

# Analysis of “Papiñ-Pame Biisi”—A Love Ballad of the Apatanis, Arunachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

Ballads have evolved a long way since the beginning of story-telling among humans. Love-themed ballads were not confined to the romantic poets of England alone but were composed and narrated in hidden hamlets in every corner of the world. The “Papiñ-Pame Biisi” is one such ballad popular in the Ziro valley, Arunachal Pradesh, India. In this paper, the epitome of love, the rites of passage and the general life and culture of the Apatani society during the early time are analyzed.

## Keywords

Apatani, Arunachal Pradesh, Ballads, Folk Songs, Papiñ-Pame Biisi

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## 1. Introduction

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have rich oral folk tradition, among which folk songs play an important role in manifesting tribal culture. Verrier Elwin had written in his book “A Philosophy for NEFA”, “We still have a good many folk-songs and dances when we go to the villages, because modern civilization has more or less left them untouched. The progress of modern civilization in India involves both good things and bad. One of the things we have lost is the spirit of song and dance and the capacity for enjoyment and this is what the tribal people so abundantly have” (Elwin, 1957). Folk songs often acted as a medium for the tribal people to express their emotions. In fact, “The tribal people sing their songs not for its tune but to record their own moods and emotions. They give expression to their thoughts in their songs, as a result their songs become a perennial expression of thought, action and sentiments of human interest. Songs are the part and parcel of their lives like their own tools and equipment which they need for their daily living” (Choudhury, 1984). Apart from songs, there are narratives like tales, fables, ballads, proverbs, myths and legends etc. which are passed down from generation to generation. The beautiful verses in the ancient folk songs prove that the tribal people of Arunachal

Pradesh “have a deep vein of poetic imagination...” (Elwin, 1958). Folk songs depict the lives of the tribal people, their surroundings, social set-up, customs, traditions and festivals. Nature is a constant source of inspiration for their songs. These folk songs serve the purpose of spreading knowledge and awareness apart from providing entertainment. They play an important role in the rites of passage. Folk songs are usually sung in group and seldom solo. During festivals, they are often sung in accompaniment of musical instruments and dance.

Specifically, the Apatanis have a rich oral tradition that includes myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, priestly chanting, songs, etc. It is through these narratives that the young ones are taught the way of life. Folk songs were mostly sung during important junctures of life such as birth, death, marriage and during rituals and celebrations. They were also sung to relieve themselves after a hard day’s work. This way singing became a light-hearted recreational activity.

Papiñ-Pame Biisi is the first popular love ballad that is sung and passed down through generations among the Apatanis of Ziro valley. This ballad about the love story of Loder-Byai (twin brothers) and Puming-Pubyang (twin sisters) shares some similar features with English epics and ballads. It is great in length and is usually narrated in grandiose style. This romantic ballad is one of the oldest oral narratives of the Apatanis. As Romeo and Juliet is to the world, so is Loder-Byai and Puming-Pubyang to the Apatanis.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology of this study is mostly empirical in nature. The primary sources (ballads) have been collected from All India Radio, Arunachal Pradesh. The interpretation of these ballads has been done through informal interviews with the singers and some elderly persons well versed in Apatani folk narratives. A digital recorder has been used to record the narrative data, ballads and interviews.

The secondary sources include books, articles, journals and internet references on relevant topics. The books were referred from the libraries and state museum of Arunachal Pradesh. The field study was carried out in the villages of Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

### A Brief Summary of the Narrative Papiñ-Pame Biisi<sup>1</sup>

Miido Loder and Miido Byai were said to be the sons of Miido Tilying and Nyime Yaye. They were born in a beautiful village called Miido Lemba or Senyi-Sapi Ganda. They had two sisters and enough land and animals. Loder and Byai married and divorced several wives since none of them knew the art and technique of weaving. However, they had a son each named Chada and Chama from their last wives supuñ yonii and yoyi sansañ respectively. One day Loder and Byai were setting out for Bulyang<sup>2</sup> to a distant village with their mithuns (a sacred animal of Arunachal Pradesh). Their sisters Dumí and Yami weaved clothes for them before they set out. When the two brothers reach a village called Papiñ -Pame, they are enchanted by the beauty of two sisters Puming and Pubyang living in that village. They enamoured Loder and Byai with their beauty and grace causing the two men to fall in love with them; Loder with Puming and Byai with Pubyang. Loder and Byai were so captivated by them that they had completely forgotten about their wives and sons. The love affairs began and Loder and Byai could not help but to start living with the two women respectively. Puming and Pubyang with their beautiful charm kept them mesmerized and spellbound with their art of graciousness. Loder and Byai settled with them, providing for them like husbands do for wives. Years passed by without Loder and Byai remembering their family back at home.

Loder and Byai one day decides to visit their own forest (Miido landre morey) after many years. When they reach Miido landre morey, they find two young boys setting traps for animals there. This angers Loder and Byai since it was their forest and no one had the right to trespass. They scold the boys for trespassing and ask them their names and whose sons they were. The two boys tell them that the forest was their fathers’ and that they were Miido Chada and Miido Chama, sons of Miido Loder and Miido Byai respectively. Their answer leaves Loder and Byai dumbstruck as they realize that they had left their wives and babies at home. They also realize that it has been years since they left home and their sons have grown up now. They go back to Puming and Pubyang and tell them about what had happened in Miido landre morey. They ask the two women for divorce and tell them that their wives might be thinking of themselves as widows and their sons might be thinking that they are orphans and so they should go back to their wives and sons. Puming and Pubyang, who were deeply in love with the two men, did not have the heart to let them go. However, after some discussion they finally let them go while cursing them in their hearts. Their curses take effect when Loder and Byai are on the way. They encounter

<sup>1</sup>Narrated by informants Tilling Pui and Michi Yasing.

<sup>2</sup>A council or arbitrator.

bad weather and thick fog and are unable to carry on their journey. They decide to return to Puming and Pubyang and scold them for not letting them go whole-heartedly. Loder and Byai set out again taking back their mithuns. This time again, bad weather cause them to return. They ask Puming and Pubyang to sacrifice a hen and perform a ritual on Tulo Putu<sup>3</sup>. In spite of the sacrifice and ritual, they are faced with obstruction on their way. They return to Puming and Pubyang again and ask them to hand over their ornaments (hutu gakhe<sup>4</sup> and uyang kobyang<sup>5</sup>) as blessings. Puming and Pubyang give them their ornaments and squirt milk from their breasts on the two men's palms as blessing and make them go. Finally, Loder and Byai are able to go without any obstruction on the way. Once they reach their own village, the people look down on them with disgust. As they look for a place to keep their mithuns, none of the villagers accept the offer as they believed that Loder and Byai had desecrated the mithuns by their infidelity. Having no place to keep their mithuns, Loder and Byai perform Supung<sup>6</sup> with sand instead of rice powder and butcher the mithuns. Then they go on to live with their wives and sons forever. Given below are some excerpts from Papiñ-Pame Biisi.

**Papiñ-Pame Biisi<sup>7</sup>**

*Oder ka aya miido aayi ka papiñ pumiñ nyika pame pubyañ nyika cho-cho du  
ayii umi riso mi oder punchañ so buke biniñ si ayi punchañ so buke biniñ si  
aayi punchañ so ubyañ riso mi buke tiniñ  
lyandiñ tinda ka padu torbo byo, lyanko tinda ka aju yame byo  
dolyi tiinii du lyiko tiinii du doh tiinii du heko tiinii du  
cho-cho du oder-aayi nyi papiñ lemba so bulyañ milii pa lyika talyi ka  
ayii pame lemba so yalyañ siikho pa khoka talyi ka  
umi-ubyañ nyi oder-aayi ayii papiñ lemba ho  
mu akre pa kartu siibii do, sah akre pa kartu siibii do  
oder-aayi nyi umi nello mi oder nello pa armyañ biido cho myangka biido cho  
aayi nello pa ubyañ nello mi armyañ biido cho myangka biido cho  
cho lu cho du aya-aya ha  
umi-ubyañ nyimi nentu tubi do riingo porbi do  
sandu giibi do sah pyabi do cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
miido landre morey so morey lyika incha lyika ah  
oder-aayi nyika mihi miiniñ si oho miiniñ si miji niipa du  
hensu doyu ke oder-aayi nyi papiñ lemba so duka duku la ho  
pame lemba so dusu duku la miido landre morey so morey incha tola cho  
aya miido chada nyi miido chama nyi mi oho bulyi ho pילו barnye dutey la du  
hoka papiñ lemba ka bulya milii nii yalyañ siikho pa  
mu akre pa sah akre pa kartu koto la ho  
turo pabi do hiruñ labi do miido chada-chama nyi  
oder-aayi nyim kane pa kaye lo toku la landre morey so  
morey incha tola lo huka nyibo kachi na mito kao na  
oder-aayi nyika dachi pyako so pyadonii du  
dala heko so heya donii du hiika kele lo  
ngo miido loder ka ayii aba loder ka chada cho du do  
miido byai ka aba byai ka chama cho du du  
hiika kele lo cho lu cho du ayii ho landre morey so  
morey ho dala du oder-aayi nyi tubo jinga pa ngaiko yu ke  
lyabo jinga pa ngaiko yu ke  
ayii-ayii du umi-ubyañ nyika agiñ jaso du ho abii kula cho  
ngiika mihi miiniñ si mi niipa du hendo kudo ya  
oho miiniñ si miji niipa du ayii hendo kudo ya  
umi-ubyañ nyi aya siirañ moyañ sa ka tala lo ho  
siirañ tiyu ke myoyañ da yu ke cho-cho du aya-aya du*

<sup>3</sup>A hill often referred to in Apatani folk tales and songs.

<sup>4</sup>A type of traditional bangle.

<sup>5</sup>Also a type of bangle.

<sup>6</sup>A ritual performed by smearing rice powder on the head of a mithun and later butchering it.

<sup>7</sup>By Late Doging Yapyang, taken from AIR, Ziro on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2011. Courtesy: All India Radio, Arunachal Pradesh.

*ho papiñ miri miilañ mi pame mitañ miilañ mi ka siiyu ke  
 siirañ mayu ke niirañ da yu ke ayii hutu miilañ mi  
 kobyañ miilañ mi siira mayu ke ngaya da yu ke  
 ayii-ayii du oder-aayi nyi niyaneku nii  
 umi-ubyañ mi tadiñ dimbo la tajo joba la aya-aya du  
 hapiñ lempii so hamu lempii so tagyañ lempii so talyañ lempii so  
 apu giieh tiika ah hiika tola lo ho  
 haatiñ arko si hamu arko si kotiñ tola lo  
 ayii umi-ubyañ nyimi tunii kapapu mi laliñ lala la  
 byoliñ inchi ka inchi putu so myoyiñ tope du hintu tope du  
 ro pagyo mi laliñ lala la myoyiñ hintii ka hintii putu so  
 myoyiñ tope du hintu tope du hiika du.*

The speaker begins by saying that it was through the wind that the news of Puming and Pubyang had reached the ears of Loder and Byai. As the two brothers set out on the journey as Bulyang, they reach Papiñ-Pame village where they see the two beautiful sisters Puming and Pubyang. The speaker then tells that the two brothers start living with Puming and Pubyang. In these lines, “oder-aayi nyi umi nello mi oder nello pa armyañ biido cho myangka biido cho/aayi nello pa ubyañ nello mi armyañ biido cho myangka biido cho” the speaker tells that Puming’s house is now named as Loder’s house and Pubyang’s house as Byai’s. The two men start doing all the work for them and feeding them. They make things out of bamboos and woods for the two women and go to the forest to hunt and bring them meat. They settled in the village serving Puming and Pubyang for a long time. The speaker then tells about the meeting of Loder and Byai with their sons Chada and Chama in Landre morey and the realization that strikes them like a lightning. It is only after seeing their sons that they had come to their senses and realized that they had their wife and child at home. Loder and Byai immediately divorce Puming and Pubyang and leave for their village only to return because of thick fog hindering their journey. After attempting to go and returning for a few times, finally after getting Puming and Pubyang’s ornaments and blessings, they reach their village safely<sup>8</sup>.

### 3. Results and Discussions

This stanza is about the beginning of the love affair between Loder and Puming and between Byai and Pubyang till the time when they decide to go back to their respective wives. It is said that Loder and Byai had all the desirable attributes of a man. They were wealthy and known in the society which qualified them to be in the Bulyang. Their only error was to fall for the two sisters in Papiñ-Pame village leaving their wives and sons at home. It is a rather complicated love story since it deals with infidelity or extra-marital affair, which is not acceptable in a conservative society like the Apatanis’. However, the theme of this biisi is true of every society and of human nature. Infidelity or extra-marital affairs do exist and have been existent since human beings first experienced love with the opposite sex. It is indeed interesting how Puming and Pubyang charmed the two brothers into staying with them for a number of years. Critically the two sisters represent the femme fatales of modern era. Beautiful women did exist since time immemorial that could lure and destroy men. They knew the art of feminine grace by which they attracted men and had dominion over them.

#### Papiñ-Pame Biisi<sup>9</sup>

*Ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 müido tilyiñ ka lyinkuñ cho uyi he ka nyime he cho  
 loder anii si duliñ biitii nii byai aba si duliñ biitii nii  
 oder ganda si senyi ganda cho aayi ganda si sapi ganda cho  
 sango saliiñ ka saliiñ barmii mi mihi lake le hago haliñ ka  
 haliñ barmii mi mihi lake le oder pingañ so tiili mado ta  
 ayi pingañ so tiilo mado ta beppo mado ta  
 dotu nii nii mi mihi lake le penji nii nii mi mihi lake le  
 biilyi bubi mi mihi lake le bita bube mi mihi lake le  
 oder pingañ so tiili mado ya beppo mado ya ayi pingañ so  
 tiilo mado ya yopo mado ya ayii-ayii du*

<sup>8</sup>Explained by informants Michi Yasing, Hage Kori and Duyu Otung.

<sup>9</sup>By Tilling Pui, taken from AIR, Ziro on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2011. Courtesy: All India Radio, Arunachal Pradesh.

ganda tata ka biinii aru mi mihi lake le siigañ tata ka  
 siibo roro mi mihi lake le oder pingañ so tiili mado ya  
 aayi pingañ so tiilo mado ya beppo mado ya  
 ayii-ayi du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 siiro dogi mi mihi lake le sango sambyii mi mihi lake le  
 abi pikhañ mi tarii ngokhañ mi lagii nii da ku cho-cho ayii-ayii du  
 diilyi gechi mi mihi lake le diige gema mi mihi lake le  
 abi ratta ya chipi datta ya tarii ratta ya chopo dota ya cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 lakko tarii pa lappi lima do cho-cho du ai-ayii du ayii-ayii du  
 supu yonii ka yoyi sansañ mi mihi lake le ayii-ayii du  
 oder pingañ so tili mado ya beppo mado ya aayi pingañ so  
 tiilo mado ya yopo mado ya ayii-ayii  
 nii supuñ yunii ka ami yunii ka yuyi sansañ lu  
 oder jittii mi jike kele lo aayi jiro mi hekke kele lo  
 sango pulye pa luru pada la hago pulye pa kopii pulu la  
 oder tingañ so tiili mado ta beppo mado ta aayi tingañ so  
 tillo mado ta lyoppo mado ta ayii-ayii du  
 supuñ goppii so huppa tala lo kenya papu ka kenda piila la  
 hugii tola lo dabi dayi ke ayii-ayii du  
 ami dumi ka dumi tadu lo ami yami ka yami yalo lo  
 ngunu ate lu sango innañ la piidiñ chuchu la dassu da ku ya  
 bulyañ tataan pa lyanyu puchu ma lyañlyañ tamañ pa nyago balye hema  
 ka dalyi ke ayii-ayii du cho-cho du  
 iijañ siilyañ ka siilyañ siigañ so ayii-ayii du  
 chinyu riipii si piipyo kapa do payi sangya si gyapyo kapa do  
 miido riigiñ ela la miido riiah mi riiah ela la  
 miido dokho mi riikho ela la riigiñ ela la  
 yubo meli mi mengka tiicho du ayii-ayii du  
 yubo artu mi tika kele lo kauka nii si taluñ chamii pa kabii dota yu  
 takho chamii pa pyatta chamii pa kabii dota yu  
 siichañ pakhañ ka khambu myogyañ mi laliñ lala la myodi parañ ka  
 rambu yogyañ mi laliñ lala la ayii-ayii du  
 uyi bimi ka bimiñ bije mi palo lala la uyi sami ka sami sadiñ mi tiilo lala la  
 dingyañ lala la ponyo lala la apii lala la chenyu lala la ayii-ayii du  
 pudu ilyo mi laliñ lala la pudu yahii mi laliñ lala la  
 lyodu ilyo mi laliñ lala la pabu pake mi paka techo du  
 ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 nukuñ anii ka dintii dikhuñ mi laliñ lala la yuyi piichañ pa  
 nukuñ anii ka kotii kolo mi laliñ lala la yumo sampya pa  
 mobu gachi mi laliñ lala la paye garo mi laliñ lala la  
 ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 nupu yobii so pyapu khiila la niikhii yabii so pyakhe khela la  
 niilañ yobii so pyalañ khiila la ayii-ayii du  
 yani duttiñ mi laliñ lala la yana lyekho mi laliñ lala la  
 ami dumi ka dumi tadu lu ayii-ayii du  
 hinti himii ka khiibo khiimii mi laliñ lala la pintii hiruñ ka  
 khiibo khiiru mi laliñ lala la ayii-ayii du  
 ami dumi ka dumi tadu lu ayii-ayii du  
 ngunu ate pa sango pulye mi hago pulye mi jitti talyi la  
 tiika talyi la yira talyi la hekka talyi la hiika tala lo ayii-ayii du  
 yompñ landiñ so potiñ lala la tiicha lala la hachañ ranko so  
 chingyañ lala la ralo lala la jittii toke le tiika toke le  
 jiro toke le hekka toke le ayii-ayii du

*yompiñ takhii si soi biida la lobu biido ta soku biido ta  
 hachañ piita si socha biida la lone biido ta solya biido ta  
 ayi-ayii du cho-cho du ayi-ayii du  
 piidu piikhu mi lyanya soru si rokka toke le nyango soru si  
 rokka toke le piile kontii do soye kontii do rubii donii du  
 papi loma ta katiñ lama ta pari lama ta katiñ lama ta  
 ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ami dumi ka dumi tadu lo  
 misi riidii pa dabii da ku ta meela riicho pa dabii da ku ta  
 ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 riibii achañ so ato charuñ ka lahiñ pinchu mi joliñ biido la  
 papi nantii cho katiñ nantii cho riioh achañ so ayii-ayii du  
 ato charuñ ka lanker pinta mi joliñ biido la pari nantii cho katiñ cho ayii-ayii du  
 jitii toke le tiike toke le jiro toke le hekke toke le  
 oder pingañ so tiili doku ta beppo doku ta  
 aayi pingañ so tiilo doku ta lyopo doku ta ayii-ayii du  
 ami dumi ka dumi tadu lu ami yami ka yami yalo ka  
 bulyañ lyitii ka tiikke chanii si butii jiro ka hekke janii mi  
 müido loder lu müido byai lu giika doyu ke  
 bulyañ somu ka sobi janii si tajo bulyañ mi taja bulyañ mi  
 tako bulyañ mi lyaso bulyañ mi sogii tiyu ke  
 bulyañ soja ka sogii janii si ayii-ayii du  
 papiñ nello so soah giitii ke pame nello so soah giitii ke  
 umi nello mi oder nello pa abyañ nello mi aayi nello pa hengka tiita ke ayii-ayii du  
 bulyañ soja ka sogii janii si müido tayo ka tayo nello ho  
 müido tage ka tage nello so sogii teyu ke  
 umi nello so ubyañ nello so sogii teyu ke  
 ayii-ayii du cho-cho du ayii-ayii du  
 umi nello so pariñ nasi si senyo dota ke  
 ubyañ nello so paku nalo si ponyo dota ke ayii-ayii du.*

The speaker says Loder and Byai's parents Müido Tilying and Nyime Yaye are looking for brides for them in their land called Senyi-Sapi Ganda. They first get married to saliiñ barmii and haliñ barmii respectively but those girls do not know how to dress. Then they get married to dotu nii and penji nii nii but they are not fit to be their wives. They get married to bilyi bubi and bita bube but they have no knowledge about weaving. They marry biinii aru and siibo roro but they are not fit to be their wives. Then they get married to siiro dogi and sango sambyii but they have no sense of dressing . They get married to diilyi gechi and diige gema and they too have no sense of dressing or grooming. Finally they get married to supuñ yonii and yoyi sansañ . They weave clothes for Loder and Byai but they do not do it well, so Loder and Byai throw those clothes and asks a bird named kenyi papu to take them and fly away. The sisters of Loder and Byai, Dumi and Yami feel disappointed for their brothers that none of the prospective wives can weave clothes for them. They know that their brothers are enthusiastic and determined about going on journeys to faraway lands but none of their wives are capable of making them clothes to take with them on the journey. Dumi and Yami decide to weave clothes for their brothers. They wish to make the best designs for their brothers so they start looking around for things to draw inspiration from. They first go to a place near the river and keeps a giirii (bird trap), hoping to trap beautiful birds. A bird named "Yubo" gets trapped and the two sisters cut open its stomach and finds seeds that look like cotton seeds in it. They also collect pumpkin and melon seeds. They go to the forest and collect all sorts of things they can to create beautiful designs. Then they start making sticks for weaving by cutting down trees with an "ilyo"<sup>10</sup>. They also take out old broken things from the old people, like vessels and baskets. Now they start dyeing the thread in red colour. Now that they have collected everything for the design, they start looking at the melon seeds and other things. The speaker then tells that they are going to draw the thread from north to south and start weaving . As they start weaving , a squirrel (Yompiñ takhii) disturbs them and drops the weaving stick . A bird (Hachañ piita) also disturbs them. Suddenly they see a peacock and try to catch it. They spend around five years trying to get hold of the peacock to copy its feather design. Finally when they catch the peacock, they are able to get hold

<sup>10</sup>Sword or machete.

of only one feather. They are left confused about the design on the single feather. They try to figure out how to copy it until they are in tears. Then they go to Ato Charuñ's<sup>11</sup> house and bring things they find beautiful and copy the design. They successfully make beautiful designs on the clothes and those are also perfect fit for their brothers. Loder and Byai wear them and go on the journey with other Bulyang leaders. The speaker then ends by saying that the Bulyang group had stopped at Puming and Pubyang's houses for refreshment and entertainment. There is dance and merry-making as Loder goes to Puming's house and Byai goes to Pubyang's house<sup>12</sup>.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

These lines describe how the clothes of Loder and Byai were made ready before they set out on the journey as Bulyang. It seems Loder and Byai married many women but left them soon since they did not possess the qualities of an ideal wife in terms of grooming and weaving. Some of them did not know how to weave or to dress well and others did not weave properly or some of them were simply not fit to be their wives. The knowledge of weaving was a desirable quality in women during those days, and they had to be perfect in it. The talent gained them better chances to be chosen as the bride. The search for designs by Dumi and Yami shows the origin of designs on traditional Apatani clothes. Each and every detail of the design is thus inspired from nature as the two sisters collect whatever they can from the forest. It takes great effort to create the design as Dumi and Yami spend years in search of peacocks to copy the designs on its feather. The time and effort taken by Dumi and Yami to create the designs reveal the creativity and excellent craftsmanship behind the simple yet colourful and authentic designs on Apatani traditional dresses. Like every other folk songs, this too reflects the life and culture of the Apatanis during the early times.

#### 5. Conclusion

The complete ballad has intricate details of the romance of the two couples which has inspired people to compose love ballads to express their feelings of love and longing. The ballad begins from the time Loder and Byai are born with details about their parents and family as a whole. Each and every ritual performed in Loder and Byai's lives are described in detail. In a way the ballad signifies not only the epitome of love but also the rites of passage in the Apatani society. It is through such ballads and other narratives that the history of the Apatanis can be traced. These oral narratives depict the life and culture of the Apatanis.

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<sup>11</sup>Priestly ancestor of Apatanis.

<sup>12</sup>Explained by informants Michi Yasing and Hage Kori.



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