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**INDIGENOUS INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND  
COMMUNITY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN TRIBAL  
SOCIETY: A STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The institutions are the instruments of the society through which it fulfill its need and aspirations. Society creates, restructure and modifies political, social and economic institutions in accordance with its changing requirements, growing demand, and constraints which in turn condition and moulds the topography of the societal relation as a whole. In case of the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh, the institutions are not product of consciously design at any specific point of time but evolved spontaneously through generations, without any external force to meet the different social exigencies. One such practice which still prevails among the Adis amidst the various forces of modernization is the system of Kebang or Baane Ager. The system of Kebang or Baane-Ager through its complex and multiple functions play a vital role in the realm of social networks and coherence. The system of Kebang or Baane Ager is still prevailing among the Adis and sustainably facilitates collective action for achieving mutually beneficial ends. The paper is based on participant observation.

**Keywords:** Indigenous institutions, community participation, kebang/bane-ager, collective effort, obligation.

**INTRODUCTION**

The institutions and institutional arrangement based on democratic norms, relative self sufficiency and interdependence at grass root are imperative in determining long term prospect of any community. Institutions are physical and material embodiment of collective human aspirations through which society fulfills its need and aspirations. All human institutions developed out of socio-political, economic and cultural milieu have close connectivity with each other and remain as a base for superstructures of the society. The strength of society to overcome crisis, face challenges and fight stagnation depends largely on the vitality of the institutions

within its fold and the nature of precision with which institutions are built. It is through institutions human beings achieve their socio-political, economic and cultural satisfaction. In short, the objective and values of life are emphasized in concept, while the concepts are fulfilled through the mechanism of structure. Institutions are the pattern that directs the behavior of human beings in their manifold activities to their physical, natural and social environment under their charter of purpose. The institutions are social constructions and artifacts of time that reflect the types of experience that a particular community has in the past.

In case of the tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh, the institutions are not product of consciously design at any specific point of time (as in structure plan and operating procedures) but evolved spontaneously through generations, without any external force to meet the different social exigencies. The society is regulated through traditional governing bodies which administered justice in case of disputes or conflicts and directs all kinds of developments and welfare activities within the villages. In the realm of social domain, these time tested and time honored institutions work as catalyst in maintaining the intrusions of social anomalies and aberrations. The institutions are considerably different in its organizational pattern and structures from tribe to tribe based on their social outlook and social polity. However, there are certain characteristics which are common to all the tribal. For instance, clan is a very important element in the organization and elders by virtue of age, experience and wisdom enjoys a respectable position in all respects. For the purpose of this study, the system of *Kebang* or *Baane-ager* (institution of community work) among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh has been taken to refer to the capability of traditional social institutions to hold the members or the villagers together by effectively setting and facilitating the terms of their relationship and sustainably facilitates collective action for achieving mutually beneficial ends.

The Adis are one of the major tribes inhabits mainly in East Siang, Upper Siang, East and northern part of West Siang and western part of Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh. They are divided into different groups on attributes such as lineage, migration pattern, territorial consideration and accent of spoken language. These different groups are the *Minyongs*, the *Pasis*, the *Padams*, the *Milangs*, the *Shimongs*, the *Tangams*, the *Boris*, the *Bokars*, the *Karkos*, the *Ashings*, the *Pailibos*, the *Ramos*, the *Panges*, and the *Komkars*, having some variation in their cultural practices that are too distinct to distinguish the group separately. They are bounded together by common language with dialectical variations of no great importance. Elwin described this territory as one of the most fascinating and exciting parts of the North-East Frontier Agency (Arunachal Pradesh) having well developed village council and well organized social system. The Adis normally live in multi-clan villages. The social life is regulated by the village and clan affiliations. The clan or exogamous sect among the Adis is known as *Opins* or *Oli*. In their social life, every family feels it duty to support its fellow members of the village.

The influence of clan, inter-clan and sub-clan division or alignment is also felt in the social life of the Adis more particularly when there is a misunderstanding or quarrel between the members of the different clans and sub-clans. The social organization is patriarchal and patrilineal. The family known as *Rutum* is the smallest unit in the structure of their society. The agricultural operations, community works, village rituals, festivals, etc, are carried out in corporate manner. All the hard and difficult works are done by the male member of the family. They take the initiative and responsibility of clearing the jungle, felling trees, construction of fencing, etc., and at the same time give time in the community works such as attending the meeting or session of village council, *Kiruk* (community hunting), *Etor* (community fencing), construction of bridges and village path, receiving the visitors to the village, etc. The Adis are sparsely populated but closely-knitted society with a high degree of interactions and inter-dependence based on clan, and ethnic identity. The interactions and interdependence among the villagers on various aspects of life promote among them, strong sense of fellow feeling and cooperation. Cooperation and mutual help is a salient feature of socio-cultural life of the people. It is the duty of each family to help the fellow-villagers in time of need. The respect for collective or joint effort and sharing pattern of life give them a sense of belongingness. As a result, most of the Adi villages, though modern with almost all the civic amenities, still maintain village solidarity. There is no social stratification as ruling class and subject class or any institutions of centralized authority which could claim absolute allegiance from its members. The society is an integrated whole within which all social institutions are concerned with welfare of the corporate whole as a single entity with politics, religion and economy overlapping one another. The social life is characterized by equality, mutual respect, sharing and an acceptance of obligation to work collectively for greater social interest. The society is regulated by spontaneously evolved traditional self-governing institution or village council called *Kebang*. The *Kebang* organized on pyramidal or hierarchical order from village level to the tribe as a whole is the highest authority of socio-cultural and politico-administrative institution that regulate the social order based on collective and cohesive social ethos. One such practice which still prevails among the Adis amidst the various forces of modernization is the system of *Kebang* or *Baane Ager* (institution of community or collective work). It is a complex and composite mechanism to reinforce obligation on the part of individual to share the burden of collective action for the social ends. The *Baane-ager* are generally convened by the *kebang*(village council) in its corporate capacity to meet different socio-economic, political, cultural and religious exigencies of the community.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is hardly any comprehensive study conducted on this aspect of *kebang* pertaining to the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. A. Hamilton in *In Abhor Jungles* (1912) gives a descriptive account of the Adis and highlights the nature and character of the socio-economic, religion and political

life of the people. Verrier Elwin in *A Phillosophy for NEFA* (1964) and *Democracy in NEFA* (1965) attractively illustrated the socio-economic, religious and political life of the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Sachin Roy in his *Aspect of Padam-Minyong culture* (1960), comprehensively discusses the traditional institutions and practices of the Padam-Minyong Adis of Arunachal Pradesh *A Comparative Study of Adi Religion* by J.N.Choudhury (1971), *Moshup Abang* by B.S. Guha (1964), *Alluring Frontier* by Tarun Kumar Bhattacharjee (1988), *History and Culture of the Adis* by T. Nyori (1993), *British Relation with the Adis* by N.N. Osik (1992), and *Political Transition in the Grassroots in Tribal India* by A.C. Talukdar (1987), are some of the important work on *Adis* which seek to trace the early and recent history of the *Adis* and gives significant information about indigenous socio-economic and political institutions. S. M. Dubey (1974) in his *Elites and Modernisation in Arunachal Pradesh* and Sanjay Dubey (1991) in his *Dynamics of Tribal Local Polity and Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh* observes the institutional and structural changes in tribal society in context of Panchayati Raj institutions. Tamo Mibang's *Social Change in Arunachal Pradesh* (1994), is highly illustrated and significant work on the dynamic of tribal society in Arunachal Pradesh in general and the *Adis* in particular. He precisely sums up the trend of change under the impacts of various agents and aspects of modernization.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study is based on historico-analytical and participant observation method by using both documentary and interview technique supplemented by gathering both primary and secondary sources. The primary data have been collected from the *Adi* inhabiting areas of Arunachal Pradesh by undertaking field study through direct interview method.

## **BAANE-AGER**

The *Kebang* or *Baane-ager* (community works) is a tradition of cooperative and collective effort among the people of village for general development and welfare of the village community as a whole. This tradition of collective action and customary rules helps in strengthening community networks, human values, and societal commitment of individual to socio-economic development of the village community as a whole. In the *Baane-ager*, the entire village work together as a single unit. It is institutionalized through the village level decision making and enforcement structures (*Kebang*). Therefore, it becomes an obligation for every individual in the village to share the burdens of collective action for the social ends. There is no fixed time or schedule for this but it can be conducted or convened as and when the villagers as a whole feel it necessary.

The *Baane-ager* includes all the works related to the village welfare or activities which involve general welfare of the village community. Because of the corporate nature of life in villages, the

villages in group take up the works collectively thereby making the individuals less burdensome in their social life. This collective actions of villagers as a single unit is not only confine to developmental activities but also related to socio-religious and politico-administrative activities. Therefore, participation of at least one male or female member (according to nature of work) from each family is compulsory irrespective of clan, groups, occupation and economic status in the collective activities which concerns the village or village community as a whole. This institutional arrangement thus provides the individuals or each household with obligations of different level to the community works. Close observation on the nature of functions and services rendered toward the societal whole therefore can be categories into: (i) developmental or economic based (ii) socio-religious based and (iii) politico-administrative based.

**Development and Welfare Based:** The *Kebang* takes up various welfare measures for the society in general and to the individual member in particular. The welfare function of the *Kebang* is allocative in nature. It includes extension of relief and help to the needy and distressed person like widow, orphan, old couple, family bedeviled by misfortune, etc, in the construction of house, in agricultural operation and so on. Relief and rehabilitation is another important responsibility of the *Kebang* at the time of natural calamities such as landslides, earthquake, epidemic, floods, accidents, etc. In such situations *Kebang* directs the villagers to collect food, cloth and utensil and rush them to the victims. Male members of the village are engaged in construction of house to accommodate and rehabilitate the needy people. The *Kebang* also makes arrangement for inter-village relief and helped in the time of emergency. Other instances found in welfare dimension of *Kebang* was that of prohibition of ownership of land within village settlement area and some cultivable land (dry land or Jhum land) as *Kebang* land or community land. This was to be allocated to anyone who is a new settler in the village or else to those village people who do not have land for cultivation (generally for the younger generations getting settlement without landed property). Thus the welfare connotation of *Kebang* is not only to provide the minimum needs but also the minimum requisite for the survival itself. The *Kebang* or *Baane Ager* includes the obligations of every household to render services related to welfare and developmental activities such as construction of village fencing, maintenance of agricultural channels, village roads, construction of cane or bamboo bridges and other such activities which are for common use for the village. Nowadays, there are also many instances of *Baane* (*Kebang* body) taking initiative in construction of school buildings, dispensaries, etc. In such works, presence of at least one person (male or female) is compulsory. However, exception/consideration is always with the person in distress. The widows, orphan, etc., are exempted or old couple having no one to support are always exempted and never imposed penalty.

**Socio-Religious Based:** Socio-religious based obligation of individuals or household is the obligation that an individuals have toward various socio-religious based ceremonies such as social taboo, festivals, community rites or rituals and other such socio-religious and customary rule based activities. This is because, when there spread epidemic in the village or in the neighbouring villages, natural calamities and other such misfortune happens, the village as a whole perform rituals and prohibits individual from moving out of village on that particular day. Such social taboos are also observed in case of an unnatural death occur because of snake biting, drowning, falling from tree, etc. In such case every households are expected to obey and follow the customary rules.

**Politico-Administrative Based:** The *Kebang* has the power to regulate all aspect of community and individual life according to the set code of conduct and to punish those who transgress the codes. The *Kebang* as a “court of justice” interpreted and adjudicate cases as per the customary laws. All disputes between clans, families, groups and individuals over encroachment of land properties, ownership, money suit, debt, non clearance of dues, misappropriation, causing injury, divorce, elopement, adultery, rape, theft, cheating, robbery, murder, etc. are settle in the *Kebang*. Punishment and fines are awarded to the wrong doers according to the nature of the crimes. The punishment and fines awarded by the *Kebang* now a day is simple and reformative depending on the nature of the crimes. Despite the governmental accommodation for judicial dispense, the judicial function of *Kebang* still hold the sway in the villages. Certain crucial factors that helped in the perpetuation of this system/body are varied and many- the ignorance of the rural folk in modern legal system, complicated codes beyond the grasp of layman, delayed in justice etc, due to which even the educated persons seek the traditional system of jurisprudence as much cost effective and effective one. Hence it is obligations upon every household to attend in the process of deliberations and decisions making which concerns the village or village community as whole. This is because every initiatives taken at the village level for the general welfare is discuss in detail before the implementation in the name of *Kebang* or *Bane* (community) as *Kebang* or *Baane-Ager*. The decision taken in the *Kebang* for such steps is for general welfare.

All the steps taken up through *Bane ager* crops up through the collective initiative of the villagers acting as single unit through *Kebang*. The consensus reached in the process is executed collectively. Every individual or household being a part of decision making body and community is therefore expected to obey the decisions and initiative taken up by the community in this regards. Those who abstain from such work or fail to observe the social taboo, disobey *Kebang* decisions etc. are imposed penalty through the practice called *Langkong*. The practice of *langkong* is but to take away some of the belonging of the household which are of daily use like utensils, inglenook (the chullas known as *lichik*), poultry, etc. The objective of this practice is to impose inconvenience to the abstainers so that the inconvenience caused by community or social



work and the inconvenience inflicted because of abstention in the work is equated. This imposition however, is relative depending on the economic stands or status and circumstantial reasons of the abstainer. The materials (utensils, *Lickik*, etc) are returned by penalizing and imposing certain amount of fines.

## **CONCLUSION**

The system of *Kebang* or *Baane-Ager* through its complex and multiple functions play a vital role in the realm of social networks and coherence. Through this institution and its moral code of conduct certain social malaises like theft, murder, robbery, rape, disputes, etc., are control, social resources are manages and collective actions are accomplished; various social norms such as customary rules, traditional conventions, etc, are manifested and made binding. Series of obligation and expectation that individual acquire through this institutional arrangement enhance their relationship network making individuals morally bound to stand up by each other in time of need and danger as well as to provide social support to one another. The system of *Kebang* or *Baane-Ager* serves not only as a social mechanism for social control and conflict resolution but also as institutional arrangement of collective resource management and social support.

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