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**THE SIGNIFICANCE AND MYSTERY OF INDO PACIFIC
BEADS: THE CASE OF THE NAGA TRIBES OF NORTH
EAST INDIA¹**

Abstract

A formal pattern of bead heirlooming still exists in parts of north east India and south east Asia. The concept of handing down property from one generation to another is an ancient one. Heirloom beads were social markers announcing their wearer's social status, gender, birth, wealth, position in the society and ethnic identity. The paper will attempt to explore the similarities of heirlooming beads among the Kachin, Sumi Naga and Zeme Naga. The Kachin called it as khaji. The Sumi called it as achiku and the Zeme called it telui. Khaji are orange Indo-Pacific beads of a type traded from South east India probably between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. Cole (2008) reported that these beads were found by the Kachin and the Naga from ancient graves. These ancient graves belonged to a group of people called Siemi. Siemi intermarried with Zeme; but till date nobody knows where they went. The mystery of the disappearance of bead makers called Siemi and their intermarriage with Zeme will be discussed based on narratives collected during a short fieldwork in 2017. The paper reflects upon the concepts of Performance postulated by Judith Butler (1990) and Inscriptions, by Elizabeth Grosz (1995) to illustrate how personal adornment was used by individual or group to craft, sustain and differentiate precincts of gender, class, and marital status.

Keywords: Beads, Jewellery, Zeme naga, Sumi naga, Trade.

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The study of beads is not only about the way it was produced, or how it was used. Beads convey more about their makers and users than their history. Beads have been the subject of anthropological and archaeological attention (Bednarik 2006). My earliest memory regarding the brick-coloured beads was that of my mother's. She always wore that bead necklace around her neck. It sure looked heavy but she did not mind wearing it everyday. I could not comprehend why every woman could not help but stopped by to talk about it,

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and sometimes insisted her to sell it to them. I could not understand why she refused to exchange it for gold or silver. Only when I became an auto ethnographer, I realised its value. I came to know the meanings attached to it, and the social status it commands. In 2014, I met Catriona Child, the daughter of famous anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower in Delhi. Bower conducted anthropological fieldwork mostly among the Zemi (Zeme) in Assam. Her daughter Catriona Child has a Zeme name given to her by the Zeme people. She is fondly known as Haihangvile, which in Zeme, means good/precious to all. She frequently visits few Zeme villages in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, and fondly refer to them as her second home. In one of our meetings, Child mentioned about her being upset as she misplaced her invaluable bead necklace gifted to her by the Zeme. She went on to talk about the mysterious origin of the beads, and how her mother (Bower) had heard from the Zeme people that there were once a group of small and dark people who performed magic and possessed glass bead making technology. I quietly went to my cupboard and brought out my bead necklace gifted to me by my mother, and asked Child if hers was similar to mine. She was awestruck by the resemblance. I was enthralled; I wanted to know more about the mystery of the origin of beads. Child referred me to Barbie Cole's paper on beads. Child had also helped Cole in collecting data for her paper. I wrote to Cole requesting her to send me her full text paper on beads as my institution did not have full access to her article. Cole very promptly mailed me her article as well as pictures of various beads. Reading Cole's paper on beads was the foundation of the present paper. Her paper ended with an unanswered question as to the whereabouts of the mysterious bead makers. During the course of my fieldwork over the last four years, I came across reliable informants among the Zeme Naga. Their insights helped me to shape this paper and attempt some answers to mysterious disappearance of the bead makers. Every little thing I knew about the beads from my younger years resurfaced in my head. I wanted to research further, so I started asking questions to my older relatives over the phone, or in person while on vacation. The current paper is a result of asking questions regarding beads for the last four years. I visited few Zeme villages in Manipur - Teguarum, Impa and Tousem in 2015 and 2017. During this visit, I met elders who have good knowledge about beads and the Siemi. I also visited Sumi headquarter - Zunheboto (Nagaland) in summers of 2015, 2017 and 2019. The stories about the mysterious nature of beads were collected from elders. Narratives from both Zeme Naga and Sumi Naga were collected over the years through anthropological methods of observation, interview and photo elicitation.

Performance and Inscriptions

The beads that are worn by the Zeme Naga and the Sumi Naga are strikingly similar. They are mostly brick coloured with irregular edges. One cannot help but notice every person wearing a string or two of these beads in festivals or other auspicious programmes. These beads do not glitter and

definitely do not look expensive; but these beads are costly and often not for sale. They are mostly passed on as heirloom beads. Imitative beads have flooded the market and it is difficult to determine their authenticity. Beads like other bodily adornment are one of the means for understanding the construction of identity among the Naga tribes, be it Zeme (or Zemi) or Sumi (previously known in colonial writings as Sema).

Adornments are used to create and negotiate self-identity and group affiliations intersecting with gender, class, and marital status. Ornaments worn in the past of utmost importance as it reflect cultural ideas about entwined construction of identity. Identities define a person as part of a group, and characterize a person as separate and different from other groups. This contradictory nature of identity construction is embodied in clothing and adornments, through which people attempt to convey their own uniqueness.

The concepts of Performance postulated by Judith Butler (1990) and Inscriptions, by Elizabeth Grosz (1995) provide how personal adornment was used by individual or group of people to create, sustain and differentiate precincts of gender, class, and marital status. The concept of performance describes identity as integrated into the self through acts and gestures that occur on the surface of the body (Butler 1990). The act of getting dressed is a repetitive ritual and is part of the performance of identity. Clothes and other items of personal adornment become part of the body. The performance of the gender is created as a 'stylization of the body and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (Butler 1990). The body is the ground in which the socio-political exteriority creates interiority. Interiority is produced through the 'inscriptions of the body surface' (Grosz 1995). Bodily inscriptions secure social integration and it serves to uphold the ideas held by the society as a whole on the surface of the body. Inscriptions may be on the bodily surface but they create individuality and consciousness. It is in this sphere that physical inscriptions on the body contribute to creation of interior ideas about identity and group affiliations. Inscription on the body is not complicated. According to Grosz (1994), anything that come into contact with the surface of the body and remained there for long will be incorporated into the body image. These could be jewellery, clothing and other accessories. For the Naga tribes, the beads that they proudly wore on the surface of their body, convey unspoken meanings and attributes of status to the wearer.

Not more than few decades ago, the Naga tribes decorated their bodies and inscribed themselves with colourful adornments. They defined themselves and constructed themselves along lines of gender, class and age. Adornments in the form of necklace of beads, head gear and earrings, arm gauntlets, scarlet sash, shawls and wrap-around cloth were used to convey the means and status of a person in the society. According to available British colonial literature, it was learnt that the British observed that beads known as *Deo moni*, 'god beads', 'spirit stones' were the most highly prized among other personal adornments.

The Zeme Naga

The Zeme is a Naga tribe inhabiting the states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur in India. In Assam they are known as Zeme, in Nagaland they are Zeliang but in Manipur they were known as Kaccha Nagas until 2011. One British Anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower¹ (1950a, 1950b, 1953) published works on the Nagas where many instances and encounters with Zeme people have found ways into her books. My encounter with Zeme Naga started with my marriage to a Zeme man from Manipur. Despite both of us being Naga, there were so much of differences – language, cuisine, attire, etc. One thing that struck me while studying them, is the consistent use of teknonymic kinship terms. Teknonyms are the recognition and assertion that the person addressed, or referred to, is a mother or father (Bloch 2006). The system of teknonymic nomenclature is quite simple among the Zeme. At birth each person is given a personal name, by which he is called until he marries and has a child. Soon after the arrival of his/her child, people begin addressing and referring to him as ‘Father-of-So-and-So’, employing his child’s personal name. The wife, likewise, becomes ‘Mother-of-So-and-So’, with the result that man and wife now have essentially the same name. It is said that it is discourteous to use a person’s childhood name instead of his teknonymous name. Clifford Geertz (1964) reported similar extensive usage of teknonymy in Bali. Among the Balinese, an individual’s name may shift as many as four times during the course of his life. Since not only a personal name is employed, but also always a status term – ‘Father-of’, ‘Grandfather-of’, ‘Great-grandparent-of’ – the name indicates each person’s current familial status. Everyone is categorized by his teknonym into a set of generational classes, i.e., children, parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. For the Zeme Naga, teknonymy has the function of focusing attention on the marital couple as joint procreators by classifying them together socially under the single name of their child, and setting them apart from the immature, the childless, and the aged, but lacks the two other implications as found in Bali. A similar instance can be found among the Penan of central Borneo as reported by Needham (1954).

The Zeme Naga value the brick-coloured beads which they proudly wear on their neck. Unlike, the Sumi Naga, where beads are inherited by daughter from her mother, the Zeme Naga passed on their precious beads from father to son. In the Zeme village I went, I came across more men wearing strings of beads which are commonly known as *telui*.

The Sumi Naga

Sumi is one of the major Naga tribes settled in the state of Nagaland. In the colonial literature (Hutton 1921), they were known as the ‘Sema Naga’. The Sumi people felt that the word ‘Sema’ had no meaning and thereby decided to replace it with the original term ‘Sumi’. If the kinship terms of the Zeme are so limited, then the kinship term used by the Sumi are so extensive that

each relative has a particular term of reference, except for parallel cousins. I belong to a Sumi Naga tribe where the social position of a person was known based on the ornaments and attire he adorns. But that was before the advent of Christianity; that was before the meanings got shifted. In the past, each personal adornment had significance and symbolic aspects attached to it. For a woman to wear necklace of beads, headgear, earrings and beaded skirt, she has to be either a daughter or a wife of a Chief or a warrior. As for men, only the warriors and those who have completed feast of merit were eligible to adorn themselves with headgear (made of bear skin and hornbill feather), ivory tusk, cowrie gauntlet, cowrie shell apron, scarlet chest sash and so on. Later on, in the contemporary, these attires are now limited only to folk dance and festive occasions. Out of various items of personal adornments, *achiku* (beads) is still highly valued. It has now become more of heirloom that is passed on from a mother to her daughter or son as per her discretion. Barbie Cole (2008) mentioned that the *deo moni* beads found among the Naga tribes by the colonial writers has striking similarities with that of *khaji* found among the Kachins of Myanmar. There is a possibility that *deomoni* and *khaji* are one and the same if we have to go by Cole's research. If that is true then, could they be passed off as Indo-Pacific beads? I have decided to use the term Indo-Pacific beads for *telui* (found among the Zeme Naga), *achiku* (found among the Sumi Naga) and *khaji* (found among the Kachin).

Indo-Pacific beads as Heirloom Beads

The term 'Indo-Pacific beads' is short for "Indo-Pacific Monochrome Drawn Glass Beads". These beads are made from tubes drawn by the Lada process (Francis 1991). Indo-Pacific beads are considered to be the most common single trade item in the ancient world. Many scholars have attempted to trace their origin; the best guess was they were from southern part of India. Peter Francis traced the origin of Indo-Pacific beads for more than ten years. He mentioned about a village named Papanaidupet in Andhra Pradesh, where Indo-Pacific beads were made using Lada technique. There are striking similarities of heirloom beads among the Kachin, Sumi Naga and Zeme Naga. The Kachin called it as *khaji*. The Sumi Naga called it as *achiku* and the Zeme Naga called it *telui*. *Khaji* are orange Indo-Pacific beads of a type traded from South east India probably between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 (Cole 2008).

The concept of handing down property from one generation to another is an ancient one. A formal pattern of bead heirloom still exists in parts of north east India and south east Asia. Heirloom beads were social marks announcing their wearer's social status, gender, birth, wealth, position in the society and ethnic identity. Heirlooms are maintained in circulation for many generations because they possess an inordinate value to their respective owners (Lillios 1999). Heirlooms are objects of memory, that evoke sentimental feelings a person may have had for a particular parent or grandparent; it also represents

links to an ancestral past. In order to call an object an heirloom, we need to focus not on the essential quality of that object, but primarily on how that object is treated by its owner. It is said that an object can shift from an heirloom state to non heirloom commodity state, and vice versa.

The heirloom beads were frequently referred to in colonial literature, although the materials from which they were made was little understood. Pemberton (1873) reported that the ornaments generally worn by the Kachin are amber earrings, silver bracelets, and necklaces of beads, a good deal resembling coral, but of yellowish colour, these are so much prized that they sell for their weight in gold. A Kachin woman's prized ornament is a *khaji*- a necklace of terracotta coloured stones which is difficult to obtain and are kept as heirlooms in a family (Carrapiet 1929). Lords and rich people wear round their neck a string of precious pearls, kasha of a yellow colour. A small opaque orange glass beads were ancient pacific beads. How come Indo-Pacific beads reached far north of Burma to become their heirloom beads of the Kachin?

Like the Kachin, the Naga tribes also value the orange coloured opaque beads which are known by different terms in different tribes. Some author use 'Indo-Pacific beads' as generic term for not only orange coloured beads but other colours as well. In the British colonial literature, the term often used to describe the Indo-pacific beads is *deo moni*. Cole (2008) reported that the Indo-pacific beads found among the Sema Naga and Rengma Naga are larger in size. The Sumi Naga calls it *achiku*. The Indo-Pacific beads are used as heirloom among the Sumi Naga, whereby a daughter inherits the necklace from her mother. It is a prized possession worn only by people of higher status achieved through headhunting prowess or feat of merit. Only the daughters and wives of such successful person were eligible to wear such necklaces. Marriage for Sumi Naga is a costly affair. The concept of bride-wealth used to be practised. There were three tiers of bride-wealth according to the number of mithuns (*bos frontalis*) the prospective groom can bring. It was the responsibility of the bride's family to arrange precious *achiku* and other accessories for her. Whenever a mithun is given as a part of bride wealth, it was compulsory for the bride to bring precious *achiku* to her marital home.

Beads worn by the Sumi Naga and the Zeme Naga

Among the Sumi Naga, there are various types of beads. *Achiku* is a brick-coloured bead, considered as the most costly one among the beads. Its size is bigger than *Achipu* and *achixathi*. *Achipu* is also a bead but inferior to *Achiku* in its size and colour. It is paler than *Achiku* and could be considered as pale brown in colour. *Achixathi* can be considered as the smallest bead of all the beads. It is somewhat reddish but not as red as *Achiku*. Some women prefer to mix all three and wear, whereas some prefer not to mix. Along with these different beads, some large beads of black and white colour are used for complimenting the mentioned beads. *Achipala* is a necklace that has various

strings of carnelian beads. The beads in this necklace are long cylindrical and are black, white and red in colour. The bones of the animals were used in making small rectangular flat boards with holes pierced to support the strings of beads. *Achigho* is another necklace of beads that can be worn by those who have complete set of necklaces. It is tied on the throat. Hutton (1921) reported that the Sumi always put the bead necklace around the neck of dog before putting on his neck; so that should there be evil in the beads, it may affect the dog and not the wearer. The necklace of beads worn by Sumi women have now become more of heirloom. The mother gifts it to her daughter on the latter's marriage. However, if the daughter happened to marry a man who has no means to offer bride wealth, then the bead necklace is not given to the daughter but to the son.

Among the Zeme Naga, the bead necklace is passed through male line. I happened to come across a Zeme Naga man named Hailei at Impa village in 2017. He was wearing a single string of coarse brick-coloured beads with wild boar tusk at regular intervals. On my enquiry, he gladly removed his necklace and allowed me to photograph it. He told me that the necklace was given to him by his late father, a family heirloom which has been passed on for many generations. The beads bear striking resemblance to the beads worn by the Sumi Naga. The only difference is the size of the beads. The Zeme man's beads were smaller and more polished in size. However, my suspicion was proved right, as the man disclosed to me that the beads were bigger in size but over the period of many years of constant wearing round the neck, the size of the beads has decreased. For Zeme, *telui* (beads) is very much a part of their culture. There are folk songs and psalms that revolve around *telui*, its worth being compared to exceptionally beautiful maiden.

The origin of Indo-Pacific beads (Khaji, Achiku, Telui, Deo Moni)

My grandmother was born in 1911. She was fond of *achiku*. In fact in her early 20s she found 5 beads (*achiku*) stuck between the rocks. She carefully took out these beads only to realize she had accidentally found the original and highly valuable *achiku*. Her father kept pursuing her to sell him the beads. She refused as it was very difficult to buy or get the original beads like hers. However, her father kept on pushing her to sell him the beads, so finally she sold the beads to her father for Rs. 5 each.

The Sumi Naga claim that *achiku* is found beneath or between rocks, or sometimes beneath shrubs, while some people believed that only fortunate people could see beads bearing trees. A Sumi businessman who makes traditional adornments stated that most of the beads he used are brought from the southern side of Nagaland particularly from among the Zeliang² tribe. J.H. Hutton (1921) claimed that the Angami Naga wore beads which were actually made by the kacha Naga. Kacha Naga³ is no more used in official documents. It was a term used by the British Administration to denote tribes

like Zeme and Liangmei. Is it possible that the Zeme is the only Naga tribe that possessed the glass-making technology? From whom did they learn the art of making beads? Before answering these questions, let us take a look into the origin of the Indo Pacific beads. The Kachin and the other Naga tribes did not possess glass bead making technology. However, they are very fond of the beads. Various theories have been floated as to explain the origin of the Indo-Pacific beads.

1. *Borrowing by insects*

Kachin believed that *khaji* (indo-pacific beads) are made from naturally occurring extrusion found underground and already pierced for threading. Some claim they are sometimes found beneath 'mounds in the ground' as if made by burrowing insects; found occasionally in the stomach of jungle fowl (Cole 2008). For Sumi Naga, the origin of the beads they value so much is not very clear. Some said, the red coloured beads were only found by few lucky people in the jungle, fields, rocks, and caves. There was a story of one Sumi man, who went for hunting. During the hunt, it started raining heavily so he took shelter in a cave. While waiting for the rain to subside, he chanced upon bright red coloured glorious beads in between the rocks inside the cave. He used his hunting spear to pick up one big bead and decided to take the remaining after his hunting expedition. After some days, he came back to the same cave, but the beads were nowhere to be seen. There is also a story of one woman who happened to come across beads in her agricultural field. Since she was carrying her baby, she urinated over the beads, went back to keep the baby in the hut. It is said that finding beads in unlikely places was very rare and unless one claim ownership over it, it will disappear. It was also considered inauspicious to pick the rare beads while carrying a baby. That was why the woman claimed her ownership by urinating over it and placed the baby in the hut before retrieving the beads.

2. *Trade*

The Naga tribes living in close proximity with the plains maintained a limited contact with the kingdoms of Ahom, Kachari and Koch. The Naga exchanged their jhum filed products like ginger, wild cotton, for salt, metals, shells, beads (Cole 2008). The Naga tribes were and are very fond of wearing ornaments which not only include beads but ivory tusk and horn, feathers, etc. But among the ornaments, the Nagas highly valued *deo moni*. Apart from their trading contacts, the origin of *deo moni* beads is quite obscure. The Naga tribes did not possess glass-making technology; therefore, it is argued that perhaps the *deo moni* beads must have originated from other countries and brought to the present Nagaland via traders. J.H.Hutton (1921a) mentioned in his book on the Angami Naga that the trade in shells and beads was quite popular among the Angami Naga. A group of villagers go down to Calcutta to

trade and come back through Burma and Manipur. Usually this kind of group comprise of one man who perhaps being able to speak a little bad Assamese or worse Hindi

3. *Ancient graves*

Cole (2008) reported that these beads were found by the Kachin and the Naga from ancient graves. These ancient graves belonged to a group of people called Siemi. Siemi intermarried with Zeme Naga; but till date nobody knows where they went. Anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower in her book 'Naga Path' (1950) mentioned about the Siemi. The Zeme people believe that the Siemi preceded them in the occupation of the territory. The Zeme people believe that Siemi possessed beads making technology. In one Zeme village called Nchubunglua (literally means 'land of stone jar') in Assam, the remnants of Siemi culture can still be seen in the form of stone jar, even today. According to the Zeme, Siemi must have used the same drilling process of making beads to bore a hole in the stone. The Siemi bury their dead along with a bamboo container of beads. Hence the appearance of beads over their graves. Bower (1950) also mentioned that the Siemi were magicians too and could conceal their graves by splitting rocks and sealed them up again after placing their dead inside. They were also able to cause great stones to fly from distance and pile up over the grave through incantation. They sealed the graves so that the exact position could not be found by others.

The mysterious case of the Siemi people

Bower (1950) reported that the Siemi were an uncanny race; they were magicians, 'small and dark'. They lived in the forested hills and by a secret process, they were able to make beads by using fire. No one exactly knows the process of making beads as the Siemi people refused to disclose to their neighbouring tribes.

"One day when the Siemi of a village near the present Guilong were making beads, the smoke of their fires poured up in such volume, a smoky haze, that it was seen by the Kacharis. The king, his curiosity rose, sent men into the unknown hills to find out what was burning. When they came back with the group of captured Siemi, the king demanded who and what they were. They answered that they were jungle people, that they did not live by digging, or cultivation, but that they make, and traded the yellow beads, and from this derived a living. At this, the king insisted that they tell him the process. The Siemi refused" (Bower 1950:112).

It is believed that Zeme Naga learned the technique of making glass beads from Siemi people. However, they are contrasting stories as to whether the Siemi actually taught the art of making beads to the Zeme Naga. Catriona Child⁴, daughter of an anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower shared a bead story from Laisong in Assam. It goes that a Siemi man agreed to teach the Zeme Naga to make the *deomoni* beads. While teaching Zeme, the Siemi were cooking a cockerel. Siemi asked Zeme to taste the cockerel meat. Zeme

tasted and ate all the liver. Siemi said that if the Zeme will not share all the liver with me, I will not share the secret of how to make the *deomoni* beads. Siemi had said the *deomoni* beads were made by using bamboo⁵. This particular bamboo is known as *gareu* in Zeme language. It is said that *gareu* does not grow in the wild but only near human settlement. This species of bamboo is also used by the Zeme for construction of thatched house till today. Wherever there is new settlement, they take this species of bamboo along with them and plant for future use. It is also said that the Siemi used one particular wood called *Ngaising* as one of the raw materials. It is said that *ngaising* wood is dark reddish in colour and the toughest known wood found in the Zeme country. This wood is used for making pestle to pound paddy.

A person from Teguaran village in Manipur claimed that he is the 14th generation of a Siemi-Zeme intermarriage. A Zeme man name Izeing married a Siemi woman. Izieng urged his siemi wife to teach him how to make beads. His wife finally agreed to teach him how to make beads but she did not teach him how to pierce hole in the beads. It seems Izieng continued to work hard on the beads, trying to pierce hole, eventually he succeeded but gave up making beads as it was considered to be very time consuming and tedious.

Barbie Campbell Cole (2008) wrote a well-researched paper on heirloom Beads of the Kachin and Naga. She discussed about the mystery disappearance of the bead makers Siemi. Recent Naga authors (Jimomi 2018) mentioned that the vanquished Siemi migrated eastward and settled in Maikhel. It is said that most of the Naga tribes originated from Maikhel, including Zeme Naga. In December 2017, I chanced upon a knowledgeable man at Impa village (Zeme Naga village), Manipur. He disclosed to me that the Siemi people had close relationship with Zeme people in the past. There were inter-marriages (Cole reported the same thing). In fact, when the chief of the Siemi people died, he was buried in Impa village land. I personally could not go and see the grave but I was told that it was more than ten kilometres away through dense jungle. I was told that till today, some people find beads whenever they pass through the grave or whenever they cultivate on the area. There was one incident where some mischievous young men tried to dig the grave but were unsuccessful. In fact, all of them had nightmares the same night about the grave. This story spread like wild fire and fear was instilled that till now, nobody dared to touch or go near the grave which is supposed to be of Siemi chief.

The Siemi people dispersed after the death of their chief and nobody knows the whereabouts of them. The only testimony to their inter-marriages was the living descendants of such union who are settled in Tousem sub division under Tamenglong district of Manipur. In fact, my key informant said that the subdivision Tousem was named after Siemi people. Another twist to the mystery of the disappearance of the Siemi came to light in December 2018; a knowledgeable man from Tousem village confided that the Siemi were captured

and tortured by the British during colonial rule in India. It was believed that the Siemi refused to divulge their glass bead making technology to the rulers for which they suffered consequences. That could be one of the possible reasons of their mysterious disappearance, as per oral tradition of the Zeme, the last group of people who saw the Siemi alive.

Concluding remarks

The disappearance of Siemi people without a trace is still a mystery. Some said they were wiped out by the Kacharis (Bower 1950), while some said they were tortured by the British for not disclosing the secret of bead-making technology. Their glass bead making technology was also questioned regarding its authenticity. Irrespective of whether the beads which are highly regarded among the Naga tribes are imitative or genuine, the significance of beads and the social status it enforces are more important than the object itself. Be it Kachin or Zeme Naga or Sumi Naga, the privilege to own beads is in itself an achievement as it confirms and signifies their social position in the society.

Times have changed, the significance of traditional personal adornments has shifted or not counted anymore, however, the heirlooming practice still continues more as objects of memory. Weiner (1985) argued that heirlooms have the power to define who one is in an historical sense. The objects are like vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that histories of ancestors or mythological events become intimate part of a person's present identity.

The Naga tribes did not have the technology to make glass. However, their fondness for ornaments led them to barter their field products with traders. Hutton (1921) mentioned that the trade in shells and beads and shaping shells into popular forms was in the hands of village Khonoma. The villagers go to as far as Calcutta to trade and return via Burma and Manipur. This is a reminder that Naga tribes were not isolated in the past but were in constant interaction with other non-Nagas and traders.

As Bednarik (2006) pointed out, beads do not only indicate simply bodily adornments. The technological deduction beads give us are of great importance but of the more importance are the cultural and cognitive deductions they make possible. In human culture, various forms of meaning may be encoded in such objects as well as other kinds of body adornments like tattoos, and body paint. Beads sewn onto apparel or worn on necklaces may signify complex social economic, ethnic, ideological, religious, or emblematic meanings, all of which are accessible to a participant of the culture in question. Without understanding the contextual interpretation and symbolic significance, beads are entirely piece of objects. I have never regretted choosing bead necklace of my mother over gold. The bead necklace I inherited from my mother has become an object of memory of my mother's sacrifice and resilience and will continue to inspire me even after her death.

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Notes

1. Zeme and Liangmei tribes are known as Zeliang in the state of Nagaland. The same tribes were called Kacha Naga in Manipur for many years until 2011. In Assam, the Zeme people are known as Zemi.
2. The term Kacha Naga was considered derogatory and hence the name was rectified as Zeme, Liangmei by an act of Parliament THE CONSTITUTION (SCHEDULED TRIBES) ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2011.
3. Personal communication through email dated 12/08/2018.
4. This ties in with the Zemi belief that the special bamboo that was always found near Siemi graves was somehow linked to the making of the bamboo.

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