

# Cultural significance of Handloom products and Equipments among the Adi (Minyongs) of East Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh

**Mrs. Oman Taloh**

Asst Professor, Dept. of Economics, JN College Pasighat,  
East Siang District-791102, Arunachal Pradesh,  
Email ID: otalohsiram4@gmail.com

**Abstract :** The Adi is one of the major tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis are broadly divided the Minyongs, padams, Shimongs, Millangs, Pasis, Karkos, Ashings, Pangis, Tangam, Boris, Ramos, PaiLibos and Bokars. They inhabit the present district of East Siang, west Siang, Upper Siang and some portions of Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh. The adis have been practising the art of weaving using traditional tools and equipments since time immemorial and is evolving with the changing time. The traditional handicrafts and handlooms is intertwined with the life of the Adis. The term for weaving in adi is "egaa Humnam/sumnam". Egaa here means cloth and humnam/sumnam is the process of weaving. The weaving is deeply rooted in the socio-economic and cultural setup of the Adi society since ancient times. Various traditional tools and equipment are used in order to create beautiful Gaales(wrapper), Galups(coats), Nyogons/Paayeks(bags), Gaadus(blankets), etc.

*In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the various indigenously weaved product, to explain the traditional tools and equipments used in the process of production of Handloom products and to explain the socio and cultural significance of handlooms and traditional tools on the community of the Adi ( Minyong) Tribe.*

**Keywords:** traditional Tools, Handloom products, Gaale, Galup, Gaadus, culture.

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

Weaving was practiced by the tribal's of Arunachal Pradesh since time immemorial. There are more than 26 major tribes in Arunachal Pradesh with sub tribes. They have their own traditional system of weaving cloth through loin or Backstrap loom. They are expert in the weaving of their traditional cloth which can be seen in their distinct tapestry and embroidery etched in the cloth worn by the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh,

East Siang is one of the district of Arunachal Pradesh which is predominantly resided by the Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Minyong is one of the sub tribe of the Adis. The Minyongs are known for their valour and craftsmanship. The women folks of the Minyong tribes are expert in weaving cloths. Traditionally the women folks are engaged in weaving the cloths, which may comprise of the traditional coat called 'galuk' and the 'gale' worn by the Adi's community. The traditional looms used by the Minyongs is called the **gekong-gelong**, which is a Backstrap or Loin loom used for weaving fabrics for garments viz; 'galup' and 'gaale', shawls, bags, blankets etc. Besides, for wearing purposes the culture and traditional use of the cloth may also be found. There is immense significance of handlooms and Handicrafts in the socio cultural life of the Minyongs, like during the funeral it is required for the close relatives of the deceased to present a traditional blanket for the dead. During the festivals like "Solung" and 'Aran' the men and women folks of Minyong community take delight in wearing traditional 'galup' and 'gaale', as well as they use it in performing other culturally significant rituals. Henceforth, the traditional handloom products and weaving equipments of the Minyongs has persisted not only for the economic but also because of the socio-cultural reason.

## 2. Objective of study:

- To study the various handloom products.
- To highlight traditional tools and equipments used in traditional handloom products
- To explain the Socio Cultural significance of handloom products and Equipments in the lives of Adi ( Minyong) People
- Concluding remarks

## 3. Methods used in study:

This is a conceptual paper based on the observations of the author herself being the part of the society and other various sources used in the work are based on secondary data only. The journals, published books of national and international standard, publications from Government of India and Arunachal Pradesh, articles, newspaper publications, information from Internet (Google.com), scholar etc are consulted to collect the relevant data.

For primary source of Data personal interview method was used.

## 4. Discussion and Results:

### 4.1. Various Handloom products

#### *Gaale*

The *Gaale* is the traditional dress of a Adi woman. The *Gaale* is a kind of wrapper which is worn to cover the lower body part. The length of a gaale starts from the waist and extends upto the ankle of a woman. The *gaales* are weaved into different colours but some *gaales* are weaved with some specific colored yarn which have some cultural and social significance. The gaales can be categorised into *Poreng gaales* and *Humyum gaales*.

Poreng gaales comes in different colors with different motifs and design using different colored yarns called *nomyo*. (group of three or four yarns ) They are weaved on a plain background. The motifs are normally of geometrical shapes which have a zig-zag pattern. Within that pattern there is a diamond shaped design normally coloured in white which is called as *aamik* or eyes, the design runs vertically from top to bottom on the back part of the *gaale*. The *paari* is a geometrical stripe which lies horizontally and runs lengthwise across the *gaale* from one end to the other, the width of *paari* is approximately two inches in the traditional weaving. It may be of different types namely *pyagling Gaale*, *honyi poreng*, *gaape gale*, *hoter poreng*, *tuten poreng*.

Humyum gaales comes without any design or motifs. In such type of gaales only the different colors are combined to weave under certain pattern. The main humyum gale worn traditionally by Adi women is *Gamuk Gaale* or *Ejo Gaale* . This *gaale* was traditionally worn by the elderly women in the Adi community. Unlike other gaales, *Gamuk gaale* is woven without any motifs or design. The *gaale* is weaved normally in black or blue colored background with horizontal orange stripes on it. However, nowadays the *gaale* is woven in various colors depending on the choice and availability of the yarns. This *gaale* has gained popularity among the younger generation and over the time the wearing of *gamuk gaale* has not been limited only to elderly women folks.

#### *Galups/Galuks*

The **Galups** or **Galuks** are the traditional coats weaved by the Adis since time immemorial. The Galups may be of *Milo* ( men) galup and *Mime* (women) galup. There are different types of *milo* Galups depending on their color, their design , motif type and have their own historical and social significance. Various types of galups are woven by the Minyongs are *Lupling/lukling*, *Lupmuk* , *Geget galup*, *Luplee galups*, *Noin galup*.

Mime Galup : Mime *Galup* is the coat or a blouse worn by the womenfolk of the Adis. *Mime Gaalup* are of two types. One is of a blouse type which is closed on the front side. The second one is of a coat or a Jacket type which is open on the front part of the *gaalup*. The *mime gaalup* has a geometric design with dots inside a diamond shaped motifs. This design in the form of stripes or band is made on the middle of the back below the shoulder and the design runs parallel to each other. The same design of stripe is put on the wrist or the arm length and the same band of design is kept on the lower end of the *gaalup*. On the blouse, double stripes or bands of the motif is created on the front part and for coat or

Jacket single stripe of the motif runs from one end of the *gaalup* to another end running across the nape part of the *gaalup*.

**Gaadu/Baadu :** The *gaadu* or *Gapeng* as called in Minyongs or baadu as it is called in Pasi and Padam is one of the important handloom products of the Minyong community.

The *gaadu* /baadu or *Gapeng* is a traditional blanket woven by the Adis using coarse cotton yarn ( anno ) for warp and woof thread. The Duput (coarsely spun cotton yarn ) is cut in small pieces, preferably 2 inches in length is woven onto the warp yarns.

### Paayek/Nyogons

The Adis also weave beautiful bags or *Jholas* locally known as *paayeks* or *Nyogons*. They come in different types of colours and pattern displaying the artistic skill of an Adi woman. The Adi bags are normally of three types; the first type is of a plain one which is plainly woven with single colored yarn or it maybe combined with two or more colors depending on the colour combination choice of the weaver. This is woven without any type of pattern or design. The second type of *nyogon/paayek* is woven with some geometrical pattern as in the *gaales*. Hence this type of bags are known as *poreng nyogons*. These bags have designs on the body part of the bag. The shoulder straps extends from one part of the bag to another part. This is mainly woven in plain colour which also forms the background colour for the *nyogon/paayek*. The *poreng nyogon* is woven by combining three colours of yarn. Out of the three colours, one is used as the warp for the background colour, the designs are made on the top of the warp yarn using the the remaining two colours of the yarn. The designs are created by two types of pararely running striped pattern of zigzag and diamond shaped motifs. The last type of *nyogon/paayek* is of a recent origin having floral designs and pattern on the body of the bag. This type of bag is simply known as *pool nyogon* which derived from the Hindi word for *phool* or flower. The designs weaved on such types of bags may vary from flowers to other non flower designs. The designs weaved are a product of the artistic colour combination and weaving skills of an Adi woman.

## 4.2. Traditional tools and Equipments of weaving

Traditional tools and equipments are generally known as *Gekong Gelong* in Adi

**Gobe or Gelong:** It is usually a dry bamboo beam or a warp beam usually tied in between two wooden posts of the house. This is used in order to support the warp as the warp threads are wound onto the gobe to give the warp a consistent tension.

**Gekong ( cloth beam):** this is two pieces of square shaped wood which has a tapering ends in both side of the gekong. One of this is placed in between the folds of the warp and the other is fixed with the first one, keeping the warp in between the two ( Sachin Ray )

**Taagii:** It is the rope that is fastened on the both ends of the Gobe and it runs upto both ends of the Gekong. During the period of the process of winding up of the warp threads (anno), the taaagi keeps the whole loom into proper shape.

**Getak:** This is a backstrap belt whose two ends are attached to the two ends of the gekong. This gives support to the whole loom while weaving

**Sumpaa:** This is a straight flat piece of wood with tapering ends. The size is normally of 38 inches long and around 4 to 5 inches in breadth. Traditionally sumpaa was derived from taamak tree (Fish tail palm) but nowadays, other woods are also used. The sumpaa is used for compressing the weft threads.

**Taatngeng :** It is nylon thread which holds every alternate threads of the warp.

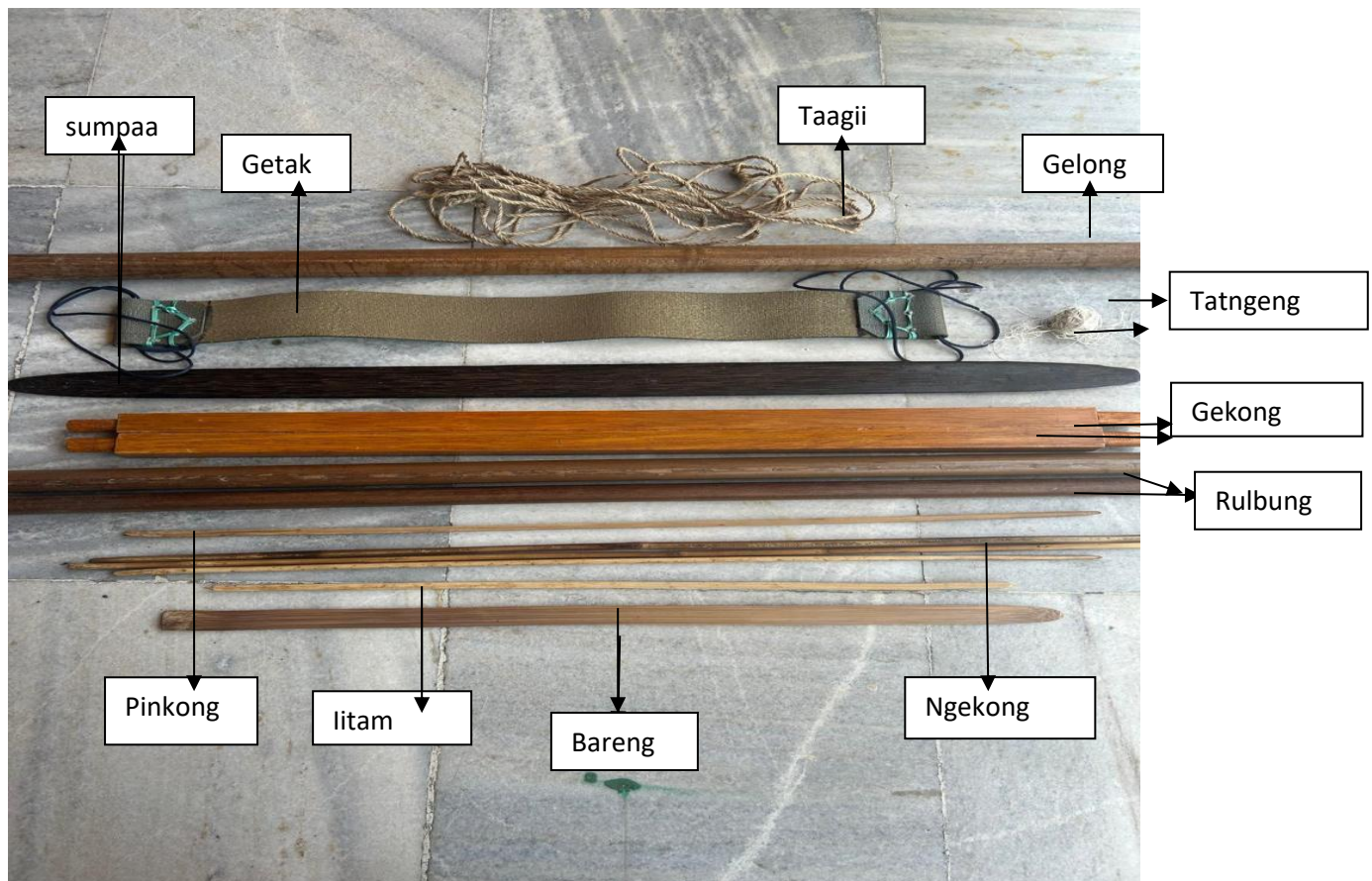
**Ngekong( Heddle ):** Ngekong is a small rounded shape long bamboo stick which holds the taatngeng together in place. This is done so that the sumpaa may easily pass between the alternate threads of the warp

**Rulbung :** It is a rounded shape stick type tool of normally 41 inches.this is placed in between the alternate threads of the warp to make a partition between the alternate warp threads

**Taakpin or pinkong:** It is a small bamboo stick used as a shuttle. The threads intended for weft/woof are wound up on the taakpin and then is used for shooting the thread of the woof /weft between the threads of the warp in weaving.

**Iitaam:** It is a small flat bamboo stick usually a size of the weaved material. The iitaam has pointed ends on both of its side and is placed on the woven part to make it uniform while weaving.

**Taakaar/ baareng:** It is a small mini sized sumpaa made of bamboo which is used while making motifs on the weaved material. It is used to make different patterns and designs in the warp threads.



Traditional Tools for weaving.

Source : photography by the Author.

#### 4.3. Significance in the socio cultural Ritual Performed by Minyongs:

##### Gaadus or Baadus used in the funerals:

The gaadu as called in Minyongs or baadu as it is called in pasi and padam is one of the important handloom product of Minyong community. It has a very significant place in the culture of Minyong people. As observed by leki Sitang, During olden times, the Adis used gaadus as blanket, mattress and coat (worn by man). As blanket it is called Yambo, ippu when used as mattress and the coat is called *lukdi* in local dialect. Earlier Gaadu as a blanket was offered to the most prestigious guest that arrived in the family. Traditionally there was no system of giving gaadu/baadu to the deaths but nowadays, it has become a tradition of covering the dead body of a deceased with gaadu( Yater Taloh). The gaadu/baadu/gapeng occupies a very significant place in the death rituals of the Minyongs. The death ritual is incomplete without a gaadu as it has become the tradition of the Minyongs to cover the dead body of a deceased with a gaadu. The gaadu blanket or Yambo that is used to cover the death one, is called as Mayet in Adi dialect. When an elderly person dies, then the near and dear ones of the deceased person mandatorily contribute a gaadu as a mark of respect to the deceased. This is done specially by the the immediate relatives, particularly the womenfolk of the deceased. If they fails

to do so then they are scorned by their relatives and even by the society. The accumulation of gaadu during funeral of the deceased is a manifestation of the love and honour that is being delegated to the deceased person.

After a person has a natural death he or she is given a proper bath and a new dress is put on. In case of an elderly person, new *gaale* and new *gaalup* will be put on the death body. The death body will then be wrapped in a *gaadu/baadu*. Traditionally the burial ground was prepared by digging downward in a rectangular shape. The dimension was usually of six to seven feet in length and one to two feet in breadth and at least six feet in depth. After that another rectangular shaped excavation is being done in one of the inner wall of the grave which is done on the basis of the size of the dead body as the body will be laid there. The area is completely cleaned up and first of all, the *gaadu* is laid on the floor as *ippu* or mattress and then the body is laid on the gaadu mattress. The body is covered with the *gaadu* other extra *gaadus*, *galups* and *gaales* are also kept with the dead body. Nowadays, the dead body is laid inside a coffin and the coffin is directly lowered down inside the grave. The coffin which is normally made of wood or plywood is covered with gaadus and then the body is put inside the coffin. The coffin is filled with not only gaadus but other essential items which the person used to use while living and also other weaved products like *gaale*, *gaalup*, *nyogon* etc

### Gaape Gaales, Red Poreng Gaale and Taamak or Maksong Sumpa

#### Ward off evil spirit and for protection from Evil spirits

When somebody from a village kills a *Myone* (Tiger) or a *taakar* (leopard), people from the village altogether with the womenfolk come out to meet the hunter. The womenfolk will come out wearing gaape gaale or red colored gaale as well as holding gaape gaale or red colored gaale along with the *taamak* (Caryota Uren/ Fish Tail Palm) *sumpa* in their hands. As they come out to meet the hunter they shout and chant war cries ho... ho... ho...ho...and perform energetic rhythmic performance in consonant with the chanting while holding the sumpaa in their hands which represent as a sword. The womenfolk would put a gaale on the one who killed the tiger and tie a *ridin* (east asian arrowroot vine) and an amulet called as *emul* is put on the neck on the neck. This is done in order to ward off the evil spirit related to the hunting of the tiger. It is believed by the Minyongs that if the reception of the hunter is not done by the proper procedure, then the spirit of the tiger may attack the hunter as well as any other person of the village. After this the hunter is not directly allowed to go to his own house but is taken to the village community hall or *dere* by the villagers. He will stay there for five to seven days and during his stay at the *dere*, again the same rituals of performing war dance will be done by the young men of the village. During his stay he will be provided food and other essential items of his need. The young men of the village will take turns and stay with the hunter and will never leave him till his designated days are fulfilled. After that he is allowed to proceed to his own house.

During the time of accident of any form, for example motor vehicle accident, injured by beast, accidentally hit by bullet during hunting etc, the relatives and the near and dear ones of the injured will come out to receive the injured. The menfolk will take *eyok* (machete) and the womenfolk will come out wearing gaape gaale or red coloured Gaale to receive the injured person. They will bring taamak sumpaa along with them while coming to receive the injured person. After receiving the injured person, he or she will be wrapped with the gaale and a taamak /maksong sumpaa will be laid above the head of the injured person. This ritual of putting on the gaale and sumpaa on the injured person tell us about the beliefs of the Minyong people regarding accidents being caused by the evil spirits. The Minyongs believe that accidents donot happen but is being caused by the *urom* (evil spirit) of *Nipong* or *Taleng* collectively known as *nipong Taleng urom*. Hence, the act is performed in order to ward off the spirit of *Nipong Taleng urom* as well as protection for the injured in particular and for the family members and visitors in general.

In some cases when a person is being possessed by a *Nipong Taleng Urom*, (evil spirit which cause unnatural death) then the Adis use the gaape gaale or red colored gaale and taamak/maksong sumpaa to ward off *Nipong Taleng Urom*. The one who is being possessed by the spirit is wrapped with the gaale and taamak sumpaa is placed over the head of the possessed person and the traditional local yeast is hanged all around him. This is done in order to ward off the evil spirit and to prohibit the evil spirit to enter into other person.

#### Handloom in Festivals and related rituals :

The Gaape Gaale and Lubling/Lukling Galup had a very special place in the festivals and its related ceremonies. The Gaape Gaale is traditionally woven with red and Black colored Yarn or *nomyo*. The motifs on the gaale is also mainly composed of red and black *nomyos* and mixed with white yarns. The Gaape gaale has got cultural significance in the

Adi community.. This gaale used to be a status symbol during the bygone days. The women from the rich families had the privilege to wear Gaape gaale. in the villages the family who used to own lots of traditional valuable items in the form of *tadoks* (local beads and necklaces) and *aarems* (brass utensils) as well as Grainstocks and Livestocks such as pigs and Mithuns known as *Eso Or Sobo* used to slay *Esos* ( Mithun/Bos Frontalis) during the *Unnying Aaran Giidii* (festival) named as *Sobo Panaam*. This was a ceremony which was done in order to appease the gumin soyin or the household diety in order to invoke blessings from the diety as well as to give a feasting to the whole village specially to the poor in the community. The *sobo paanam* ceremony during festival time was an act of social responsibility of the rich people towards the community they live. During this time the women folk of the family who fulfilled the act of Sobo paanam will dress themselves in Gaape Gaale and perform the religious ceremonies during the festival. During olden times this Gaale was not commonly worn by every women. This was a privilege earned by the women of that particular family who had carried out the act of Sobo Paanam to wear a Gaape Gaale.

The act of Sobo Paanam becomes the criteria for a man to wear a lupling/lukling Galup. Throughout the whole period of the performance of Sobo Paanam and its related ceremonies during Unnying Aaran Festival the men from the family of *Sobo Paana* ( the one who sacrifice the Mithun) will adorn themselves with Lupling/Lukling Gaalups. The Minyongs Believe that till a person performs Sobo, He is not considered as a full Male and is Not permitted to wear a Lupling/Lukling Gaalup-an Adi Coat ( Gibj Nimasow, 2015)

### Gaale in performance of ponung Dance during Solung festival

Ponung Dance is performed by the young girls during the solung festival of the Adi. The Ponung Dance is led by a *miri* ( traditional healer or Shaman). This is done by singing solung *Aabangs* (rhapsody) which narrates the mythology of Solung Festival. The Dancing takes place from 8 or 9 pm in the night and continues till 3 or 4am in the next morning. It is Believed that throughout the whole episode of ponung Dance and *solung Miiri Lunam* (singing or recitation of solung aabangs) the *miirii* leads the souls of the Ponung Dancer on an spiritual Journey. The Ponung Girsls are hence prohibited from sleeping during the whole night as long as the dance goes on because it is believed that the soul of the girl is left behind in the spiritual journey that sleeps in the midway. This kind of action may lead to early death of the concerned Girl. The *miri* will be attired with a red colored gaale irrespective of the gender. The male *miri* will also wear a red gaale which is presented by the Ponung group. The Ponung party will also compulsorily wear the traditional Gaales though it is not mandatory to wear only Red colored one. They may wear others colors deprnding on their choice. But the *Miirii* has to compulsorily wear a red colored Gaale and During the whole period of dancing which usually lasted for one to three nights the *miri* will wear the gaale. .



Solung Dance with the Miiirii in the centre.source: Google.com

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that there is a very significant relationship between handloom products and equipments and the socio cultural life of the Minyong people. The handlooms are a representation of the culture and identity of the Minyong community. In the culturally significant ritualistic performances like death rituals , rituals during traditional Ponung dance performed during Solung Festival and other rituals where the evil spirits are being ward off and for the protection of the individual and of the whole village, the utility of the handloom products cannot be undermined. The Hence it occupies a very important place in the socio cultural life and the belief system of the Adis Minyongs of East Siang.



Handloom Products : Gaales and Gaalups. Source: Photography by the Author

## REFERENCES:

1. Dr Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, 791111

2. Das, Manoj kumar,(2021) Cultural symbolism and handicrafts of traditional Artisans of India:case studies from padmashali weavers and Jaapi Artisans, International Journal of Research culture and society,Vol. 5 Issue 5
3. Nimasow.G (2015),Socio Economic Importance Of Mithun (Bos Frontalis) among the Adi Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh,India.Science and culture, July-August,2015
4. Roy, S (1960) Aspects of Padam Minyong Culture, Published by the Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh,Itanagar 791111
5. Sitang, L (2020), Siang tribes and Culture, Perspective of Tribal Culture of Siang Valley, Raghav Publications,K-1229,Mangal Puri, New Delhi-110083
6. Vide personal interview with Yatok Taloh, handloom weaver on 13/05/2025
7. Vide personal interview with Yater Taloh, search committee member, Adi Baane Kebang(ABK) on 19/05/2025
8. Vide personal interview with Talem Taloh, elderly member of Kelek Mirbuk Village on 20/05/2025