Collective Action and Community Labour

Management System among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The Adis are sparsely populated but closely-knitted society with a high degree of interactions and inter-dependence based on clan and ethnicity. Cooperation and mutual help is a salient feature of socio-cultural life of the people. 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. One such practices which fabricates the solidarity irrespective of clan, sex, tribes, etc, and binds the people with a common sense of cooperation is the Riglap - the system of mutual reciprocal help. The services rendered by the members are based on the principle of mutual help and reciprocity. No payment is made but the similar type of services is expected in the future by person who rendered the services. This system of exchanging services serves as traditional system of insuring the services to the community with the hope of getting similar services from other at the time of needs or when such services are required. But there is no formal rule as such that governs the exchanges of services as in modern legal contract. The Riglap is still prevailing among the Adis and sustainably facilitates collective action for achieving mutually beneficial ends. The paper is based on participant observation.

Keywords: Traditional institutions, collective effort, riglap, reciprocity, management.

INTRODUCTION:

The Adis (earlier known as Abor) is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They inhabit 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 Ashimgs, 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. One such practices which fabricates the solidarity irrespective of clan, sex, tribes, etc, and binds the people with a common sense of mutual help is the *Riglap*- the system of mutual reciprocal help. The services rendered by the members in *Riglap* are based on the principle of mutual help and reciprocity. No payment is made but the similar type of services is expected in the future by person who rendered the services. This system of exchanging services serves as traditional system of insuring the services to the community with the hope of getting similar services from other at the time of needs or when such services are required. The *Riglap* is still prevailing among the Adis and serves as indigenous mechanism of labour mobilization and exchanges of services.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The Adis, because of their earlier and closer contact with the foreigners (Britishers) and establishment of educational institutions relatively at an earlier date are more studied among the tribes 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 Philosophy for NEFA* (1964) and *Democracy in NEFA* (1965) attractively illustrated the importance of indigenous tribal institutions and their relevance in administration. 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. 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. It is 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.

**Meaning of Riglap:**

The word ‘*Riglap*’ consists of two words; ‘*Rig*’ derived from the word ‘*Arik*’ which means field and ‘*Lap*’ from the word ‘*Lapnam*’ which means “to call for help”. Therefore, ‘*Riglap*’ literally means to call for help in the field. But in practice, this is applied in all the works where two or more person are required such as construction of house, granary, hut in the field, building bunds to protect the fields from flood, in digging cannels for water supply, leveling of agricultural land, etc. It is both a reciprocal and mutual help among the people in the village. In short, it is a reciprocal mutual help among clan and community members in such activities as agriculture, house construction and other such works.

**WORKING AND ORGANISATION:**

In every village of the Adis, the entire population of the village is divided into different groups on the basis of clan, location of house, age, inter-clan relations, sex, etc, for different kinds of works. Every family and its member of the village have membership in two or more group of *Riglap*. For instance, a family having membership in one group for construction of house can also have a membership of its clan group for agricultural purposes. Membership in any of these groups is not imposed or bounded by blood relations or clan
relations etc, but depend on the individual’s choice except in the Riglap which are specifically arrange for its clan members. This system among the Adis is an example of organized group solidarity based on moral obligations to help each other. There is no strict rules and regulation for the formation of Riglap group in the village. It is based purely on the mutual understanding of the peer group of same age. Once a person becomes member of Riglap, he or she has to maintain solidarity and fidelity. The group can continue for generations together and son can inherit the membership of father. The Riglap can expel any of its members if any of the members does not behave according to the established norms. The disqualification or expulsion of the member from the group can be on the following- as mitu-horeng (hypocrite), losi-lobak (lazy person), midu-huak (quarrelsome), menam-pyonam (habitual thief and liars), etc. The collective opinion of the members influences the decision relating to Riglap. Work is regarded as an important social value in the society. A person gets recognition and respectability in the village through his or her performance in the Riglap.

TYPES OF RIGLAP:

On the basis of the nature of works it performs and membership, the Riglap can be categorized into: Arik Riglap (for agricultural operation), Ekum Riglap (for construction of house), Gimang Riglap (help extended to aggrieved family) and Opin Riglap (among the clan members specifically for the clan).

Arik Riglap: The agriculture is the main-stay of the occupation of the people supplemented by forestry. They have developed Jhum or terrace cultivation owing to natural terrains and river valleys as well as wet cultivation in low lying plains near river valleys and hill slopes, without any spectacular tools of production. The agricultural operations are carried out using family, clan or Riglap (group) during transplantation of rice seedling, weeding, preparation of bunds, harvesting of rice, etc, on the basis of reciprocity called Arik-Riglap. It is a kind of collective labour sharing arrangement to mobilize the labour of the neighbour, clan member and other households of the village community for the agricultural purposes. No payment is made for such mutual assistance, but the person on whose fields the group works is expected to render similar services when required. Whenever a man needs extra working hands for agricultural operations, he used to invite his Riglap friends to help in work. In this system of Riglap, people not only combine their labour, but also include other resources like implements, as well as different skills and expertise to carry out the farming activities. The notable feature is that members used to remain in the same group not only for one agricultural season but for years together.

The Arik Riglap may be consisting of members from the same clan, different clans or village irrespective of social status. Since the major part of the agricultural operation is done by the women traditionally, the involvement of women in Arik Riglap is higher than males. The involvement of man in this is restricted to the work such as leveling, repairing and building bunds, harvesting, etc.

Ekum Riglap: The Ekum Riglap is a group of families who voluntarily organized among themselves to render physical services/labour to co-members for construction of their dwelling house. This is found in all the Adi villages. The construction of house is considered most complicated task that demand different local experts right from collection of materiel such as Bamboo, canes, etc., to the construction of house. Therefore, different works are distributed among the members of the group on the basis of age, sex and expertise. Once a member of Riglap informs his need for construction of the house, he has no further responsibility to organize collection of house-building materials; the collection of materials such as bamboo, post, canes, leaves, etc are to be collected by the members of the Riglap. However, the responsibility of serving food during the construction of house rests on the owner of the house. Each family of the group has to send one or two members according to load of the works. All the hard and complicated works are performed by male members while female members engaged themselves in serving rice-beer (Apong) and in preparing food for the Riglap during the collection of materials and construction. During the construction, female members render their help in lifting leaves to the roof of house. The widows and aggrieved families in the group are given concessions in terms of magnitude of reciprocity in both services and materials. They are always extended voluntary services not only by co-members of the group but also by villagers irrespective of clan, group, status, etc.

Opin Riglap: The Opin Riglap is a group organized on the basis of clan or the inter-clan relations. In this kind of Riglap people of one clan or a group of clans participate. This is a manifestation of village solidarity through clan and inter-clan relations within the village. As discussed, the Adi villages are known for multi-clan and inter-clan relations. The opin (clans) are divided into pinnik (sub-clan), sub-clan are further divided into odong (lineage) and odong into erang (family). This relation among the clan member plays a significant role in socio-economic life of the people in the village. Thus every individual or family of the village is assured security in terms of services and supports at different levels of interactions as a member of Kebang , community, Riglap and as a member of a particular clan or inter-clan groups. This system in the village prevents the people of
different social status to misbehave or undermine each other in the society. The purpose of this Riglap is to strengthen the unity and integrity of the clan and inters-clan relations. This Riglap become functionally significant when someone of the clan members cannot complete the works in time, if some one of the clan member falls ill or meets an unfortunate situation, etc. The member of clan voluntarily in group extends their helps to the aggrieved. However, if there is a single family in a particular clan and is in trouble, the people of the village who are free and have completed their work early, irrespective of clan or Riglap come forward for the help.

**Gimang Riglap:** It is a Riglap of the people at the time of grievances. Though reciprocal in nature, Gimang Riglap is a selfless and sympathetic expression of help among the members of the village to each other, irrespective of clan, tribe, or sex considerations. The Gimang Riglap, therefore creates the sense of belonging and brotherhood among the people in the village and strengthens the unity and integrity of the people. For example, if any house in the village is gutted by fire accidentally, all the people of the village feel it their duty to help and construct a new house for them. In such situation they donate the basic household needs like rice, clothes, utensils, etc. The materials required for construction such as bamboo, cane, leaves, etc., are also voluntarily contributed by the villagers. The Gimang-Riglap does not confine to any particular area of work. This can be convened anytime as and when required for the purpose of agriculture, house construction, in case of emergency including the natural calamities or when the Kebang (the village council) in its corporate capacity feel it necessary. The Kebang can convene this Riglap for the whole village or for few expertises keeping in view the types of work or situations. Such Riglap being convened by the kebang is binding upon every family of the village. This is a form of spontaneous help among the people that fabricates multi-clan and multi-tribe village into a single cultural entity.

Besides these kinds of Riglap, there are many other such type which are less organized and adhoc for mutual help in terms of services and material exchanges based on reciprocity, but bears functional significance as more organized institutions. These are practices among the Angong (friends) of different age group called Angong enpeng as arrangement for exchanging the services and Ajon-bimin (material exchange) at the time of agricultural operations and other such activities. All these though small and less organized have a similar effect to cooperation and solidarity on the society. These types of Riglap require fewer members and are based basically on the inter-personal relations between the villagers. Every family in the village is a member in at least two or more Riglap groups and naturally all families are mutually dependent on one another in different ways. Since the works are done season wise in the village, so there is no chance of coincidence of two works at a time. The Ekum Riglaps are generally conducted in the month of January and February after the harvesting. Kumsung Riglap, yogum Riglap, etc, are necessitated in the months of April and May and the Arik-Riglap are conducted right from month of sowing of Jhum in the month of May to time of harvesting in the month of December. The Gimang and Opin Riglap depend on the situation and can be functional any time irrespective of seasons.

**Material Exchange in the Riglap:** The Riglap is a system of a reciprocal and mutual group relations, its scope extends to exchange of materials items also. As mentioned, difficult works such as construction of house in the village is the responsibility not only of groups but of the whole village as a whole. Therefore, construction of more new houses means more involvement of resources in the forms of services and materials. Hence, in order to solve this problem it is negotiated among the villagers that minimum houses are constructed in a year. However, these decisions are not binding but just made through mutual agreement. The material exchange in Riglap involves the exchange of different items such as bamboo, leaves, etc., require for the construction of house and food items require for serving to members. Within a group if someone plans to construct a house and does not have required materials like bamboo, cane, palm, etc, he has to inform it to the fellow members. The members discuss the matter and anyone having the stocks makes them available to the needy one. But the materials, which are used, are to be returned either in the form of money or in similar materials. Besides, there is a system of donating rice, apon (local beer), sugar, tea-leaves, dried bamboo shoots, etc. This donation is also reciprocal in nature. The owner of the house while receiving the materials keeps in mind the amount and kinds he received. When times come for the construction of the houses of the donors, he has to reciprocate them with the same materials or the material which is needed by others. This reciprocal help among the members in exchange of materials is called Riglap - Ajon. The Riglap - Ajon is a practice among the members basically for the security of food materials at the time of construction of house.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Riglap is both a social as well as an economic institution, which benefits the people in different ways. It ensures completion of works in time, increase efficiency by making the works easier, giving training to the

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youth, and introduce division and distribution of work. It plays a vital role in the realm of social networks and coherence based on mutual commitment, relational norms and trust rather than transactional agreement and formal rules. The relations based on implicit norms and trust present opportunity to members for collective action making the institutions transcends clan, sub-clan, groups and tribe boundary in a multi clan and multi-tribe society. It serves not only as a traditional arrangement for fulfillment of economic needs but also as an effective indigenous mechanism for social control and support. Through its complex and multiple socio-economic functions, social resources are manages and collective actions are accomplished.

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