



Research Paper

Social Structure, Family, Marriage and Social Change: an Analytical Study on Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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Abstract: In this paper, it is discussed about a tribe named Adi, inhabited in Arunachal Pradesh, a state in North-East India. The paper contained the social structure, life style, food habit, family pattern, marriage system of Adi tribe and the social changes that occurred presently in Adi community. The study is totally based on secondary data collected from various sources. An analysis regarding the present status of Adi community is also included in this paper.

Key Words: Social structure, family, marriage, customs, traditions, Mithun, Social change.

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I. Introduction

Adi is a major collective tribe of Arunachal Pradesh living in the Himalayan hills of Nyingchi Prefecture. The literal meaning of Adi is “hill” or “mountain top”. They are inhabited in the sub tropical regions of Arunachal Pradesh, basically in East Siang, Upper Siang, West siang and Dibang Valley districts. Some of them are found in Southern Tibet (a little more north than South Tibet), around areas near the Indian border.

The Adi tribes trace their origin from Pedong Nane. Pedong Nane was the great grand daughter of Sedi Melo, the creator. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid stock with well-built features.

The Adis have two main divisions, (The Bogums and Bomis) and under each there are a number of sub-tribes. the Minyonfs, Karkos, Shimongs, Bomdo, Janbos, Panggis, Palibos, Bogums, Padams, Milangs and so on from one group; while the Gallong and seven other groups constitute another group of Adis.

II. Social Structure of Adi Tribe

The Adi villages are constructed with an assemblage of huts with jackfruit trees in and around the surrounding. Houses are constructed in rows with ample space and passages for emergency purposes demonstrating a sense of planning. At the center of the village, there is a council hall called DERE or MOSUP where social and cultural affairs of the village are discussed. Granaries are constructed preferably at the village outskirts to avoid fire accidents.

2.1 Social system of Adi tribe

There is a council in every Adi village named ‘Kebang’, which looks after the administration of the village. This council is represented by appointed headman (Goan Burah or Gam) and village elders. The council decides disputes and settles or solve all the issues of the concerned village. All the developmental and welfare activities concerning the village are deal with by this council. In-fact, the council is traditional political organization on which the internal administration of the village is based and it maintains peace and order in the society.

2.2 Special Institutions for Adi people

Adi society has two types of dormitories – for the boys it is called ‘Moshup’ and for girls it is called ‘Rasheng’. These dormitories are used as the sleeping houses by all the youngmen of the village from the age of ten till marriage. The basic idea behind these institutions is to create a habit of discipline amongst the children and also to create a feeling of cooperation.

Moshup is a house for the unmarried boys which are constructed by the villagers. It is normally situated in the centre of the village and is constructed at a place from which different approaches to the village can be seen. The children of ten years and above can become member of the Moshups. They believe that this system develops the spirit of cooperation, mutual respect and adjustment and fellow feeling among the children. The Moshup, sometimes has its advisory board comprising of the old and experience people. They advice the young members on the matters of community life, hunting, etc. The old and infirm members of the village also came to Moshup in the day time to get-together and gossip. Guests and visitors are also entertained here and kebangs are also held here. There are different Merum or cells in the Moshups. Each belong to a particular Merum and sleeps in it.

Rasheng is comparatively smaller and is constructed in the middle of the village. A senior girl becomes the in charge of this house. It is for the gaiety, amusement and the art and regulation of love-making. This rasheng is purely secular in nature and has no religious significance. After reaching puberty, girls sleep in their respective clan Rashengs. During the day time it is generally vacant but at night spinning and weaving is carried out here. A senior experience girl normally supervises the Rasheng. It is a training institution for the girls in discipline, friendship, responsibility and leadership. The romantic life of a girl starts here. Young boys from different clans come and join the girls at night and the affairs of the boys and girls of marriageable clans generally lead to marriage.

Thus the Moshup and rasheng of the Adis are the central institution where the boys and girls received practical training in traditional mode of life.

2.3 The pattern of Houses

The traditional Adi house is raised floor in plinth of height about one metre above the ground in plane areas. While in hill slopes, one end almost touches the ground and the other end having the height of about two to three metres from ground. The house is made of wood, bamboo, cane and leaves. The roof is covered with palm leaves and wild banana barks/stems is used in upper belt while thatches in lower belt.

The house has a big hall with hearth at the center where members sit around. Cooking is done in the hearth. The house is rectangular in shape with wooden post, bamboo matted/splits floors and walls, tied with cane and roofing by leaves etc. Villagers help each other in construction of a house. Once constructed, the Adi traditional house lasts for about 5-6 years. In the upper belt in interior villages, the gumpir (toilet) cum pig stay are also constructed attached to the back side of the house.

Nowadays, the pattern of house construction of Adi tribe has been updated with modern techniques following modernisation. Symultaneously they preserve their traditional ancestral construction model. The plinths of the house are constructed with rock, concrete cement instead of woods. RCC and OBT types of house are built following traditional house madel. The toilet is also constructed separately away from their house which is more hygienic. In many cases, wooden post are not buried but rested on stone slap to prevent them from quick decay. Iron nails and plastic rope are also used in place of cane. Most of the villagers are now using CGI sheets for roofing in place of thatches and palm leaves. Most of the villagers are now concerned with health and hygiene, so they keep their surrounding neat and clean.

2.4 Life style

The Adi tribe practice wet rice cultivation and have a significant agricultural economy. The adult goes out to the field for cultivation and the young girls bring fuel and water, pound the grain and help in domestic duties. Rice is the main foodgrain for them. Trapping and hunting is also a way of life of Adi people for the suplement of food. In recent time, the technique of hunting and trapping animals through bow and arrow is replaced by firearms. Their favorite prey is the abundant rat, prepared in various ways, including pieces of rat and other meat in a rice flour cake wrapped in banana leaves. The Adis rear pigs, chickens, mithuns and cultivate vegetables. They rear pigs in a very unusual way. The pigs are kept in a fenced area under the house, which is on stilts and feeds on human waste as the pig pen is situated right under the toilet. The pigs are let out in the day. The meat of the toilet pig is actually a delicacy.

2.5 Language

The language spoken by Adis is called Adi, which is distantly related to the Chinese and Tibetan languages. It is spoken with minor variations among all the Adi tribes.

2.6 Economy

Food production is achieved by cultivation, hunting and fishing. They practice Jhum cultivation. Paddy, maize, millet is sown in the same field. The Adi tribes are known for their amiable and simple nature. The way they carry out the job of administering people, depict their democratic nature.

Art works are popular amongst Adi communities. They have unique skills in handicrafts and it is best seen in their cane and bamboo works such as, making baskets, trays, haversacks, mats, hats and headgears with artistic designs for domestic use.

Women belonging to the Adi tribe are expert weavers. They weave several things like coats, jackets, bags, skirts, shawls and blankets displaying their abilities in handloom.

2.7 Culture

Dormitories play an important role among the Adi tribe, and certain rules are observed. For example, a male can visit the dormitory of a female, although he is not allowed to stay overnight. At times, guardians will have to be around to guide the youngsters.

There is separate dress for women and men which are naturally weaved by Adi folk women. Helmets made from cane, bear and deer skin are sometimes worn by the men, depending on the region.

Usually, Adi women are very beautiful and charming one. While the older women wear yellow necklaces and spiral earrings, unmarried girls wear a 'beyop', an ornament that consists of five to six brass plates fixed under their petticoats. Tattooing is popular among the older women. The traditional measure of a family's wealth is the possession of beads and ornament and land.

2.8 Festivals

The Adi celebrate a number of festivals. Their fairs and festivals reflect their rich culture and heritage. The main festivals are Solung, Etor and Aaran. During these festivals, huge feasts are hosted, offerings are made to deities. Songs and dances are performed.

Solung is a harvest festival performed after the sowing of seeds and transplantation, to seek for future bumper crops. It is celebrated in first week of September for five days or more. Ponung songs and dances are performed during the festival. At the last day of Solung, throne and indigenous weaponry are displayed along the passage of the houses for a belief that they would protect people from evil spirits.

Donggin is celebrated in 2nd February every year ; continued by Aran which is celebrated on 7th March and Etor on 15th May. At the end of the year, the festival Podi Barbii is celebrated on 5th December.

2.9 Dance

Adi's dances are beautifully enchanting style. Popular dances are the Ponung, Delong, Yakjong and Tapu, which are the dances narrating war. Ponung, the exhilarating dance and exuberant thumps of Delong represent the prominent culture of Adis.

Ponung is the most common of all the dances. It is an integral part of the lifestyle of Adi tribes. They have adopted their own style of dancing. In the *Tapu War Dance*, the dancers vigorously re-enact the actions of war, its gory details and the triumphant cries of the warriors.

Yakjong is another kind of dance whereby the dancers carry sticks with designs created by removing the barks in certain patterns and then put into the fire for some time, which creates the marked black designs.

Dances performed are in-group lead by a main singer (Miri). The Adi tribes are very fond of dances. They perform group dances. The dancers are linked to one another in a certain manner by the hands, by the waist or the shoulders. The main movements of the dance are confined to legs, arms and central part of the body.

2.10 Religion

Traditionally, majority of Adis followed the animist Donyi-Polo religion. It is regarded that Sedi-Melo is the creator of Adi tribe but is neither worshipped nor followed as source of attain spiritual purity and eternity. Rather, they believe in and worship DONYI-POLO, the Sun-Moon duality. Other deities traditionally worshipped by the Adi include Kine Nane, Doying Bote, Gumin Soyin and Pedong Nane. Each deity is

associated with certain tasks and act as protector and guardian of various topics related to nature which revolves around their daily life.

But, in modern times, many of the Adis have moved away from Donyi-Polo, especially the Adi youths and have converted to Christianity. Adis in Tibet, in particular the Bokars, have adopted Tibetan Buddhism to a certain extent, as a result of Tibetan influence. But in recent few years there was a revival in the faith and the search for indigenosity on the part of the people made it popular with the youth again.

Mithun is considered precious for socio-religious activities and even imposed payment of compensations against anything done wrong.

2.11 Disposal of Dead

Dead bodies are buried. Body is washed and dressed with new clothes and at-least kept for a night. Mourners (Penge) are sometime engaged. Dead bodies from accidental or un-natural deaths are disposed off as early as possible in separate graveyard.

II. Family Pattern of Adi Tribe

The Adi society is patrilineal, patriarchal and patrimonial and generally, their family pattern is nuclear in character. The father is the head of the family.

2.1 Family size

In general, Adi family consists of father, mother, unmarried sons and daughters. In some families, grandparents and grand children also stay under the same roof. The size of the family also depends on the income and education level of the family. Now a days, majorities are nuclear family among Adi community.

2.2 Property and Inheritance

All the movable and immovable properties of the family except some personal belongings like Tadok (beads) are inherited by the sons. Usually, the youngest son inherits the father's house and other son's builds their own separate house after their marriage.

As per the customary laws of Adis, the daughters have no right to claim their parental properties after their marriage and beads are usually gifted to the daughters in the time of marriage. But, now a days, the system has been changed as daughters also inherit the parental properties equally with sons following Indian Constitutional provisions.

Besides land and residential buildings, beads, pots and dishes of brass, daos/swords, spears and guns are considered valuable possessions. A family also boast/claim over their bamboo groves and jackfruit trees. Holding and running of business shops and commercial buildings, small industrial units etc. are however, emerging as a new property concept among the people.

Father being the head of family takes all the final decisions in the matter related with the family. But for the important cases, the consent of the mother is also taken. Mother also holds an equal position in the family. The widow or wife of a disabled husband with minor children is considered as the head of family.

III. Marriage system of Adi Tribe

The system of marriage such as monogamy, polygamy, exogamy and endogamy happen to be in existence in Adi society. Monogamy is the common form of marriage and polygamy is socially restricted. A marriage arranged by parents and elders is considered ideal and decent though selecting a partner by initiating a love affair is also popular and common.

The marriage within the same clans/sub-clans are not tolerated and considered incestuous. The Adi society also accepted the widow remarriage system that is proposed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The unmarried younger brother can marry or remarry the widow of his elders which is called méyéng kaanam.

The Adi have various ways of getting their mate. There are arranged marriage, love marriage, marriage by elopement and remarriage of widow. Earlier exchange marriage was also prevalent among the Adi society but it has been discontinued. There is no strict age limit for marriage.

The process of marriage called nyameng tatnam (pre-marriage negotiation) initiated by the boy's parent directly or through a mediator. If the response of girl's parent is positive to the proposal, then the boy's parent or his uncle, may be paternal or maternal uncle, arrange nyameng kaypel (bride price). In the case of Padam sub-group of Adi, the bride price consist of four smoked squirrels trapped only by etku and eda (traditional trapping techniques), a jar of apong (rice beer), and some takay (ginger). The bride price is delivered by uncle or father of the boy to the girl's parent at the house of the bride, in the early morning. If the same is not returned to boy's house by the evening until dusk, it is considered that the proposal is accepted. If, in case, girl does not want to accept or like the boy, it is ritual that she herself has to return the bride price to the boy's residence by the evening. The boy's parent and relative waited till the dusk in the evening. If the bride price (kaypel) have not returned, the parents and relative of boy along with him go to the girl's residence in the evening itself or next evening which is called makbo giliknam. After that, the boy and girl are considered formally engaged and marry each other.

At present, continuing the occurrence of social change, the item of bride price has been added with so many items. It requires huge quantities of items like drinks, meat, smoked squirrels, dried fishes and money as well. Indian made foreign liquors are replacing locally made rice beer. It involves whole relatives of both the groom and bride. The huge expenses of money are involved in such modified marriage system.

Recently, the traditional method or process of marriage is also diminishing in the Adi society, as people preferred to register their marriage in the court to become it a more authentic one. Love marriages have become more prevalent than the arranged marriage. Many boys and girls have married to the people of other community and even outsider. In love marriage, much importance is not given to giving and taking of marriage items.

Nowadays, the custom of slaughtering of Mithuns during marriages is also banned following a resolution, passed by Adi Baane Kebang. It is the belief of Adi community that, this will, not only bring an equal balance in marriage among Adis but also, will be affordable for everyone, and will also prevent rampant wildlife hunting.

IV. Social change among Adi Community: An Analytical view

Following the process of development and modernization, custom, tradition and culture of Adi community is changing gradually. But, Simultaneously, they preserve their ancestral customs and traditions. The various traditional activities and practices are still performing in the interior villages.

But, some changes in tradition can be highly noticed in the urban areas than the interior villages. Changes in their day to day life style, in the mode of marriage system, in their culture and traditions can be noted.

It can be cited that they adapted to new culture. The way of living, education of children and health care systems, etc. has improved in and around the urban areas than the rural one. The cultural changes are not uniformly progressive; there may be positive as well as negative impacts of cultural changes on the society.

V. Conclusion and Discussion

The process of modernisation and the development of science and technology is taking a prominent role in social change and the human development. The Adi people, like other communities of the world, have also adopted the modern technologies and way of life. Some customs and traditions which led to affect other species or creatures has also been diminishing and brought the society towards equality and homogeneity positively. But, at the same time, it is impacted to lose their traditional culture and practices.

In continuation of the topic, so many research study can be proposed to understand the present scenerio of Adi Community and its impact to the modern society.

Lastly, it can be said that human development is a dynamic phenomenon and cultural change with general consciousness is unavoidable.

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