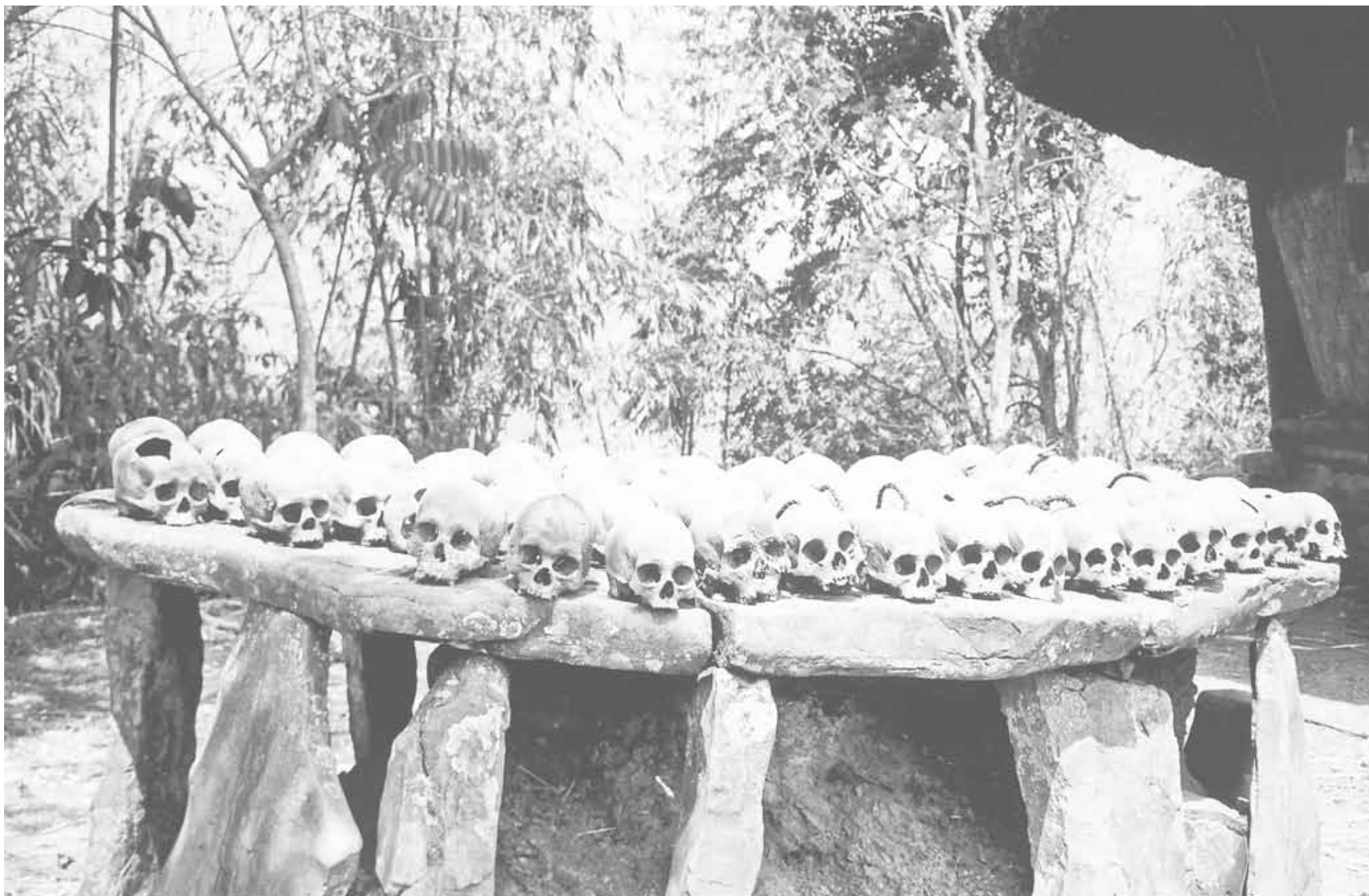
# KONYAK

## OF NAGALAND

*Wakching, the greatest of all villages,  
With the shells of the ears  
With the drums of the ears  
Hear, O hear, our song.  
O villagers, O commoners,  
O chieftains, hear our song.*

•

A Konyak taunt song  
(heaping scorn on members of a rival Morung)



Skulls once "headhunted"  
Longmei Village, Nagaland, 2001





A typical Village Hut  
Longmein Village, Nagaland, 2001



Anu Malhotra and Crew at the Aoling Spring Festival  
Wanching Village, Nagaland, 2001

*In the North-Eastern corner of India, bordering Myanmar, lies a land that was, for centuries, shrouded in myth and mystery. This is Nagaland, home to several tribes, which, until not too long ago, were feared as headhunters. Inaccessibility to their settlements and their isolation from the rest of the world allowed these tribes to practice their own unique culture, which was marked by animistic traditions, elaborate rituals and unique costumes. Inter-tribe strife was common, and peculiar to their style of warfare was the custom of head-taking. Of the 16 tribes that lived in this region, the fiercest were the Konyak. With the absence of a written language, mythology and history have been transferred orally down the generations through songs and poetry. The advent of the British in the 1830s introduced technology, modern architecture and roads into this final frontier. The American missionaries followed, and the animistic Konyak are 95 per cent Christian today. Nagaland remains predominantly an agrarian economy, with about 70 per cent of the people living in traditional villages strategically located on hilltops.*

**T**HE NIGHT IS COLD AND DARK, YET I SEE THEM. Stealthily creeping through the gate, with spears and *daos* gleaming in their hands, the men wear loincloths and tattoos and carry cane baskets adorned with monkey skulls. They spot me and abandon their stealth tactics. With a blood-curdling “Aaaouuh!” they charge towards me, even as I cower in absolute terror. My head is slashed in an instant and tucked into the basket. “Blood on the dance floor,” sings Michael Jackson...

“Hold on! Hold on! It’s just a bad dream!” I think, with an accusing look at the book by my bedside, *Naked Nagas* by Christopher von Furer Heimendorf.

Later, between Mon to Wanching, my local guide and interpreter, Pong Tao, who is a scripture teacher at Mon,

sings along with Sting playing on the tape. He laughs at my dream, “Yes, that’s just the way they would have done it a hundred years ago. Even today you will meet old headhunters who remember this. You’ll recognise them because their faces are tattooed.”

Traditionally, the Konyak believed that the soul of a person lives in the nape of the neck, while the spiritual being, a source of fertile potency, was in the skull, and that it could be transmitted to others. The means of acquiring such power was to behead one’s enemies. Warfare and headhunting were sacred ritual practices to ensure bountiful harvests, reinvigorate villages, enhance prestige, and become endowed with fertility.

The village of Wanching, situated at a height of 1,000 meters, has about 500 huts closely nestled together. They are traditionally constructed from wood, bamboo and masses of palm fronds for insulation. Bamboo balconies form the hub of their daily chores.

As Pong Tao walks me through the narrow village lanes, we are followed by groups of curious, giggling children. Women in long skirts and cotton blouses gracefully walk by with long conical baskets of wood strapped from the top of their heads. I still see some remnants of traditional customs and attire – the heavy brass and bead jewellery, teeth blackened with soot for hygienic purposes, and tattooed legs, which once symbolised rites of passage like menstruation and betrothal. An elderly woman, who is grinding tea leaves with her feet, hurriedly puts a blouse on and smiles at me with black teeth. Pong explains: “Our grandmothers still don’t like to wear tops; they never wore any when they were young. And in those days, black teeth were signs of beauty, so they used to blacken them with coal, which was also hygienic.”

As is customary, we pay our respects to the *Angh*, the hereditary king of Wanching. I’m warmly welcomed with a betel nut in a betel leaf. Khem *Angh* is dressed in full ceremonial regalia – an electric blue kilt and jewellery of beads and cowrie shells. Boar tusks and hornbill feathers adorn his cane helmet. Thenga, his wife, is wearing a wraparound skirt and blouse with long brass earrings, loads of beaded necklaces and bracelets.

Khem *Angh*’s hut consists of a large central room dominated by a continually lit hearth, with grains and meat stored on the drying racks above. Bamboo utensils, bunches of corn and a wide assortment of *daos*, their most versatile tool, line the walls, as do elaborate hunting trophies like animal skulls and horns. The institution of the *Angh* is still highly revered. “My people are simple and hardworking,” Khem *Angh* tells me “Our lifestyle is very different from yours, but we’re quite happy here.” Quite so, I think, observing the glowing faces and easy laughter all around me.

Later, Pong Tao tells me that every Konyak is a member of a clan, which is determined by birth. This is an important part of his self-identity and finds concrete expression in mutual obligations. Sociologically, a key institution of their society is the youth dormitory, also called the *morung*, which has members of one or more clans, who owe a lifelong commitment of loyalty and duties to the *morung*, its members, and the village.

Situated on the outskirts, each village has several *morungs*, which allow the warriors a panoramic view of the village boundaries. This is where the young unmarried men spend the night guarding the village. It also serves as a learning ground for the youth, making them acquainted with their ancestry, rituals, customs and duties. Most Konyak children are initiated into it at



Konyak Men ceremonially dressed for the Aoling Spring Festival  
Chui Village, Nagaland, 2001





Konyak Boys aping the "headhunters' dance," Aoling Spring Festival  
Wanching Village, Nagaland, 2001



Konyak Men beating the log-gong, Aoling Spring Festival  
Chui Village, Nagaland, 2001

about the age of ten and stay there until they get married. Here, they learn everything from cultivating the land to composing songs and music. It is a shared space and a shared journey from childhood to adolescence to adulthood and builds a shared sense of security and community. The *morung* is also the final resting place for the human skulls, brought back from the headhunting days of yore. "Today, the *morung* mainly depends on social work. If someone needs help, we help them in farming or building a house," Pong Tao concludes.

Pong Tao walks me to the *morung*, a huge wooden hut structure with a slanting roof and enormous wooden pillars carved with animal figures. The Naga feel intimately related to the animal world around them. Their relationship is especially strong with animals that they perceive as potent in serving fertility and social status. Even today, the belief prevails that in killing an animal its qualities and powers pass on to the hunter. As a consequence, hunters adorn themselves and their houses with hunting trophies. Fate and the future can be read from animals' intestines, and animal sacrifice is practiced to appease the spirits and gods.

As we approach Pong Tao's crowded *morung*, I hear strange staccato beats. Inside, about 20 young men are lined on both sides of a huge log hollowed out at the centre. They are drumming it with small wooden pestles. This is the log-gong, whose beats were used to communicate news of important events – from feasts to the arrival of visitors and even fire hazards. Today, the log-gong is used symbolically at ceremonies, reverberating with the sounds of days bygone.

The mist rises on the first day of Aoling, the Konyak spring festival, the beginning of the agricultural year.

Palm trees, bamboo groves and peach blossoms transform the hills into a kaleidoscope of colours and patterns offset by the sparkling blue sky. The Konyak still revere the natural cycle of fertility, with animal sacrifice, feasting and dancing. Pong Tao leads me to a typical village hut. We are welcomed by the family, with black tea and bananas, to witness the roasting of a pig. The animal is strung on a bamboo pole, brought before us and then cut with surgical precision for fair distribution among family and friends.

In the earlier days, *feasts of merit* were a popular device to redistribute material wealth in lieu of status. They also transferred the personal merit and fertility of the feast giver to the entire community. Nowadays, *feasts of merit* are rare and status is acquired by the accumulation of personal wealth, rather than through the traditional concept of community benefit. However, Aoling still keeps alive the spirit of sharing and familial togetherness.

After lunch, we head towards the *morung* and I'm overwhelmed by the colours of the Konyak ceremonial dress. The men are wearing electric blue kilts over shorts, cane belts, cane helmets decorated with ivory and hornbill feathers, brass and cowrie shell armlets and calf bands made with dyed grass. I hear a medley of loud screeches, gongs and laughter, "Aaaace! Eeooh! Oooyeeh!" So begins the headhunters' dance, with the warriors hopping, jumping and shouting war cries as they wave their cane shields, spears and rifles. Konyak ceremonial dress and ornaments are more than just a matter of aesthetics as they define identity and status. Traditionally made with bone and ivory, animal horns and skulls, today, most have been replaced with buttons and coins. Everything from the accessory, like the



trademark skull basket to the favoured colour red, is a living tradition of their headhunting days and a powerful symbol of fertility.

Pong points to the typical headhunters' cane basket, decorated with monkey skulls, jiggling behind every back, "They used to come back from a headhunting expedition carrying heads in those baskets. The heads were mounted on poles and left till the flesh fell off. Afterwards, they would perform the Puja, feed the skulls and then store them in the *morung* as sacred objects of fertility."

We head towards another *morung* where a group of men are singing a song that exalts the village. Ingeniously handcrafted instruments provide a lilting accompaniment along with rice beer, a favourite Konyak drink, being brewed in bamboo canisters. Pong hands me some and everyone watches as I take a sip. I remember it fondly from my time with the Apa Tani; so, I gulp it down, getting a huge round of applause from the men.

Suddenly, there's a buzz as the girls arrive. In the old days, dressing up for the festival was an elaborate ritual. Not much has changed, except that today women wear their special ornaments and family heirlooms over their normal clothes. In the old days, young girls wore long lead earrings; these were changed to brass when parents considered them old enough to take on lovers. Sexual relationships among the youth were considered natural and pre-marital sex was not frowned upon; in fact, it used to be encouraged to heighten the potent fertility of the village. Even today, love marriages are the norm and divorce does not lead to social ostracism, as women are regarded as embodiments of fertility and accorded great respect as mothers who provide life and nourishment.

The boys and girls hold hands and begin the fertility dance in a circle. Village elders lead the dance in the centre, looking exotic with long stems of orchids, ferns and goat horns hanging from their ears. Some have tattooed faces, the mark of a headhunter.

Pong shows me his uncle's necklace, which has five skull-shaped pendants hanging from it. "In the old days," he tells me, "you could tell how many heads a man had hunted by checking out his tattoo and necklace." At this point, an old headhunter approaches me swinging a string of leaves under which is attached a human skull— an ancient, sacred heirloom. He points his spear at me ominously and jumps towards me, startling me. I am invited to join in; and soon, with headgear and jewellery on and spear in hand, I try the war dance, cry and chant "Oooaah! Oooaah!" accompanied by much hooting and laughter from the very amused crowd.

Another old headhunter, swinging a sacred skull-cap, proudly demonstrates the headhunting stance. I observe that the Konyak youth have a deep-rooted sense of respect for their elders, who are always cared for and treated as important members of society. The isolation and insecurity felt by the people of modern day society is unknown to them, sheltered as they are by the entire village commune.

Shingwang Konyak, the Assistant Commissioner, explains to me the essential Konyak belief in the concept of fertility which was linked to their practice of headhunting. "Reduced to a simple formula, the concept was that a head equalled fertility."

Over the past 50 years, most villages have buried their hoard of skulls in the light of their new religion, but



Konyak Men at the Rice Beer ceremony, Aoling Spring Festival  
Wanching Village, Nagaland, 2001



Konyak Girls dancing at the Aoling Spring Festival  
Chui Village, Nagaland, 2001



Burmese Konyak Men dancing at the Aoling Spring Festival  
Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001

Shingwang takes me to the village of Longmein which is one of the few that has preserved their skulls to commemorate their history.

The *Angh* of Longmein village greets me warmly outside the *morung*, but I gaze in amazement at the stone slab outside it. It is covered with about 200 skulls, prized trophies once headhunted. Shingwang picks up one skull, "These are some of the heads that these people hunted." He holds it out to me and I gulp, but examine it with a sure-I-can-handle-this expression. He laughs, "He can't bite. He's been dead for about a hundred years! So, after a headhunting raid, the skull was right away put in the basket, carried back to the village and put on this stone, where the priest performed the rituals. After this, the skulls were decorated and hung on bamboo poles."

The *Angh* now introduces me to two village elders with heavily tattooed faces and beaded necklaces with wooden skull pendants, who demonstrate the fearful headhunting stance. The men stealthily creep towards me. One has a spear in his hand, and the other, a hatchet. Suddenly, they pounce on an imaginary me and begin slamming their weapons into the ground, while letting out bloodcurdling screams, "Aaaaaiieeoou!" They now tuck the imaginary heads into their traditional cane headhunting baskets and trot off! Even though I know it's a performance, my hair stands on end and it takes a long while for my heart to beat normally.

However, for a people with such a fierce past, I find the Konyak to be surprisingly gentle. Over the past two weeks, I have witnessed an amazing sense of togetherness and community harmony. This fact was strongly brought home to me when there was a fire in Wakching and about 200 houses were gutted. We head out to

Wakching and present the *Angh* with some rations for disaster relief. Inside the *morung*, huge quantities of energy supplies have found their way from all over the district, including rice, tea, blankets, clothes and even utensils. In addition, many men from neighbouring villages have rushed here to help. As I look at the site of the fire, I find that the entire hill face is in different stages of reconstruction. Shingwang tells me, "Within a week, all 200 homes will be rebuilt and their owners reinstated by the people of neighbouring villages." All of this is done without any compulsion. I am completely astounded by this amazing sense of community service.

While the Konyak's sense of community still endures, denuded hill slopes tell a story of an environment under pressure. Much of the original rainforest has been destroyed for increased cultivation. Trading in cash-rich crops like tea and timber is turning locals away from their traditional model of sustainable development and protection of the environment.

However, in the village of Chui, the celebrations of Aoling are a reassuring sign of an enduring tradition. In the past, strong villages commanded obeisance from smaller villages in return for protection and support. Chui is one such overlord village ruled by a great *Angh* who has an impeccable lineage and is still looked up to for guidance and support by many of the neighbouring villages.

Today is special because a local boy, W. Konyak, who is a Congress Party State Minister, is present. He tells me, "The administration of a Konyak village would be impossible without the guidance of the *Angh* as he still commands our respect and loyalty. In fact, the Indian Constitution recognizes our customary law and the Tribal Council." The Tribal Council is an enduring



Konyak institution and I am invited to the *Angh's* house to witness it in session. The Council consists of village elders with the *Angh* and his great-grandson, the future *Angh*, presiding. In the glow of the fire, the *Angh* of Chui looks formidable; long goat-horns adorn his ears and dark tattoos design his face, his red cane helmet is adorned with ivory tusks and hornbill feathers. The Tribal Council is the heart of their legal system, where all problems are discussed, argued and resolved, swiftly and justly. "Even if someone is killed, we don't go to the police. We come here and the Tribal Council decides the matter within a day. The decision of the *Angh* is final. He is our Supreme Court," says W. Konyak.

In the past, the tribal councils were marked by the smoking of opium from handmade bamboo pipes. Opium was believed to cure malaria and stomach problems and is now used as a pain reliever, though at the high price of rapid addiction. But today, in celebration of Aoling, I am invited to smoke the peace pipe with them! I squat beside the *Angh's* son, who patiently teaches me to draw in the smoke and follow it with a swig of black tea. I manage after a few drags and get a round of applause from some very amused and boisterous men!

As the older generation staunchly cling to their traditions, it is obvious that the modern mainstream beckons the youth. However, there are hardly any incidents of crime, Shingwang tells me, as we walk down Chui. Community ties and effective customary laws allow the Konyaks to live a relatively secure and free life. But with western lifestyle creeping in, with its emphasis on individualism rather than community spirit, I wonder for how long.

These are people who have inherited a culture which teaches harmony with nature, a culture that builds orderly societies and makes for happy people. Will their sense of pride protect their special way of life? Or will the colourful heritage of the Konyak just fade away - and remain preserved only as stray images on a film?

ANU MALHOTRA, 2001

*All the states of the North-East region have undergone a dramatic change from a remote, idyllic past. Nagaland has been turbulent for decades, with armed insurgency since the 1950s. Today, the Naga stand at crossroads, confronted with a responsibility of choice. New lifestyles and changing attitudes have encouraged rural migration, while rising unemployment has become a source of discontent and frustration for the youth. It seems essential to find ways to support and interpret this state's unique cultural heritage and oral traditions, which in the absence of adequate documentation are fading and may be lost forever.*

*It has also become necessary to re-examine Naga customary laws and find out how the modern legal system and the village councils might work together. New crimes that have no precedent in tribal society are increasing, while at the same time, some of the old social practices are no longer valid, especially with regard to the status of women in tribal society. For me, the Konyak customary way of life emphasised the importance of indelible and enduring community ties along with their fierce personal dignity and identity. I hope that the ways of life that have been resilient for centuries to the onslaught of change and the passage of time, will continue to invigorate them for generations to come.*



Konyak Headhunters of yore staging a headhunting incident  
Longmein Village, Nagaland, 2001





Konyak Boys dressed in ceremonial costume for the Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 72"x 24" Colour (K 001)





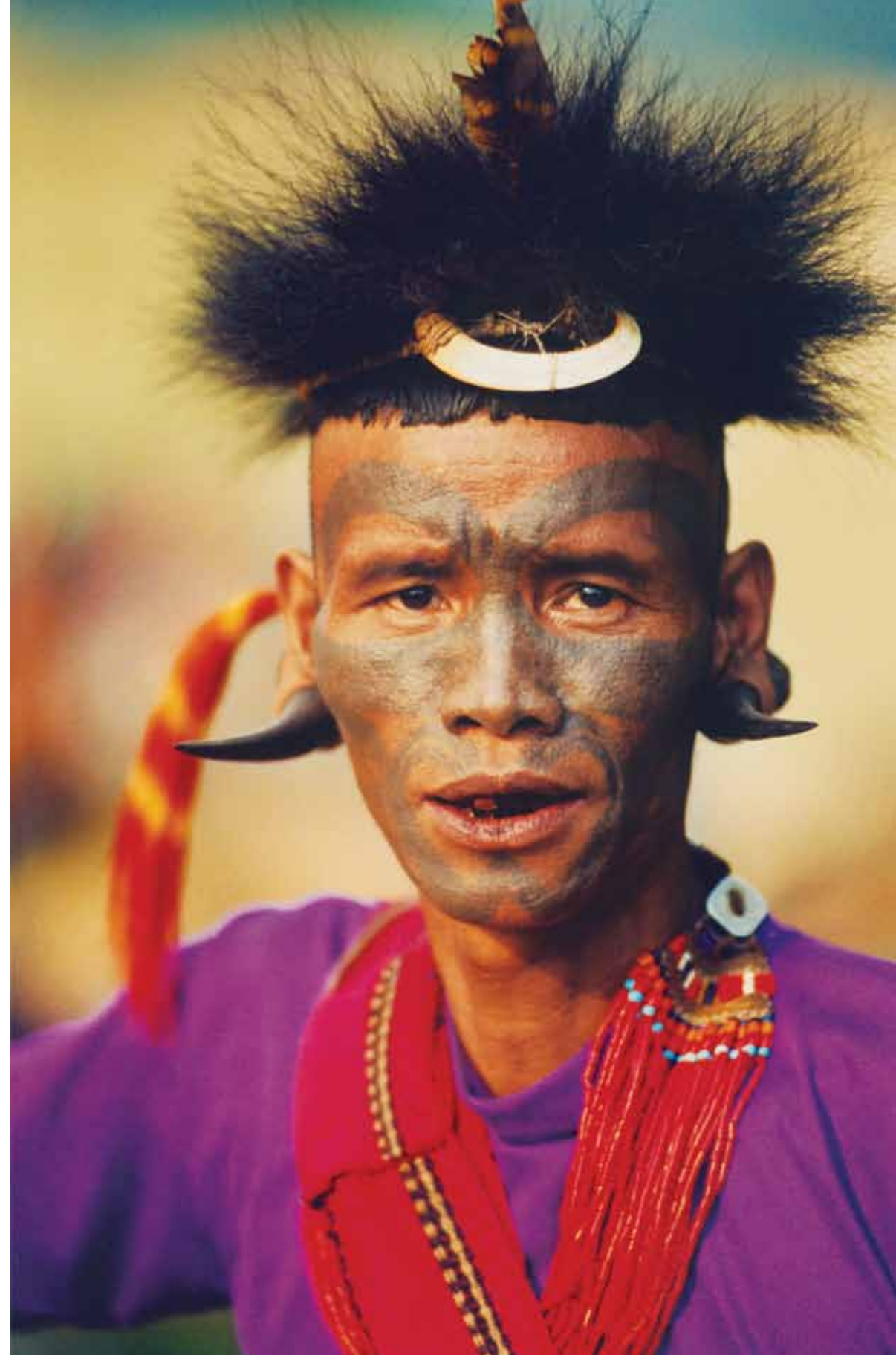




Konyak Headhunter of yore  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
18"x 28" Colour (K 002)



Konyak Headhunter of yore  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
18"x 28" Colour (K 003)





Konyak Headhunter of yore marching at the Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 18"x 28" Colour (K 004)

Konyak Men, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 48"x 36" Colour (K 005)









Konyak Headhunter of yore  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 12"x 18" Black & White (K 006)



Konyak Man  
*Longmein Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
12"x18" Black & White (K 007)



Konyak Headhunter of yore Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 12"x 18" Colour (K 008)

The Queen of Chui Village, Konyak Women and their Grand - daughters  
*Aoling spring festival, Chui Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 36"x 24" Colour (K 009)







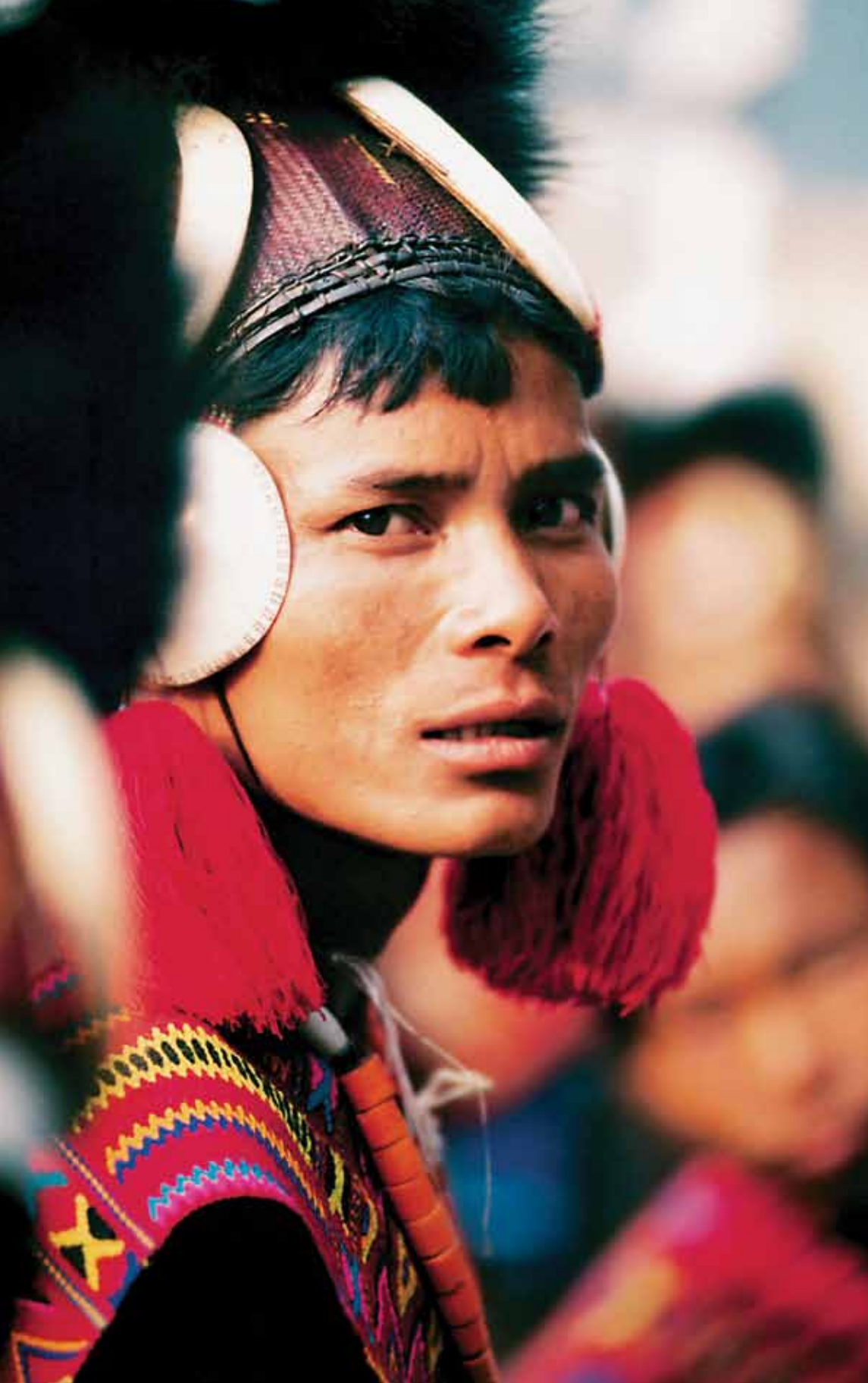


Konyak Headhunter of yore  
*Aoling Spring Festival, Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 12" x 18" Black & White (K 010)



Konyak Headhunter of yore  
*Aoling Spring Festival, Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
12"x 18" Black & White (K 011)





Konyak Youth dressed in ceremonial costume, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
18"x 28" Colour (K 012)



Konyak Boys dressed in ceremonial costume, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
72"x 24" Black & White (K 013)



Konyak Man  
*Longmei Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 18"x 28" Colour (K 014)





Konyak Headhunter of yore  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
18"x 28" Colour (K 015)



Konyak Girls dressed in ceremonial costume, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Chui Village, Nagaland, 2001*

18"x 28" Black and White (K 016)

The Queen of Chui Village, Konyak Women and their Grand - daughters  
*Aoling spring festival, Chui Village, Nagaland, 2001*

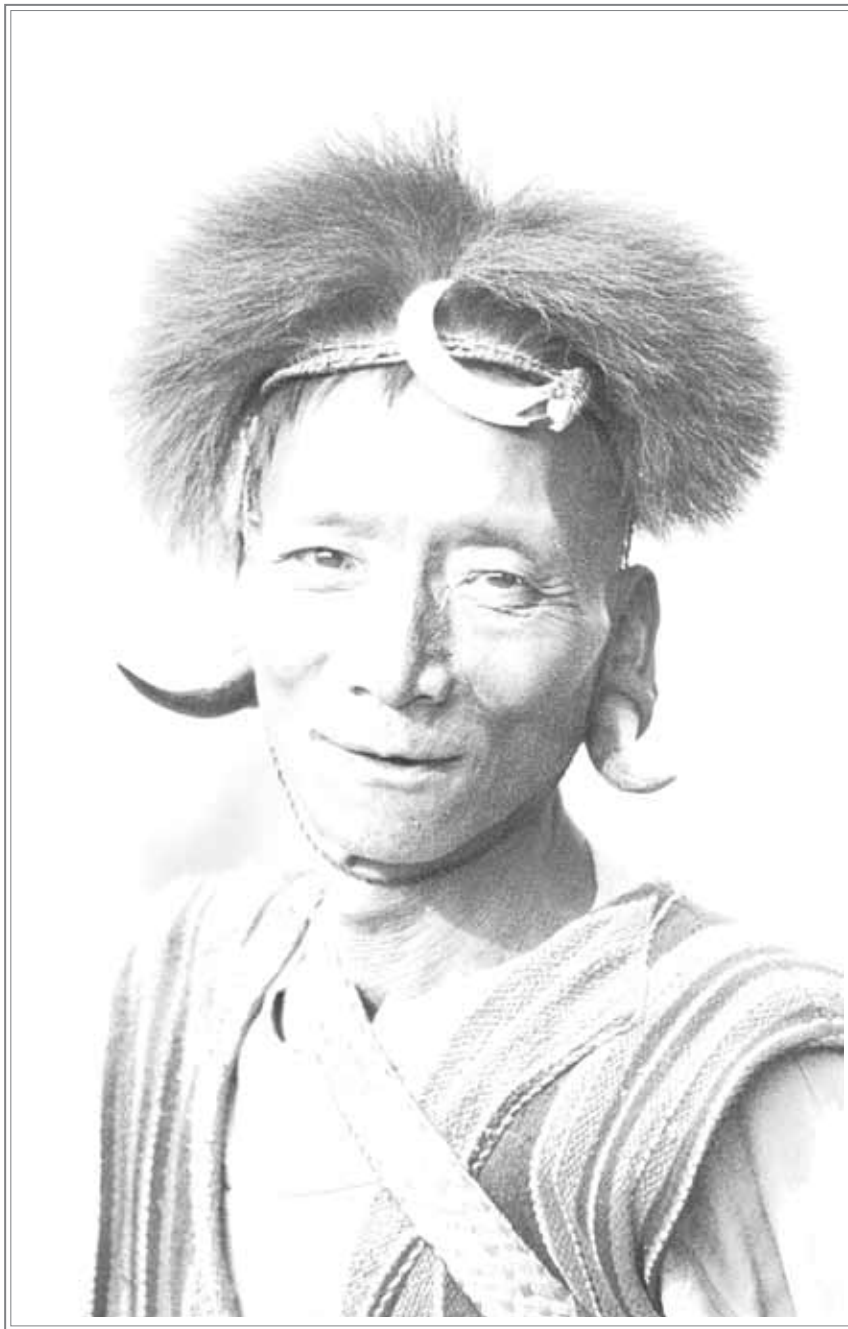
36"x 24" Black and White (K 017)



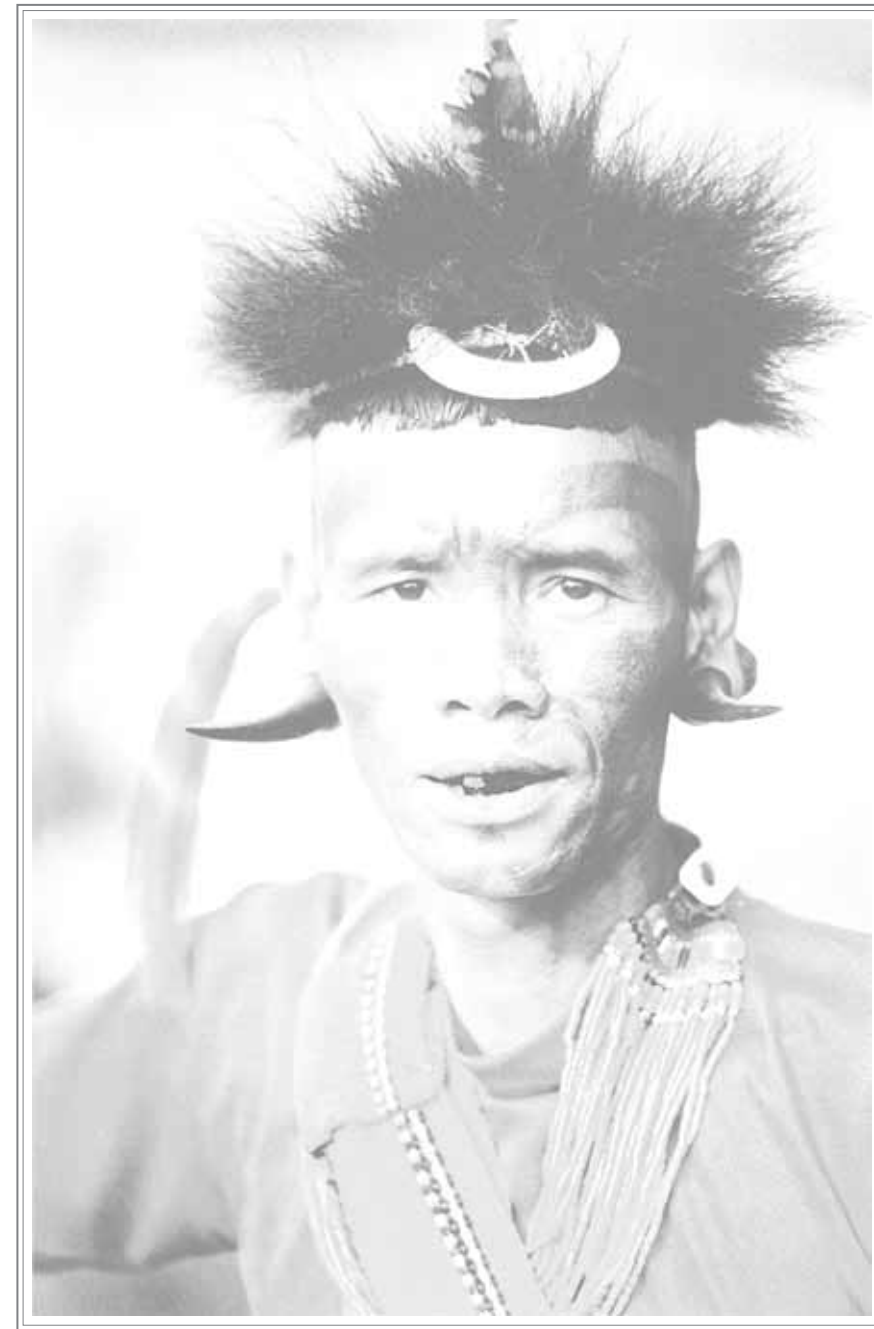




Konyak Youth, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
12"x 18" Black & White (K 018)



Konyak Headhunter of yore, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 12"x 18" Black & White (K 019)



Konyak Headhunter of yore, Aoling Spring Festival  
*Longwa Village, Nagaland, 2001*  
 12"x 18" Black & White (K 020)





# NOMADS

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OF TIBET



Tibetan Girl  
Paryang, Tibet, 2002

# NOMADS

## OF TIBET

*To love in the ocean of humanity  
Is to live in the heaven of life after,  
To sleep in the darkness of hate  
Is to burn in the fire of hell,  
To die in the universe of humility  
Is to be reborn in the presence of the Buddha,  
To seek nothing for the benefit of I  
Is to gain enlightenment in the tradition of the Buddha.*

•  
Tsoltim Ngima Shakabpa



Tibetan Plateau  
Tibet, 2002





Potala Place  
Lhasa, Tibet, 2002

*Tibet, often called the roof of the world, is home to the tallest mountains on earth, sitting majestically at an elevation of approximately 16,000 feet. Situated in the north of the Himalayas, Tibet is surrounded by China and India. Dhamma, or “dharma,” travelled from India and made Tibet into a Buddhist kingdom, an identity it strives to retain to this day. Dhamma forms the basis of its architecture, music, attire, and institutions of education and governance. Known today as much for the political struggles of its diaspora, as it is for its magnificent monasteries and palaces within the region now under Chinese occupation, Tibet remains as much a mystery as it was centuries ago when it lent itself to path-breaking anthropological and ethnographic work.*

**T**HE SOUTH WEST CHINA AIRLINES AIRCRAFT touches down at Dongar with a bang. I quell a surge of excitement. I am finally in Shangrila, the land of magic and mystery. Soon, while driving towards Lhasa, the Forbidden City, images of a hermit kingdom, quaint golden-roofed monasteries and mantra chanting monks fire my imagination. Through my reverie, I take in the stark landscape of low-lying sandy hills and a cobalt blue sky. It is very bright and the sunlight at this rarefied altitude of about 12,000 feet makes everything stand out vividly.

Our guide, Mingma, shouts, “Okay guys! We’re driving into Lhasa,” shattering my dreams in more ways than one. I am shocked, “This is Lhasa?” I stare in disbelief at the double-lane highway with Landcruisers and Volkswagens, modern buildings, hotels, departmental stores and restaurants. Lhasa is a modern town like many others in the world.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of the 1960s ravaged Tibet’s cultural and historical heritage. Tibet has irrevocably changed; monuments and monasteries



Tibetan Lady  
Jokhang Temple Square, Lhasa, Tibet, 2002

have been burnt, worship of the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama banned, monks sent to labour camps, and hundreds of thousands Han Chinese migrated into Tibet. Mingma, who is Tibetan by birth, tells me, “Life is tough for us Tibetans. We have to keep reporting to the local police and are not allowed to have passports. The Chinese have all the economic power and we have to struggle to find jobs.”

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*Buddhism arrived in Tibet from India during the 7th Century and was altered by its interaction with the native religion Bon, a shamanistic faith.*

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Lhasa’s cardinal landmark and a wonder of eastern architecture is the glorious Potala Palace. This is a vast, white and ochre fortress with gold roofs. The Potala had been the home of each of the successive Dalai Lamas since 1649. Thankfully, it was spared during the Cultural Revolution and reopened to public in 1980. I wander through three floors—a maze of hundreds of rooms containing chapels, tombs, statues, mandalas, *thangkhas* and butter lamps. The air is heavy with the incense of centuries, but all the brilliant colours and decorations cannot disguise the sense of desolation of a lost Buddhist kingdom.

Buddhism arrived in Tibet from India during the 7th century and was altered by its interaction with the native religion Bon, a shamanistic faith. Since then, various schools of Tibetan Buddhism have flourished that trace their lineage back to the great Indian teachers. The most revered is Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, the 8th century tantric master, who subdued Tibet’s “evil spirits” and helped consolidate Buddhism into a unique fusion of shamanism and ideological faith, encompassing a path of moderation, devotion to the power of natural places, undertaking pilgrimages and the worship of fierce and protective deities.

I get my first feel of “Old Lhasa” at the Barkhor market in the old town. This quadrangle of streets, with old Tibetan buildings, is crowded with pilgrims and Chinese stalls selling prayer wheels, jewellery, cowboy style hats, prayer flags, *thangkhas* and even yak skulls. An “antique” prayer wheel catches my eye and the girl at the stall tells me that this is “originally from the Jokhang temple” across the square.

As I cross over with my camera to this three-storey building with its golden bronze-plated roof, I am surrounded by prostrating pilgrims, rotating prayer wheels, wafting incense and a multitude of voices murmuring the mantra, “Om mani padme hum” (Hail to the jewel in the lotus). This is the mantra of Chenresig (Avalokiteshwara) of whom all Dalai Lamas are reincarnations. Mingma tells me that it is the most important destination for pilgrims in Tibet. “People from all over come here – sometimes by doing complete prostration all the way, which can take months, even years,” informs Mingma. The Jokhang houses statues, chapels and images of the pantheon of Tibetan deities.

Today, Tibetans have won back many religious freedoms and Buddhism still permeates most facets of daily life. Of course, the Dalai Lama is a forbidden name and when I try to ask Mingma about him, he hushes me with a don’t-talk-so-loud expression, looking around anxiously. “Even his photos are banned,” he says. The Norbulingka, the 8th century summer palace of the Dalai Lama, proves to be an anticlimax, as most rooms are closed to the public. In 1959, the present Dalai Lama (the 14th), had escaped from here to India, disguised as a Tibetan soldier.



Village near Purang, Tibet, 2002



Namring Village, Tibet, 2002

An evening walk around the town takes me past several hairdressing salons packed with young Chinese boys and girls in funky hairstyles and jeans, a few branded stores, cinema halls and lively nightclubs. As I sip a margarita at the Red Dragon Bar, the “hostesses,” pretty and skimpily dressed, ask me to buy them drinks and beg me to join a dance performed by a pretty Chinese girl. I mourn for the mystical city of yore.

hostesses giggle and confess to being madly in love with him! While we wolf down cup noodles, they entertain us with a song from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*. Cheers to Bollywood!

The Tibetan plateau widens and the rapture begins as we drive through expanses of golden green plains, earthy mountains of amazing shapes and colours and

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*Our driver halted on top of a ridge and pointed ahead. “Mapham Yum Tso,” the precious lake, a lake created in the mind, the manas of Brahma – Lake Mansarovar.*

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The spectacular Tibetan landscape begins to unfold before us as we leave Lhasa. I am totally exhilarated at the prospect of a five-day drive, about 1,200 kms, across the south-western Tibetan plateau. Sixteen of us are packed into five Landcruisers, and are heading towards the two most remote and legendary travel destinations in the world — Lake Mansarovar and Mount Kailash.

Picturesque villages skirted by rows of golden prayer wheels pass by and we arrive at Shigatse, Tibet’s second largest town, where we spend the night. The 15th century Tashilhunpo monastery here is one of the few monasteries in Tibet that has survived the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Herein, the Chinese targeted Buddhism and destroyed monasteries. We spend the night at the Shigatse hotel, our last in a hotel, so we make the best of it (our last hotel showers and proper bathrooms on this trip)!

We stop for lunch at a village rest-house, set within a Tibetan home, where we sample *ginke*, roasted barley flour kneaded with butter into cakes and eaten with butter tea. The room is colourful, on the wall is a huge poster of Shah Rukh Khan, and the two young Tibetan

several passes, honoured by colourful prayer flags flapping sacred wishes across this stark land. The view from the top reveals unending vistas fringed by purple and blue mountains, textured by the shadows of fluffy clouds, with the snow peaks of the Himalayan ranges beyond. The vastness of the scale is awe-inspiring and I can feel my spirits expand and soar.

On our second evening, we camp in tents pitched in the shadow of great mountains. Our tents are cosy and it is amusing to hear “couple conversations” — “You are hogging all the space!” “Your shoes are stinking!” “You just sat on my glasses!”... Meanwhile, the toilet tent with the Swiss portable loo is the big attraction. Dinner is an elaborate affair served in the dining tent — noodle soup, rice, dal, vegetables and even dessert. We all feel the thrill of adventure, in a world of open spaces, frosty stars and silent nights.

We drive past the Tsangpo, the Brahmaputra river, lazily winding its way through this high altitude desert, and pass by groups of Tibetan nomads, *Drogpas* (people of the high pastures), with their yak and sheep. The *Droga* wander in small groups of a few families. The summer months are spent grazing their livestock



on these highlands with constant movement to fresh pastures. With the onset of winter, they move to urban markets for trading.

Saga is the last town, with a few shops and telephones, which we all use to call home. We set up camp close by for our third night beneath starry skies. Daytime and nighttime temperatures fluctuate greatly here; you bake in the sun and freeze at night. Layering is important and I am wearing three layers of everything from socks, pants, tops to headgear!! But through these layers and shivering in the icy wind, I thank the million stars shining bright overhead for being here tonight.

The drive is rough and dusty and the altitude has been increasing steadily, from 12,000 feet in Lhasa to about 15,000 feet now and about 18,000 feet at the passes; but the ever-changing spectacular scenery keeps us enthralled. The crystalline light makes everything shine with intense clarity. Fat jackrabbits and marmots scurry through the bushes and huge ravens with red beaks hop around. From a distance we sight a couple of *Kiang*, or wild ass that gallop off as we come close.

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*Mt. Kailash has long been the object of worship for the Hindus as the domain of Lord Shiva. The Buddhists, Jains and Bonpo also revere this holy mountain.*

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After a night's stop at Paryang, we begin the last day of our journey towards Mansarovar. We pass blue Dongfeng trucks loaded to the hilt with Tibetans from Kham, also making their way to Mount Kailash, enroute to Mansarovar. The women are colourfully dressed and fantastic hats of fox skin or lambs' wool trimmed with gold brocade make them immensely photogenic.

We are all feeling completely worn out from our bone-rattling and dusty drive that day. Suddenly, our driver

halts on top of a ridge and points ahead- "Mapham Yum Tso," the precious lake, a lake created in the mind, the manas, of Brahama — Lake Mansarovar. The sheer beauty of this natural wonder takes my breath away and instantly energises me.

This magical lake shimmers, gleams and changes colours and moods constantly. Snow-capped mountains surround it and in the distance loom the ranges surrounding Mount Kailash. Hindus regard it as the spiritual centre of the universe and the abode of Lord Shiva, and for Tibetans this is their holiest mountain Kangri Rinpoche (Precious Snow Mountain), the navel of the earth. For over a thousand years, pilgrims have journeyed here to pay homage to this sacred mountain and lake, circumambulating them in an ancient ritual of devotion. The four great rivers of the Indian sub-continent — the Indus, the Karnali (a tributary of the Ganga), the Brahmaputra and the Sutlej originate here. Perched on an outcrop of red rock, overlooking Mapham Tso is Chiu Gompa, the Sparrow Monastery, and beside it is the lodge, where we all spend the next two nights.



Tibetan Nomads  
Chiu Gompa, Mansarovar, Tibet, 2002



Gauri Kund  
Mt. Kailash, Tibet , 2002



Anu and Iqbal Malhotra  
Kailash Parikarma, Tibet, 2002

For years, I have romanced the Tibetan legend of Shambhala about a vast mountain, shaped like a four-sided pyramid, so as to resemble a three dimensional mandala, a description which perfectly fits Mount Kailash. The land around this mountain is believed to be inhabited by a society which is so enlightened that it has vanished from human sight, moving on to a parallel spiritual plane. Although hidden openings to the

This first day's walk is fairly easy, if you do it in a relaxed manner. However, as we begin, the weather is whimsical, sunny and windy, changing to snow and sleet later. It is a relief to get to our lodge for the night, just below the Dera Phuk Gompa. Our yaks run away into the hillside during the night! While the Sherpas round them up, we have our breakfast of porridge brimming with dry fruits and hot chocolate and begin our parikrama.

*Drolma-la! Spiritually, its passage symbolizes the transition from this life to a new one, for atop the pass, the pilgrim is reborn, all sins forgiven through the mercy of Drolma-la.*

Shambhala are said to exist, only the pure heart can enter this hidden paradise.

So here I am, drawn by the mystical call of this mountain into its spiritual realm. Besides the Hindus, the Buddhists, Jains and Tibetan Bonpo also revere this holy mountain. Sixteen of us begin our three-day parikrama circuit of about 42 kms in the Lham-chu valley at Chuku Gompa, which is strung all over with prayer flags. Our camping equipment and bags are bundled onto yaks. Soon, with sunscreen slathered, sunglasses, hats and backpacks on, we begin our circumambulation with a group cry of "Om Namah Shivaya."

As I begin walking through the rocky valley floor, I look up in amazement at the towering cliffs lining both sides, sculpted into a gallery of fantastic forms of gigantic natural shrines made divine by the devotion of the pilgrims. Hordes of Tibetans are undertaking their parikrama by prostration and the guide tells me, "Each circuit takes them thirteen days. One circuit of the mountain erases their sins for a lifetime, 108 ensure Nirvana." Several actions are performed to bring the pilgrim into contact with the divine, such as mantra, prayers and prostration combined with walking.

From Dera Phuk, the pilgrim trail ascends to the 18,600 feet Drolma-la Pass. This climb is a test of faith and determination and more than a few pilgrims die here, should a blizzard strike almost without warning, or due to high altitude sickness. It is very cold and I can see the steep snowy hillsides rising in front, dotted with hundreds of pilgrims inching along. The climb is tough, which in this altitude of rarefied air makes every-one walk in slow motion. I pause frequently to catch my breath and ease the frantic thumping of my heart, while Tibetan pilgrims pass by with cheerful "tashi deleks" and smiles, which encourage me to keep moving.

Finally, after what seemed like eons, I hear the cry "Laso-so-so!" and look up to see a splash of colours — red, green and gold prayer flags fluttering vibrantly in the snow. Drolma-la. Spiritually, its passage symbolises the transition from this life to a new one, for atop the pass the pilgrim is reborn, and all sins forgiven through the mercy of Drolma-la. Pilgrims revere it with devotion, circumambulating it, bowing before it, stringing prayer flags from the top and making offerings.

We regroup here and celebrate, wearily and feebly, with roti rolls, dry fruits, chocolate, water and a few



photographs. Soon the weather changes dramatically, clouds descend with snowfall, the wind is fierce and chilly, the path treacherous, icy and slippery. As I slip and slide downhill, I now see the emerald green Gauri Kund or Tukjee Chenpo Tso, the lake of great mercy, nestled into the fluted ice cliffs. Hindu legend has it that Parvati created Ganesha while she bathed in Gauri Kund. I think of taking a photograph and almost get blown off the cliff while attempting it. Finally, after “the worst ordeal of my whole life,” as my husband puts it, we sight our camp on the floor of the Lham Chu valley, stumble there and collapse into our tents.

A white sheet of snow surrounds our tents as we wake to the morning. The previous day’s tough trek has completely exhausted us. We wearily commence our trek to our lunch stop at Zutrul Phuk, “magical power cave.” This little Gompa is built over a cave of the tantric Yogi Milarepa who roamed the Nepal-Tibet borderland, mixing miracles with meditation and using the yogic technique of “inner heat” to survive the freezing winters.” Late afternoon, we walk through “Red and Gold Cliffs,” a fantastic canyon splashed with explosions of mineral colour — orange, maroon and gold boulders strewn across purple, black and blue slopes. We turn a corner to find that we have reached the end of our parikrama. On the right, Kailash is veiled by the hills and clouds, an unseen but strongly felt presence.

The Kailash parikrama is very tough, but anyone with enough determination and faith can do it. There are moments of grace when time stops and the sheer beauty of the surroundings overwhelm me — suddenly, eternity and infinity seemed within reach.

The early morning drive takes us to Rakshas Taal, known as Langkak Tso or “the lake of Lanka.” It is

believed that Ravana sat here in mediation, invoking the blessings of Lord Shiva. We drive on to Purang, the regional headquarters of the Ngari province, which is a dusty little town, and spend the day getting a “dry hairwash!” Owing to water constraint, hair is massaged with shampoo and tiny bits of water, and finally washed out in a small trickle of water squirted from bottles. Ingenious! After a hot meal of delicious local Tibetan food, toasts, speeches, laughter and celebration, we retire to our guesthouse for our last night.

We race through Purang and proceed to the Chinese border post at Sher, from where we descend to the helipad at Hilsa, on the Nepalese side of the border. As the chopper lifts off the ground, I get a bird’s eye view of the magical valleys and mountains below — Shangrila — the beauty, the silence, the power, the spirit, the immense space; and it only requires the eyes of faith to see.

**ANU MALHOTRA, 2002**

*Friends who have gone to Tibet since my journey tell me that much of what I saw in Lhasa does not exist anymore. Tibetan Buddhism is now merely a touristic token as many more monasteries and nunneries have been razed to the ground, religious and personal freedom destroyed and protesters tormented in Chinese prisons. The demography of the region is perhaps irretrievably altered with large-scale migration of the Han Chinese. And Tibetans have been reduced to a minority in their own land. With the “Sinification” evident in Tibetan schools, road signs, and the cityscape at large, I feel privileged and nostalgic about having visited Tibet at a time when I could still experience some centuries’ old traditions, breathe a freer air and enjoy the vast expanses as the nomads did.*



Tibetan Pilgrims  
Kailash Parikarma, Tibet, 2002







Tibetan Woman |  
*Jokhang Temple Square, Tibet, 2002*  
36"x 14" Colour (N 001)



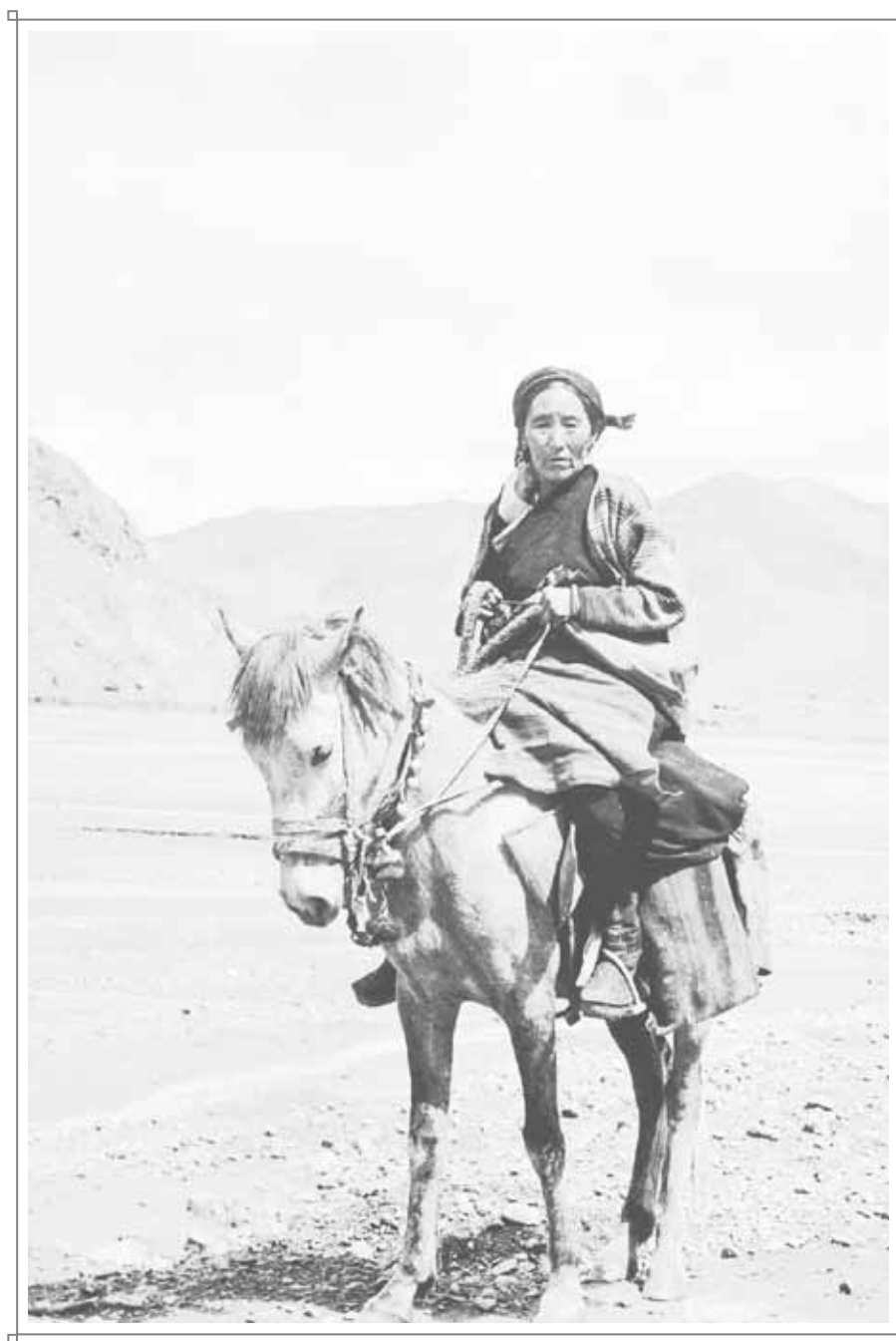












Tibetan Plateau  
*Tibet, 2002*  
24"x 16" Colour (N 002)

Tibetan Nomad  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 12" Black and White (N 003)





Tibetan Man  
*Saga, Tibet, 2002*  
18" x 24" Colour (N 004)

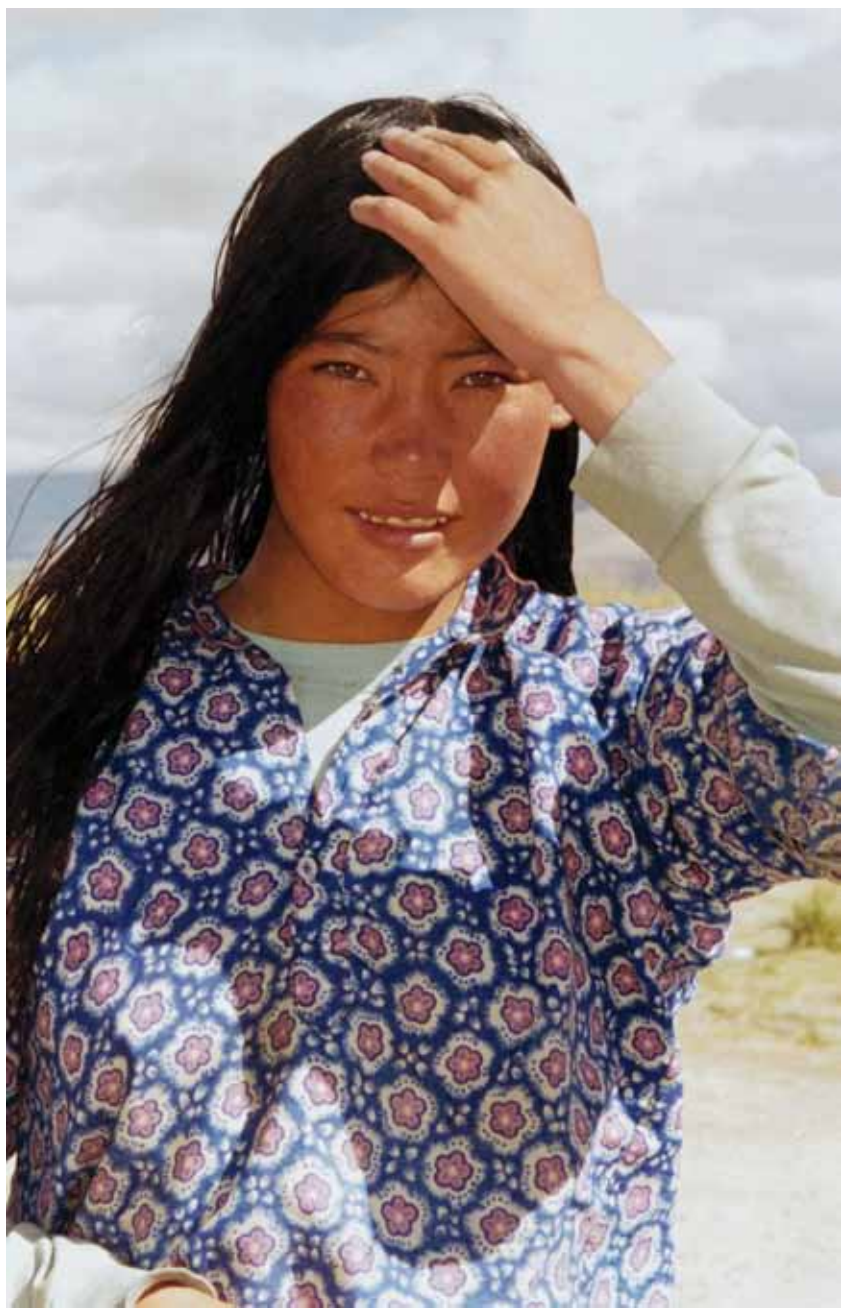


Tibetan Man with Horse-cart and Kids

*Saga, Tibet, 2002*

24" x 15" Black & White (N 005)





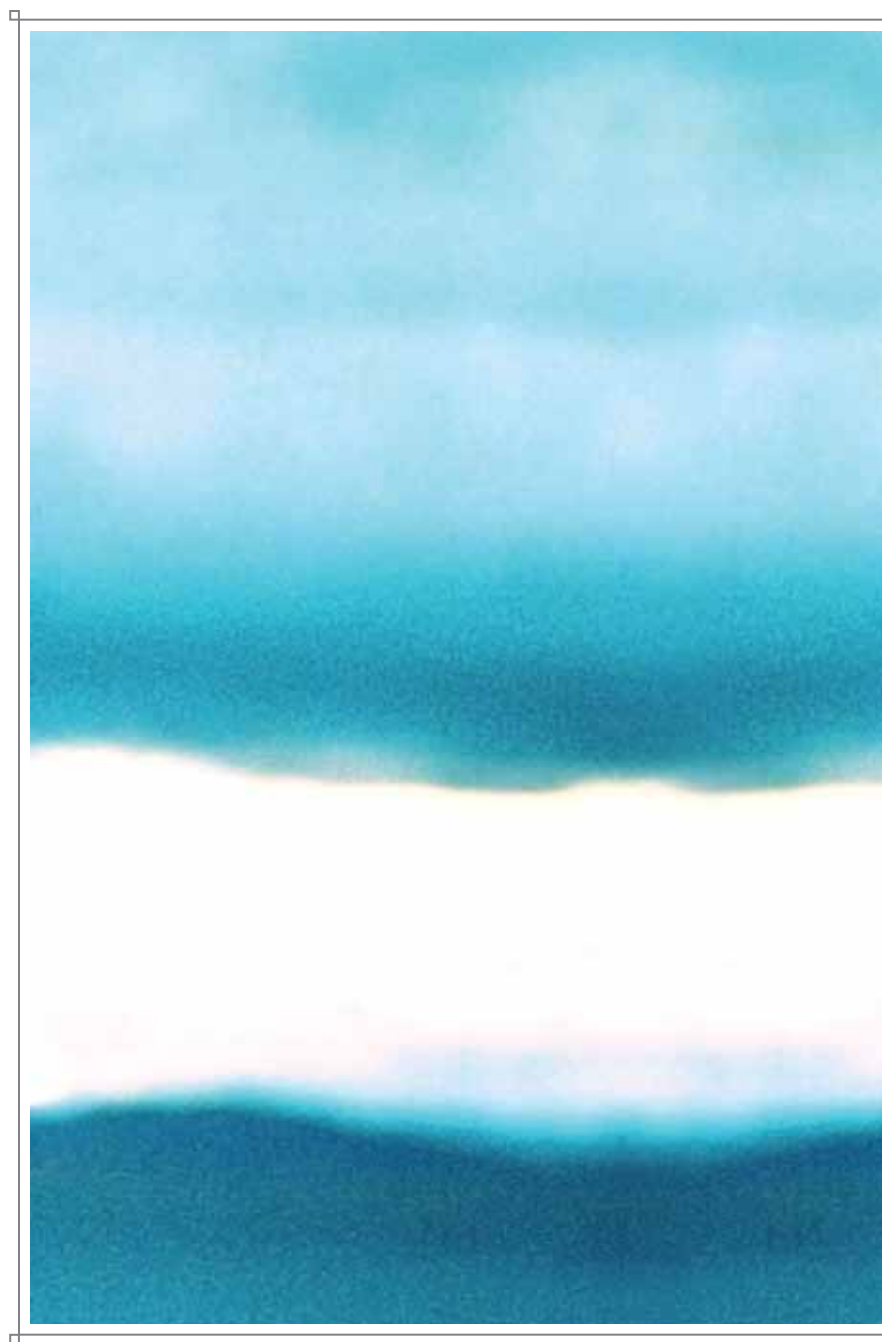
Tibetan Girl

*Paryang, Tibet, 2002*

18"x 24" Colour (N 006)

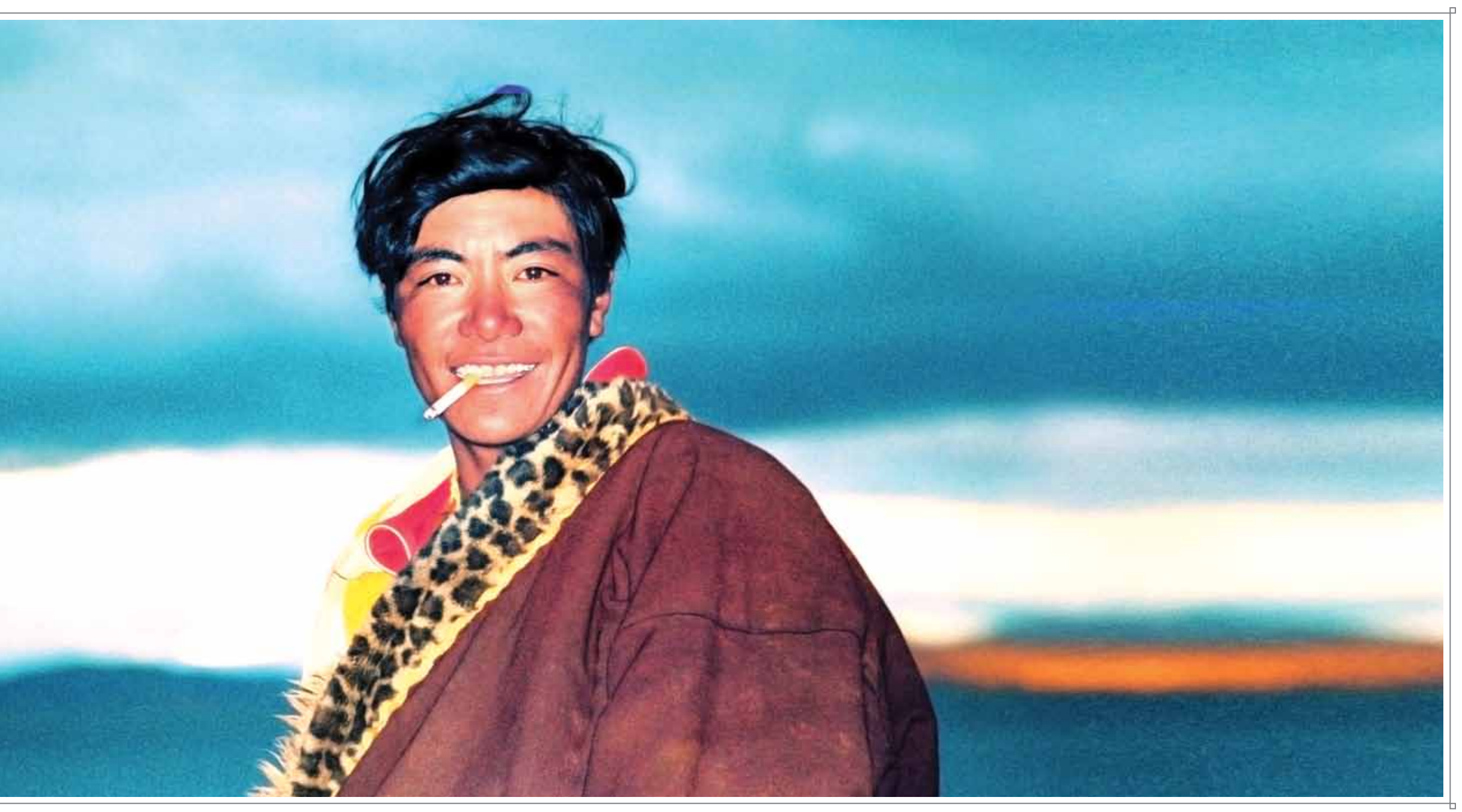


Tibetan Nomad  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
30"x 36" Black & White (N 007)



Tibetan Nomad  
*Mansarovar Lake, Tibet, 2002*  
36" x 14" Colour (N 008)







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Tibetan Nomads  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 12" Colour (N 009)

Tibetan Nomad  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 12" Colour (N 010)









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Tibetan Nomads  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
30"x 20" Colour (N 011)

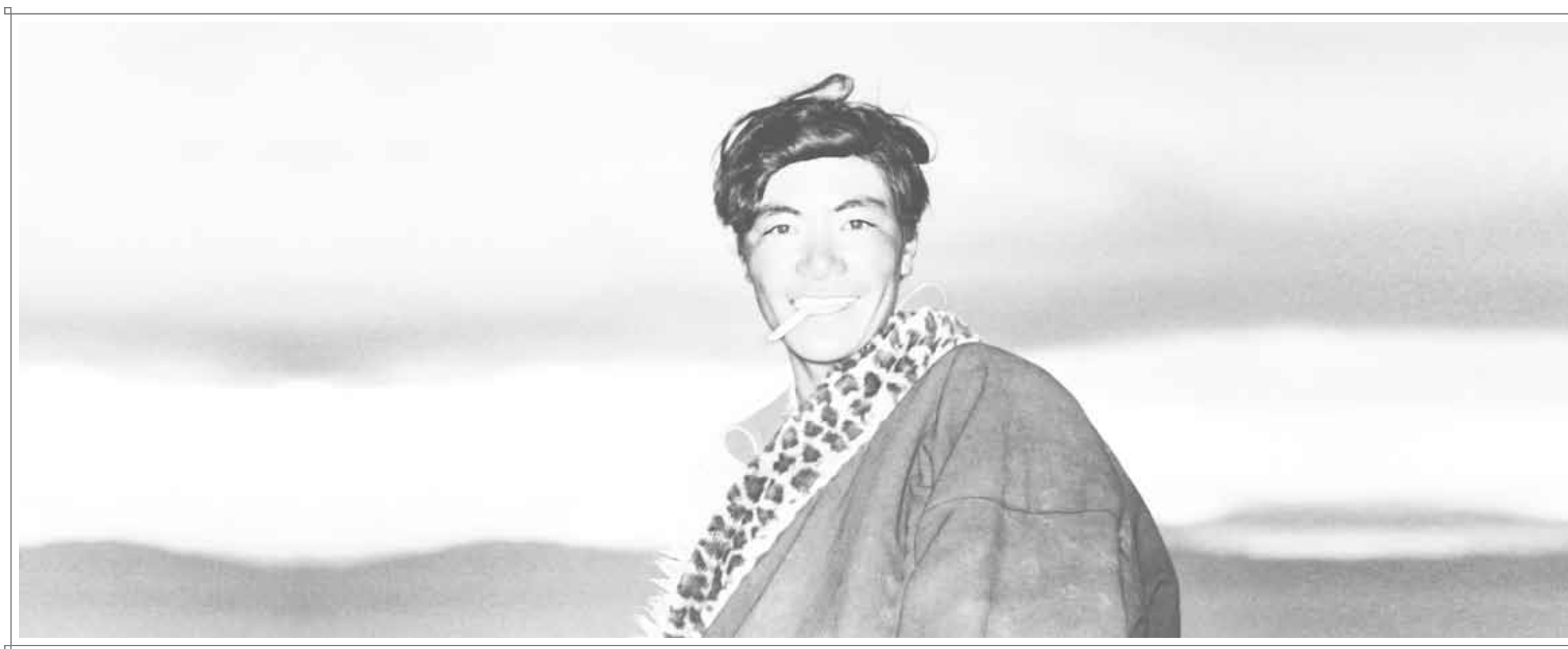
Tibetan Nomads  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
30"x 20" Colour (N 012)







120



Tibetan Nomad

*Mansarovar Lake, Tibet, 2002*

36"x 14" Black & White (N 013)

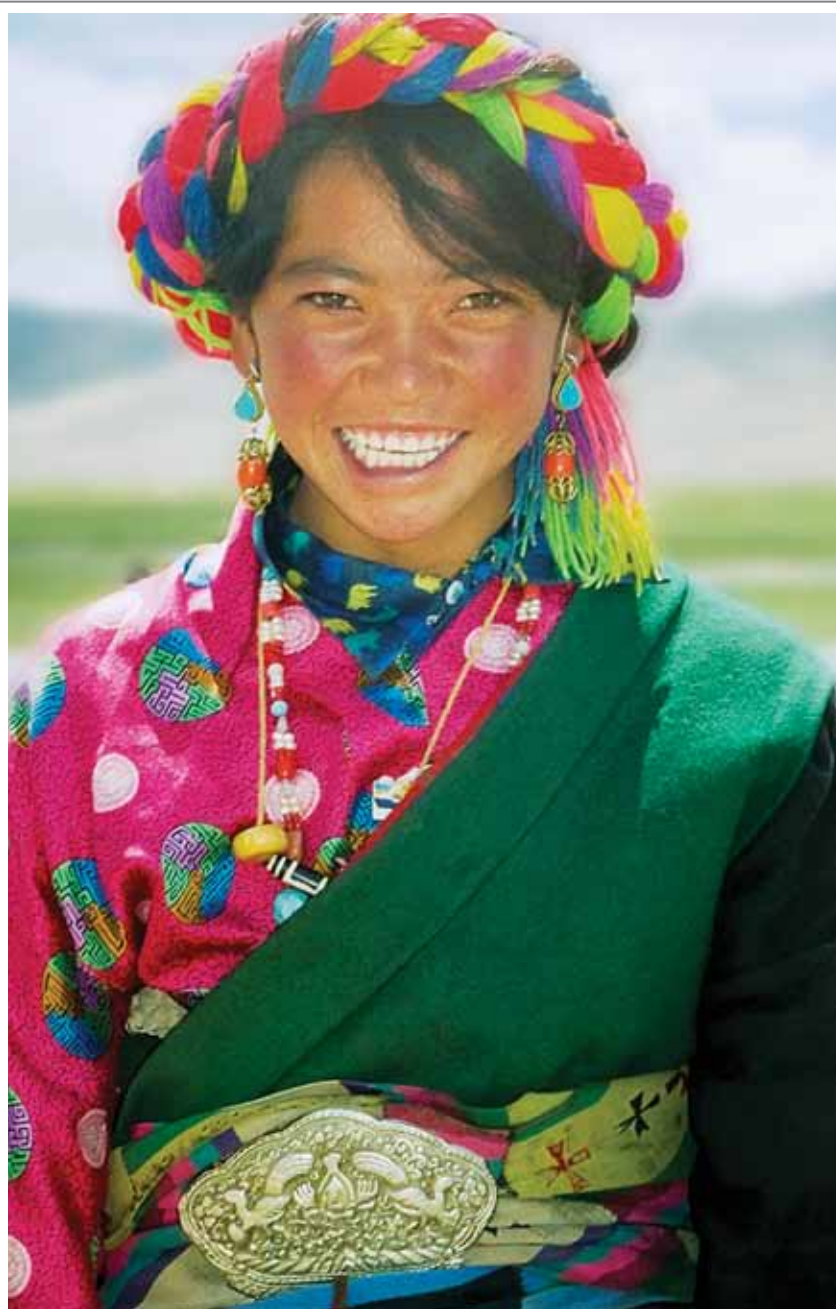




Tibetan Girl  
*Paryang, Tibet, 2002*  
30"x 36" Black & White (N 014)



Tibetan Girl  
*Paryang, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 24" Colour (N 015)



Tibetan Girl  
*Paryang, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 24" Colour (N 016)





Tibetan Nomad  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 12" Black & White (N 017)

Tibetan Girl  
*Paryang, Tibet, 2002*  
12"x 18" Black & White (N 018)





Tibetan Nomads  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
24"x 18" Black & White (N 019)

Nepali Trader  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
24"x 18" Black & White (N 020)







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Tibetan Woman  
*Mansarovar Lake, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 24" Colour (N 021)

Tibetan Girl  
*Mansarovar Lake, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 24" Colour (N 022)









Mansarovar Lake  
*Tibet, 2002*  
24"x 16" Colour (N 023)

Tibetan Girls  
*Mansarovar Lake, Tibet, 2002*  
24"x 18" Colour (N 024)







Two Sisters  
*Namring, Tibet, 2002*  
36" x 14" Colour (N 025)





Tibetan Woman standing outside her home  
*Saga, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 24" Colour (N 026)



Tibetan Woman  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
12"x 18" Black & White (N 027)





Tibetan Man  
*Saga, Tibet, 2002*  
18" x 24" Black & White (N 028)





Tibetan Woman

*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*

18"x 12" Black & White (N 029)



Tibetan Woman

*Jokhang Temple Square, Tibet, 2002*

36"x 14" Black and White (N 030)



Tibetan Woman milking her Yak  
*Paryang, Tibet, 2002*  
18"x 12" Black & White (N 031)





Nepali Trader  
*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*  
30"x 20" Colour (N 032)



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Tibetan Nomad

*Tibetan Plateau, Tibet, 2002*

30"x 15" Black & White (N 033)



Mystical Mountain  
*Tibet, 2002*  
24" x 16" Colour (N 034)





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# ANU MALHOTRA

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THE JOURNEY IS THE DESTINATION



A

NU MALHOTRA IS ONE OF INDIA'S ACCLAIMED FILMMAKERS, WITH OVER 16 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AWARDS TO HER CREDIT.

Anu set up AIM Television in 1994, as a boutique production house and went on to create over 600 hours of quality infotainment television programming, for premiere Indian television channels and a range of infotainment series for reputed international channels.

But for Anu, filmmaking is not just a profession; it is a passion—a passion with a cause—to create meaningful and uplifting communication.

Over the past decades, Anu has transformed the lives and minds of people across India and the world, through her insightful documentaries, trend setting television programming and revolutionary awareness campaigns, that are a tribute to India and her infinite diversity.

DOCUMENTARIES

*(Direction, Post Production, Visualizing of Photography, Research & Script)*

1. SHAMANS OF THE HIMALAYAS(2008-2010)

4 x 50 min docu series and 108 min docu film.

SHOWING

India Habitat Center, New Delhi, 19th October, 2010.

In distribution worldwide, by an international distributor, Off The Fence and sent to major film festivals, worldwide, in 2011.

2. THE MAHARAJA OF JODHPUR - THE LEGACY LIVES ON... (2002 – 2004)

2 x 50 min docu feature and 75 min docu film

AWARDS

- Best Documentary, Music, Indian Telly Awards, 2006.
- Best Documentary, Cinematography, IDPA 2005.

NOMINATIONS

- Best Documentary, ARPA Festival, Los Angeles (2004).
- Best Foreign Film, San Fernando Valley International Film Festival (2005)

OFFICIAL SELECTIONS AND SCREENINGS

- International Fort Lauderdale Film Festival (2004)
- Newport Beach International Film Festival (2005)
- San Fernando Valley International Film Festival (2005).
- Globians Potsdam World & Culture Documentary Film Festival, (2005)
- Oxford Film Festival (2005)
- International Festival of Televisao, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2005)
- Opening Film: Miami Film Festival (2004)
- UK Premiere: Nehru Centre, London, (2004)
- India Premiere: India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
- Dubai Premiere: Madinat Theatre, Jumeirat Madinat (2004)

SHOWING

India Habitat Center, New Delhi, 27 October 2004 and 20th October, 2010.

Nehru Centre, London, June 2004.

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International (2004 – 2009)

Home video - Available on DVD in premiere outlets, in India, by Shemaroo

3. THE KONYAK OF NAGALAND (2001)

55 min docu – film

SHOWING

India Habitat Center, New Delhi, 7 November 2002 and 21st October, 2010

GOA Spiritual Film Festival in 2005,

MS Vatavaran Film Festival 2005

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International. (2002 – 2007)

Home video: Available on DVD in premiere outlets, in India, by Shemaroo

AWARD

- CMS Vatavaran Film Festival 2005

4. THE APATANI OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH (2001)

55 min docu – film

SHOWING

India Habitat Center, New Delhi, 6 November 2002, 21st October, 2010

GOA Spiritual Film Festival in 2005

CMS Vatavaran Film Festival 2005

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International, France5. (2002 – 2007)

Home video: Available on DVD in premiere outlets, in India, by Shemaroo.

AWARD

- CMS Vatavaran Film Festival 2005

5. RAJASTHAN - A COLOURFUL LEGACY (2000)

(Creative Director)

46 min docu – film

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International, Prime TV (New Zealand), RAI (Italy), Spektrum TV (Hungary),

Ceska TV (Czech Rep), Travel Channel (UK), AIR India (2000 – 2006)

6. TRIBAL WISDOM (2000-2002)

SERIES DIRECTOR, 7 EPISODES X 55 MIN

- The Konyak of Nagaland
- The Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh
- The Baigas of Madhya Pradesh
- The Nicobarese of Car Nicobar
- The Khasis of Meghalaya
- The Irulas of Tamil Nadu
- The Rabaris of Gujarat.

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International, France 5, Al Jazeera, Twin Rambler, Tung Hoa (2002 – 2009)

7. THE ROAD TO NIRVANA (2002)

(Co-director and Camera)

56 min docu – film

SHOWING

India habitat centre, New Delhi, 3 February 2003.

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International (2003 – 2008)

NOMINATION

- The Best TV Documentary, Indian Telly Awards, 2004.

COMMUNICATION PROJECT

(Concept, Format and Treatment Design, Creative Director, Director and Post-Production)

1. HAATH SE HAATH MILAA -TV SERIES (2005 – 2006) 52 X 30 MIN

AWARDS

- Best TV programme HIV/AIDS, World Award, AIBD & UNAIDS, 2007

NOMINATION

Best non fiction, Indian Telly Awards, 2006.

TELECAST

Doordarshan

2. HAATH SE HAATH MILAA – MUSIC VIDEO(2005 – 2007) 5 MIN

AWARDS

- Best Music, Lyrics & Singers for Non-fiction, Indian Telly Awards, 2006

TELECAST

Sony TV, Doordarshan, Zee TV, Zoom TV, MTV, Channel V, Star Plus, NDTV, CNN IBN, Star News, Sahara (2006 – 2007)

THEATER RELEASE:

PVR Cinemas (2006)

TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

(Concept, Format & Treatment Design, Direction, Visualizing of Photography, Post Production)

1. INCREDIBLE INDIA (2001) 5 X 1 MIN

SHOWING

Premiered at the PATA inaugural meet in April 2002, in New Delhi.

TELECAST

International Channel worldwide.

2. AYURVEDIC KERALA (2000) 1 X 30 MIN, 1 X 20 MIN & 1X 10 MIN

AWARDS

National Tourism Award, 2001 for the best tourism promotion film

TELECAST

Premier International Channels and Travel Promoters Meets

3.INDIAN AIRLINES (2001) 1 X 60 SEC, 1 X 30 SEC, 1 X 20 SEC

TELECAST

All Premiere TV Channels in India (2001)

PROMOTIONALS FOR DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

(Creative director)

1. GO FOR DELHI (2007) 60 SEC

2. DISCOVER ANDAMAN & NICOBAR- YOUR VITAMIN SEA (2005) 60 SEC

3. THE JEWEL IN THE AGES OF TIME (2004) 10 MIN

4. THE JEWEL IN THE LOTUS (2004) 10 MIN

5. THE DOORWAY TO THE DECCAN (2002) 10 MIN

6. TOURISM -A MOVING FORCE (2001) 10 MIN

7. AN EXPERIENCE THAT IS INDIA (2001) 10 MIN

8. A TRYST WITH THE MAGICAL (2000) 15 MIN

9. PROMOTIONAL SPOTS (2000) 30 SEC

10. THE HIMALAYAN ADVENTURE (1999) 16 MIN

11. THE SPLENDID SOUTHERN SOJOURN (1998) 17 MIN

12. THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN MIST (1998) 18 MIN

13. AN ADVENTURE CALLED INDIA (1997) 14 MIN

14. THE LAST SHANGRI-LA (1997) 30 MIN

15. CITY OF TEMPLES (1997) 30 MIN

16. MAJESTICAL MYSTICAL KASHMIR (1997) 30 MIN

TRAVEL SHOWS (TELEVISION)

(Concept, Format & Treatment Design, Director, Series Director, Visualizing of Photography, Post Production, Research and Script)

1. NAMASTE INDIA (1994 – 1996)

50 X 30 min

Episodes directed:16

AWARDS

Best National Tourism Film by the Ministry of Tourism, 1997.

Best National Tourism Film by the Ministry of Tourism, 1996.

Lion's Club, Bombay Award for the ‘Best Travelogue on Television’, 1995.

Onida Pinnacle Award in “Best Director in Non-Fiction”, 1995

TELECAST

Zee TV- India & International (1995 – 2007)

2. INDIAN HOLIDAY (1997 – 1998)

39 X 30 minutes

Episodes Directed: 14

AWARDS

Best National Tourism Film by the Ministry of Tourism, 1998.

Travel and Tourism Promoters Award, 1998.

TELECAST

Sony TV- India & International, Air India (1997 – 2010)

3. YATRA- INDIAN TRAVELS (2002 - 2008)

(Creative Director)

13 episodes X 30 min

TELECAST

Discovery Channel International, Travel Channel UK, RAI (Italy), Ananey Communication (Israel), Prime TV. (New Zealand), Al Jazeera

(Pan Arab), Travel Channel (UK, Swiss TV (Switzerland) (2002 – 2008)



4. TRAVEL INDIA – THE TOP 5(2008)

13 x 30 minutes

(Creative Director)

TELECAST

Travel Channel UK, Channel News Asia (Singapore) (2008)

ENVIRONMENT SHOWS

(Concept, Format & Treatment Design, Creative Director, Set Design)

1. INDIA MAGIC (1999)

13 X 30 min

AWARDS

Best National Tourism Film by the Ministry of Tourism, 2000.

TELECAST

Sony TV- India & International (1999 – 2008)

2. HOLISTIC HEALING (2000 - 2001)

13 x 30 min

TELECAST

SABC South Africa, ERT –Photoplay Greece, Ananey Communications Israel, Planet E TV Poland. (2001 – 2007)

LIFESTYLE SHOWS

(Concept, Format & Treatment Design, Creative Director, Set Design, Celebrity interviews, Anchoring)

1. KHUBSOORAT (1999 – 2001)

112 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

Zee TV

2. BREAKFAST WITH ZEE (2000 – 2001)

154 episodes x 60 min

TELECAST

Zee TV

3. JHATPAT KHANA (1997 – 2001)

184 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

Zee TV

4. PEOPLE'S CLUB (1995 – 1996)

33 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

EL TV

5. TAKE 5

45 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

Sony TV

6. DUM DUM DEEGA DEEGA (1996)

9 episodes x 30 minutes

TELECAST

Doordarshan Metro

7. LAKME FASHION CATALOGUE (1996)

7 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

Doordarshan

8. WHIRLPOOL MERA MAGIC MERA HOME (2001)

22 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

Zee TV

9. SANGINI (2001)

114 episodes x 30 min

TELECAST

Zee TV

10. AIRTEL FREEDOM CONCERT

AWARDS

‘Onida Pinnacle Award’ for Best coverage of a live event’ 1995

TELECAST

Doordarshan

11. MALKIT SINGH - BALLY SAGOO CONCERT

TELECAST

Doordarshan

WRITING & PHOTOGRAPHY

1. TRAVELS WITH MY CAMERA: A weekly column with photographs for HT City, 2003

2. TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE ARTICLES: For various premier magazines along with photographs, 2000 onwards

3. NDTV PHOTO EXHIBITION: Participating photographer, 2010 (Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore)

4. DEVELOPING DELHI: Participating photographer, 2011 (Delhi)

**AWARDS (NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL)**

- Best TV programme HIV/AIDS, World Award, AIBD & UNAIDS, 2007.
- Best Documentary & Music, Indian Telly Awards, 2006.
- Best Music, Lyrics & Singers for Non-fiction, Indian Telly Awards, 2006.
- Best Documentary & Cinematography, IDPA 2005.
- Best Tourism Promotional, Ministry of Tourism, 2003.
- Best Tourism Promotional, Ministry of Tourism, 2002.
- Best National Tourism Film, Ministry of Tourism, 2001
- Udyog Rattan Award, 2001.
- Best National Tourism Film, Ministry of Tourism, 2000.
- Premio Televisino internazionle Award, Italy 1999.
- Travel and Tourism Promoter’s Award, 1998.
- Best National Tourism Film, Ministry of Tourism, 1997
- Best National Tourism Film, Ministry of Tourism, 1996.
- Onida Pinnacle Award for Best Director, 1995.
- Onida Pinnacle Award for Best coverage of a Live Event, 1995.
- Lion’s Club, Bombay Award for Best Travelogue, 1995.

# SOUL SURVIVORS

## WWW.SOULSURVIVORS.IN

These photographs were shot on a Canon analog SLR camera, on a 35 mm film in the years mentioned.

The photographs are limited edition prints of three per photograph printed on Hahnmuhle paper.

The first edition is exhibited between April 23 and 25, 2011. Two more prints of each photograph are available for purchase via website, email or telephonic enquiry at the details mentioned below.

## FILMS

The following DVDs by Anu Malhotra are available as Shemaroo titles in select stores in India:

1. *The Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh*
2. *The Konyak of Nagaland*
3. *The Road to Nirvana*

## REFERENCE BOOKS

*Naked Nagas* by Christopher von Furer Heimendorf

*The Nagas: Hill Peoples in Northeast India* by Julian Jacobs

*The Seven Sisters of India: Tribal Worlds Between Tibet and Burma* by Aglaja Stirn and Peter Van Ham

*Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land* by Mamang Dai

*The Hidden World of the Naga: Living Traditions in Northeast India and Burma* by Aglaja Stirn and Peter Van Ham

*Expedition Naga: Diaries From The Hills In Northeast India, 1921-1937 & 2002-2006* by Peter van Ham and Jamie Saul

## ENQUIRIES

For photographs and merchandising:

[www.soulsurvivors.in](http://www.soulsurvivors.in)

[www.anumalhotra.com](http://www.anumalhotra.com)

[www.aimtelevision.com](http://www.aimtelevision.com)

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Suneet Chopra  
Antara Datta  
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