Chapter 6

Material Culture

Material culture refers to the material artefacts which human group create to ameliorate his position in his environment. The study of material culture helps in the understanding of subsistence activities, ritual, art and various other activities of a concerned group.

When segments of society face substantially different kinds of socio-technological environments, subcultures grow up to help them adapt to these unique problems. Subcultures share in the overall culture of society, but also maintain a distinctive set of values, norms, life-styles, and even language. This cultural development based upon technological practices should not be termed as countercultures: though the latter is followed by the groups that largely have values, interests, beliefs, and life-styles that mainly differs exactly contradicts with those of the larger culture. Culture provides solutions to common and not-so common problems. The solutions devised by societies are immensely variable. Part of this variation can be explained by unique environment conditions. Other conditions that produce diversity include isolation, technology, diffusion, and dominant cultural themes. Each of these conditions affects the elaboration of culture and development of society (Thakur 2008).
As Miksic (1995) points out that in the study of Southeast Asia the study of sub-regions assume a greater importance, as does the nature of processes which have permitted or encouraged their perpetuation. This is applicable to North-East India too because it is a home to several communities having their own distinct culture.

Sinopoli (1991) stressed that documentation of the range of productive systems in South Asia can broaden our perspective of prehistoric productive systems in general. The information that ethnoarchaeology can provide about raw materials, the techniques necessary to form craft goods, and material residues of these techniques has clear relevance for archaeological studies.

Material culture sheds light on how people understood themselves. Objects and their combinations can evoke the atmosphere of a house or room (Grassby 2005). In the construction of both specific and general ethnographic analogies, any and all description of material culture, economics, settlements, and so forth, will remain useful. The early call for ethnoarchaeological research argued for a systematic collection of such information by archaeologists. These ethnographically collected data were seen to be useful in better understanding the classification and function of archaeological items (Griffin and Solheim 1982). The study of material culture is a very valuable means of approach to the study of social behaviour.

6.1. Local Technology

Technological choices are determined by local environmental factors. Nature has bestowed on the land of Arunachal Pradesh diverse vegetation. The topography, the climate and the ecology played an important role in determining the material culture and the technological
development of the tribes residing there. Arunachal Pradesh is mostly covered with sub-tropical humid climate where the nature has bestowed copiously bamboo and cane. The different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh had enough control over nature so that a great variety of resources could be exploited. They are expert in different technologies from bamboo and cane to metal-work.

The Apatanis, Adis (Galos and Minyongs), Nyishis and Hill Miris are specialists in the art of bamboo and cane articles. The Monpas and the Sherdukpens are skilled in the art of carpet-weaving and silver articles. The Wancho and the Nocte tribes are an expert in the art of woodcarving. The Khamtis are also popular for their wooden sculptures of Lord Buddha and in crafting gold, iron and ivory. Idu Mishmi tribe is famous for their bead-work and metal work. The Singphos, the Noctes, the Tangsas, and the Wanchos are famous for their highly decorated machete (*daos*).

Raw Materials

The raw materials used by them are mostly organic materials which do not survive in the archaeological record. The region occupied by them is abundant in bamboo, wood and cane.

Bamboo

Bamboos are distributed throughout the state in different altitudinal zones. The copious availability of bamboo has made them heavily dependent on it for their survival. Bamboo is an essential resource for them. Bamboo is deep rooted in their culture and tradition. It is used in every possible way such as construction of house, household goods of daily use like baskets and containers of different shapes and sizes, hunting gears, fishing traps, snares,
mats, fuel, *dao* sheaths, ritual-altars and even used as food. Fine strips of bamboo are used to tie.

Bamboo is extensively used for religious purposes. All the religious paraphernalia, the altars and the images representing various spirits are made of bamboo. During Mopin, the biggest festival of the Adi-Galos, altars of the deities are made of bamboos and leaves. Bamboo shavings are used as headgears and accessories by the `Poonuu` dancers. A large part of the Adi-Galo hunting tool kit consist of bamboo made tools.

Apart from making tools, bamboo is also used for cooking purpose. Cooking in bamboo receptacle is still practiced on many occasions which seem to be one of the age old practices still followed even in the modern times. Big bamboo receptacles are also used for carrying and storing water and small hollow bamboo tubes are used for drinking purpose. Bamboo is also a much preferred food item for them. As a food item, it is cooked in different ways in different forms.

**Wood**

Apart from bamboo another important raw material is wood which is also used widely by them. Its main use is in the construction of house. Every Adi-Galo house has a wooden mortar and pestle. For mortar a round- shaped solid block of wood is made hollow in the centre and for the pestle an elongated wood with the length of about 1.5 m with bulbous end is used. They mainly use the wooden mortar and pestle for pounding rice. Rice powder is an important ingredient in every occasion.
Cane

It can be used to make baskets of different shapes and sizes. Baskets made of cane gives a smooth finishing. The procurement and processing of cane is an arduous undertaking.

Matured cane collected from the forest is trimmed and then twisted round in several coils. The coils are then kept on the drying rack over the fire-place for some days. The constant smoke from the hearth seasons the cane, making it durable and insect-proof. The fine strip of cane is then soaked in water to further strengthen them.

6.1.1. Basketry

The basketry technique occupies an important place in their technological development. Basketry includes rigid and semi rigid containers or baskets proper, matting and bags. As Driver points out all forms of basketry are manually produced without any frame or loom (Driver 1961).

The raw materials used for basket-making are easily available from the forest. Both cane and bamboo which occupies a vital place in the material culture of the Adi-Galo tribe are extensively used for basketry (Fig.6.1).

Certain socio cultural restrictions are to be maintained for collection of materials from the forest. The raw materials when matured are collected in full moon days because if collected in new moon days the materials are often infected by insects and do not last longer. Both bamboo and cane are seasoned properly by indigenous methods before using it for basket-making.
The baskets found in Arunachal Pradesh are varied in nature. The baskets differ in shape, size and technique depending on the utility (Fig. 6.2 a, b; Fig. 6.3 & 6.4). Baskets are used for daily purpose as well as for ritual purpose (Fig. 6.5 a, b, c). They have specific type of baskets for specific purpose. Baskets are provided with straps for carrying grains, firewood, and vegetables.

- **Vbar**

  This basket is conical in shape provided with a strap. It is primarily used for carrying firewood.

- **‘Igin**

  This basket is also conical in shape made by fine bamboo and cane strips and provided with a strap. The use of this basket is multipurpose. It is used mainly for carrying grains and storing. ‘Igin is made only by specialized basket makers.
- `Ginci

It is a type of `igin but smaller in size. It is mainly used for carrying vegetables and to carry fish at the time of fishing.

- Popir

These baskets are made funnel – shaped. These are used as straining baskets during the preparation of the indigenous drink.

- Dohi – `ginci

It is a type of basket which is only used during rituals. These baskets are not used for any other purpose. These baskets are decorated with bamboo shavings and smeared with rice-paste during ritual ceremonies.

- Paapee

Making paapee does not require highly specialized basket making skill. These baskets can be made on the spot itself at the time of need with least material and skill. These baskets can be of various sizes. The big ones are mainly used for storing rice and husk ash mixture for fermentation. The smaller ones are used for packing different items like dry meat and also to pack oranges etc.

Bamboo tubes are also used to carry water which is called Kaamtu (Fig.6.6 & 6.7).

For basketry- making very less tools are required. The tool involved in the production of basketry is limited to dao and knife which explains the craft skill of the Adi-Galo. More than tools the skill is employed. They must have been following this tradition for a considerable
Fig. 6.2 a & b: Different bamboo baskets for different purposes

Fig. 6.3: Bamboo strainer for making Opo

Fig. 6.4. Aluminium strainer as substitute
a. Baskets for storing
b. Baskets for carrying

c. Baskets for ritual purpose (*Dohi-ginci*)

Fig. 6.5a-c: Baskets used for different purposes
Fig. 6.6: Bamboo tube (Kaamtu) for carrying water

Fig. 6.7: Aluminium Kaamtu
Fig. 6.8: Bamboo containers for daily use

period of time which made them such an expert that even with a very limited tool at their hands they could produce such an array of fine and finished basketry items.

Apart from baskets common household utensils for daily use like containers for salt, chilli powder, seeds etc. are all made of bamboo (Fig.6.8).

Cane and bamboo are also used to make backpack (rajacv), dao sheath (hobuk), hat (boolup) without which a traditional Adi-Galo man does not leave the house. The plaiting of dao sheaths are noteworthy examples of varied use of basketry technique. The use of bamboo and cane is not confined to the manufacture of basketry and household objects. These are also used in the construction of bridges even suspension bridges.

Apart from bamboo, mature gourds are also used as containers. Once gourd become mature, it is kept in the rack over the fireplace, as smokiness hardens the gourd (Fig.6.9).
• `Ujuk

It is made of mature gourd. It is used to pour water or `pookaa.

• `Cugrii

It is used as a container for drinking `pookaa. During the time of important ritual, elders of the family and the village were served in `cugrii. Apart from drinking vessel these gourds are used in ritual as a part of the altars (Fig. 6.10 & 6.11).

Fig. 6.9(a): `Ujuk and `Cugrii
Weaving

The Adi-Galo loom is primitive and the weaving tools are made of bamboo, wood and cane. Spinning and weaving constitute an important occupation in their traditional society. Every household in the village has their own indigenous weaving set. The apparatus are primitive. The Adi-Galo women are excellent weavers. The different tools that constitute an Adi-Galo loom are given in Table 6.1 and Fig. 6.10b.

Table 6.1: Shows different parts of Galo loom and the material out of which it has been made

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Names</th>
<th>Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gven</td>
<td>Cane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gvgur</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itam</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loomee</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1.3 Metal work

Blacksmith and metal work is also prevalent in the Adi-Galo society. Their migration history is associated with iron, silver, brass items and beads.

They had their own metal industry locally known as `Rogmo or Yogmo which comes from the term “orok/oyok”. They believe that it is a specialized job and only people blessed with special power can be qualified to undertake this profession. The metal work mainly dealt with iron and brass items.
The process of making brass items is called `yvbo-cvnam. They believe that only people blessed by the supernatural power can succeed to become a good metal worker. In Adi-Galo folklore, Ninur, one of the sons of Abo Tani was a great metal worker himself. Discontinuance of local backsmithy in the region is due to availability of mechanized implements and loss of knowledge of smithery.

During field work conducted, the researcher was informed by the villagers that pottery was practiced on a very small scale. Pots were only made by the female folk; it was tabooed for the men to make pottery. They call the pottery as takam pwcww (clay pot) but the use of pottery was not popular among them. Continuation of the practice of cooking in bamboo may indicate to the popular use of bamboo among them for cooking even in the prehistoric times; it was convenient for them to get bamboo which was so readily available with low energy input than going to river bank to collect clay and go through the arduous process of making pottery.

6.2. Inherited Antiquities

There are certain items in the material culture of the Adi-Galos which hold great importance in their society. They are not only the property item but also their identity. These are inherited by them. As per their oral tradition these materials were brought along with them at the time of migration and those antiquities are passed on from generations to generations. Two of these objects are the beads and the brass objects.

6.2.1. Beads
Beads are considered as precious possessions by them. Beads are worn by both the genders during marriage, festivals, feasts and rituals. Beads can be worn by all married, unmarried and even widows on special occasions. Usually beads are handed down from mother to the eldest daughter. It is highly valued not only for its economic value but they believe that these beads were brought by their forefathers when they migrated from their homeland to the present region. Therefore, these beads are not only symbolic of wealth but also of their identity. Beads of different colour and shapes are found among them. The beads are strung in a single strand or as many as 10 strands (Table 6.2 & Fig.6.11).

Table 6.2: Shows the important beads of the Adi-Galos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Name</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Worn by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>Bugji-</code>lwwkvr</td>
<td>Multi-coloured</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>Doglu-</code>lwwkvr</td>
<td>Light Blue</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>Dognv</code></td>
<td>Multi-coloured</td>
<td>Both Men &amp; Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>Dognv-</code>bvlvv`</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>Duulii</code></td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumii</td>
<td>Multi-coloured</td>
<td>Both Men &amp; Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumpuu</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>Haar-</code>bvlvv`</td>
<td>Transparent dark green</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hwwji-`lwwkvr</td>
<td>Multi-coloured</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>Mampuu</code></td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlww</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apart from beads, necklaces made of coins and silver like Tompila (coins and silver), Pason (silver) Golpotaa (coins and silver) and Modalii are also quite popular among them. Some of the beads are considered very rare and expensive by them. These beads are the most valuable item during marriages. The value of the beads is mostly quoted in terms of the number of mithuns, for example the value of 10 mithuns is equivalent to one `Lwwcum and one `lwwkvr. Of all the beads, `Lwwcum is a very special kind of bead. It is given by the mother to her eldest daughter, preferably at the time of marriage or afterwards whenever the groom’s family pays the bride price. The eldest daughter then passes on it to her eldest daughter and so on. This way it has been passed down from generation to generation.

Apart from being worn as ornaments some beads like `doglu, Lubor and `haar are also believed to have healing power. After certain rituals, priests tie a bead of `doglu, Lubor or `haar around the neck of the sick person for protection.

Seeing the popularity of beads among them, similar looking beads are manufactured and supplied from Haarmoti and Lakhimpur towns in Assam (Fig.6.12). Beads from the plains which are recent and new are considered as less valuable while the old beads which they have inherited from their ancestors are more expensive and preferred. Expert elderly Adi-Galo women are consulted to check the antiquity of the beads and with minute examination they tell the fake or the new beads from the original and the old ones.
Fig. 6.11: Traditional beads of Adi-Galos
6.2.2. Brass Objects

Apart from the beads, brass items also constitute an important part of the Adi-Galo material culture. The brass items are found in the shape of plates, bowls, and other decorative items. They claim that when their ancestors migrated from their original homeland and they brought along with them these brass items and the beads. Like beads these brass items have also passed down from generation to generation.

The brass plates are commonly called amee. It is used as an important item of exchange during marriage between the bride and the groom’s family. Customarily, it is given by the bride’s kin to the groom’s kin. Aame is variously named as hombati, `hotam, `tamji, `tamv, bo`ree-` barty depending on its size.

The brass bowl is called bati, which is also of different sizes. These are also exchanged during marriage. The other important brass items are `curgen, `xaar, tvkom and daacww (Fig. 6.13 a,b,c,d,e). Some of these brass items appear similar to that of the Tibetan brass items though the functional aspects of these items have completely changed. The `curgen and`xaar seem to be the modified forms of Tibetan prayer bells and bati is the Tibetan prayer bowl. Their `orok (machete) is also a modified form of Tibetan sword. Among them all these items except, the `orok is not daily useable items but are valuable piece of article which are taken out on certain occasions only to be used or to be gifted or for important transactions like marriage. During marriage experts are requested to examine these items and verify its authenticity and antiquity before accepting it. Apart from marriage,
these items are also gifted on several other occasions. These items can also be used as fine for a crime committed. Before, the advent of money economy, the major transactions was invariably conducted in terms of *mithuns* and these valuable brass items. Though money has dominated as the main medium of exchange even in their society, but the traces of ancient transactions could even be witnessed during marriage and other instances. It is the antiquity of these items which makes it very valuable among them.

These valuable items of wealth are kept away from the settlement. Houses in Adi-Galo villages are compactly constructed which increases the possibility of major fire accidents. Fire outbreak is a common accident in Adi-Galo villages and as their houses are made of wood, bamboo and leaves it easily catches fire therefore; the only safe hidden place for these brass items is to bury it underground in the forest. Apart from forest, these brass items are also kept in the granaries, as granaries are constructed away from the main village.

Arunachal Pradesh had it trade relations with Assam as well as with Tibet, China and Burma through a number of traditional outlets. Through these as well as numerous less known trade tracks, the Arunachal tribes had maintained commercial communication with the Tibetans, Chinese and Burmese from ancient times.

The brass items and beads which form their material culture are the only durable items. The rest of the material culture is mostly made of perishable materials and therefore, no trace of it can be found in the archaeological site. The organic material culture, also termed as “perishables” do not survive in temperate conditions.
The study of material culture of the Adi-Galos encounters several problems. Ethnographic and contemporary data clearly show that the majority of all material culture is composed of materials which do not survive well in sub-tropical climatic condition.

a. `Curgen

b. Tibetan prayer bell
c. Tvkom
d. Tibetan prayer cymbal

e. Bati
f. Tibetan meditation bowl
g. Amee

h. daacww

i. Anklet
Perishable material culture is therefore the “missing majority” of archaeological material culture in temperate regions (Hurcombe 2008). Perishable material culture is severely affected by issues of decay and survival in the archaeological record. Even when the organic items do survive, the finds are often fragile and they may not survive conservation processes (Coles 1973). Their survival depends on many random factors. Evidence for objects made from organic materials does get preserved in the archaeological record through a variety of methods providing some primary evidence for the utilization of perishable materials. Most evidences, however is secondary, deduced from clues such as impressions of cordage on pottery, or tools such as stone gouges and bone awls that were used to fashion objects from wood, leather and other organic materials. Primary evidence of objects made from organic materials almost always is in fragmentary form. Fragments of such objects may be preserved through favourable environmental conditions, carbonization, association with metals, or very short term burial (Drooker 2004).
For craft activities the scant archaeological record was heavily supplemented by the ethnographic record. In particular, attention was drawn to the plant craft so here where there is the use of plants as the raw materials for crafts was being largely ignored within archaeology (Hurcombe 1998).

In other parts of the country more complete assemblages of material culture have survived but in regions like North-East India and especially Arunachal Pradesh much is missed due to lack of easily deciphered archaeological evidence. Therefore, it is very important for archaeologists to pay attention to the fragments of perishable material culture that do happen to survive. For the archaeology of Arunachal Pradesh, the extensive study of perishable material culture of the Adi-Galos will go a long way.

The ethnographic studies of the Adi-Galos shows that the material culture of the prehistoric people of the area was dominated by tools and implements which were made of organic materials. They heavily relied on tools that have been made from raw materials other than stone and since these are seldom preserved at archaeological sites, we simply lack a balance appreciation of their accomplishment. The metal and stone tools repertoires consist of the knife axe and dao.

The most versatile and multifunctional tool is the knife and dao. Some of the tools are made in an ad-hoc manner, whenever the need arises and discarded randomly after use. The existence of traditional basket-makers and weavers in their society gives an opportunity to document the technology which is still primitive and done with very basic tools.
They continue to adopt traditional technologies in craft production. This ethnographic study has increased our knowledge of variation in material culture. The manufacturing activities of the tribes centred round small-scale cottage industries like weaving, basket-making, wooden and bamboo articles and rudimentary blacksmithy. The extensive reliance on the use of bamboo, wood and cane for the manufacturing of articles of daily use by the contemporary society explains the absence of stone tools.

Forgoing discussion on aspects of metal culture of Arunachal Pradesh reinforces the crude truth that the tools and techniques developed and used in society were largely the products of indigenous materials and native genius used suitably in the varied ecological niches. That is why most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh had technological developments of their own and often different from those marvelled by others (Thakur 2008).