



**Indigenous System of
Governance in
the Tribal Society of
Arunachal Pradesh**

Milorai Modi

Himalayan Publishers
New Delhi Itanagar

ABOUT THE BOOK

Indigenous System of Governance in the Tribal Society of Arunachal Pradesh is a systematic and comprehensive study of the functioning of traditional and local system of governance. The author traces the origin of the system of governance in the tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh which is also visible in case of other tribal societies particularly that of the North East.

The book clearly indicates that the Indigenous Systems, which are referred by many as traditional are more democratic, participatory, transparent and inclusive than the so called the Modern Systems of Governance. The book builds the arguments that there is a need to revive such systems of governance particularly at the local level in all the societies as they have proved more effective in conflict resolution and in building human development.

Given the content, contour and contexts of the book, it will be useful for all segments of readers such as policy makers, academicians, NGO's, students, researchers and others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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INDEGENOUS SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE IN THE TRIBAL SOCIETY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Milorai Modi

Himalayan Publishers

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Chapter- 1.

A SOCIO-CULTURAL INTRODUCTION OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

PART-I

Arunachal Pradesh, located in the extreme north eastern part of the Union of India, falls in the trans-Himalayan region. A land of mighty rocks and dense forests, gentle streams and raging torrents, the state as per 2001 Census, has a population of about 10,91,117 lakh people, of which the scheduled tribes are in majority. It is the land of myriad of tribes who speak different dialects and are characterised by their varied socio-cultural patterns. There are some 25 major tribes and as many as 110 sub-tribes.¹

The reference to this region has been made in the ancient scriptures like Puranas and Mahabharata and the recorded history of Arunachal Pradesh can be traced back to the 16th century when the Ahom kings began to rule Assam. In 1838, the British took possession of Assam and also brought Arunachal Pradesh under its Administrative control. Originally, Arunachal Pradesh was known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). It was placed under the administration of the Union Government in 1948. As per the provision of the North East Frontier Areas (Reorganisation), NEFA was declared as a Union-Territory under the name of Arunachal Pradesh on January 20, 1972. It became a full-fledged state on February 20, 1987. Thus, through the different stages of constitutional and administrative development, Arunachal Pradesh has attained the present status.

Location:

Arunachal Pradesh is situated in the most North-Eastern tip of India and as such it is called "the land of the rising sun". It is bounded by Bhutan on the west, China on the North and north-east, Burma on the east and the state of Assam and Nagaland on its south. It is located between the latitudes 26° - 28°N and 29° - 30°N and longitudes 91° - 93°E and 97° - 101°E. It covers the area of about 83,743 sq. km.²

Climate & Seasons:

The climate of Arunachal varies with the variation of the mountain ranges and altitude. The area witnesses snowfall and alternate showers of rainfall. Winters are cold, damp and windy. The temperature is higher at lower altitudes in the south and lower at higher altitude in the north. The foothills or valleys are extremely humid, hot and has a sub-tropical climate, similar to that of plains of Assam. High rate of humidity makes human life difficult and hard, and the sloping mountainous or lesser Himalayan ranges have a cool and pleasant climate, which is frequently met by speedy winds. The higher Himalayan region has Himadri type of cold climate, experiencing snowfall, but snowfall of the eastern Himalaya is not as heavy as that of the western Himalayas.

There are only two distinct seasons in Arunachal - first the rainy season, which starts from the last part of March and persists till the end of September. During monsoon, rainfall is heavy. However, rainfall varies from 40 inches at Bomdila to 200 inches at Pasighat.³

Second, the winter season exists from November to March, in between there are short spells of spring and autumn. The temperature of the territory varies from below freezing point in winter to over 80f-(26.7 c) in summer. The lower region experiences climatic conditions almost similar to that of plains of Assam.

Mountain & River system:

Arunachal Pradesh has mountains and ranges' varying from 4,000 feet to 21,450 feet above the sea level, Gorchen is

among the highest peaks in the territory. A little varied pattern is found in western Arunachal where ridges like the Bomdifa, Sela and Thang la (La means "mountain pass" in the Tibetan language) run parallel to the Great Himalayas. The north easterly directed mountainous range of Arunachal is roughly about 70,000 sq. km of which about 10,000 sq. km. is foothill area.

The state is watered by several rivers. About fifty rivers, big and small, apart from streams and waterfalls flow through the territory. Among all rivers, the mightiest is the Siang, known as the Tsangpo in Tibet and the Brahmaputra in Assam. The Tsangpo enters the Indian Territory at Karbo near Galling and flows through the Siang District under the changed nomenclature of Dihang. The other major rivers starting from west to east are the Kameng, the Subansiri, the Dibang, the Lohit and the Tirap besides small portions of the Burhi Dihing and the Noa Dihing.

Flora & Fauna:

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the botanically little known areas of our country. There are varieties of flora alongwith the variation of altitudes. Unique geographical position and divergenence of climate give rise to varieties of vegetation in the state. There are different species and sizes of trees like Bola, Tita-Champa, Hollock, Khokan, Makahi, Simul etc and enormous varieties of bamboo and cane are found, particularly in the foothill belt. The temperate evergreen tropical vegetation is found in the middle ranges, conifers in the higher elevation and the Alpine in the extreme north.

The different varieties of orchids are found abundantly in the state. About 500 species of orchids are found in the state.³ The forest department has set up the Orchid Research and Development Centre at Tipi in the West Kameng district.

The fauna of Arunachal Pradesh is rich and varied. It includes some rare species of wild animals like tiger, leopard, elephant, black panther, Himalayan black bear, black deer, barking deer, red pandas, monkey, cat, wild buffalo, goat and mithun etc. In the state, different varieties of birds are also

found, like hornbill, peacock, pheasant, khalij pheasant, migratory water birds, etc.

There are 7 (seven) wildlife Sanctuaries and 2 (two) national parks in the state.⁴

Population:

The total population of Arunachal Pradesh as per 2001 census is 10,91,117 out of which 5,73,951 are males and 5,17,166 are females. Out of its total population 5,50,351 are scheduled tribes. The percentage of tribal population is 63.66%. The density of population per sq. km is 13 and literacy percentage of Arunachal is 54.74 %, at all India level out of which 51.45% are male and 29.69% are female. The growth rate of the population during 1991-2001 was 26.21%.⁵

Areawise Arunachal is the largest in size among all the north-eastern states, as it constitutes about 33% area of entire north-eastern region. But populationwise Arunachal accounts only for 2.5 percent population of entire north-east.

Society & Culture:

The society of Arunachal Pradesh, despite local variations, has somewhat a common pattern. The social life of the tribes is guided by their respective social norms, customs and usage, which acts as a binding force, knit the members of the community together, and very rarely an individual goes against the social system prevailing in his society. The family is the primary unit of the society. It is comprised of parents and their unmarried children. Joint family system is prevalent only in a few tribes, nuclear family is common in almost all the tribes.

It is the land of myriad of tribes. According to 2001 Census Report, the total scheduled tribe's population was 5,50,351 which is 63.66% of total population of the state. There are 25 major tribes and 110 sub tribes as identified in the 1991 census. The following are the major tribes of the state:- Adi, Aka, Apatani, Deori, Hill Miri, Khamba, Khamti, Khowa or Bagum, Lisu or Yobin, Monpa, Miji or Sajolang,

Mishmi, Mikir or Karbi, Memba, Mishing, Nishing, Nocte, Na, Singpho, Sherdukpen, Sulung or Puroik, Tagin, Tangsa, Wancho, Zakhring, or Mayor. 36.34% of population is non-tribals, which consist of government servants, businessmen, laborers and refugees like Chakmas, Hajongs, and Tibetans. The tribe wise percentage is as follows:- Adi (26.52%), Nishing (21.73%), Wancho (7.35%), Monpa (7.53%), Mishmi (6.85%), Nocte (6.58%), Tagin (5.51%), Sulung (1.15%), Khamti (1.10%) and for the rest of the scheduled tribes 7.05%.⁶

District - wise inhabitation of tribal population in Arunachal Pradesh.

Sl.No	District	Name of Tribes
1.	Tirap	Noctes, Wanchos, Tangsas, Lisus.
2.	Changlang	Noctes, Wanchos.
3.	Lohit	Mishmis, Khamtis, Singphos, Zakhrings.
4.	Upper Dibang Valley	Mishmis.
5.	Lower Dibang Valley	Mishmis, Adis
6.	East Siang	Adis. Adi Galos.
7.	Upper Siang	Adis.
8.	West Siang	Adis, Adi Galos, Membas, Khambas.
9.	Kurung Kurmey	Nishis, Hill Miris.
10.	Upper Subansiri	Tagins, Hill Miris, Na.
11.	Lower Subansiri	Nishis, Apatanis, Sulungs, Hill Miris.

12.	Papum Pare	Nishis.
13	East Kameng	Nishis, Sulungs.
14.	West Kameng	Monpas, Mijis, Akas, Sherdukpens, Pens, Khowas.
15.	Tawang	Monpas.

Source: The Directorate of Statistics, Govt. of A.P.

There is no caste system in the state, though social grades exist in some tribes. Each tribe is divided into endogamous and exogamous clans. Patrilineal and primogeniture are the fundamental laws of the inheritance, though variations are also there.

Every tribe has its own distinctive way of clothing. Dress and ornaments are simple and vary from one tribe to another. Many tribes weave and weave well with patterns and colours that have evolved over a period of time.⁷ Each tribe has its specialty in adornments. People are fond of ornaments. Brass and silver ornaments and bead necklace of different colours, are common.

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh celebrate a number of festivals; each tribe has one or more festivals, which are celebrated with great enthusiasm and gaiety. During the festivals, rituals are performed. Sacrifice of animals like mithuns, pigs and fowls, songs and dances and food and drinks (Rice Beer or Apong) etc. form an important part of the festivals. In the modern days, the festivals are celebrated on a fixed date by all the tribes. The following are the main festivals celebrated by the people of Arunachal Pradesh:- Nishing:- Nyokum Yulo, Adis:- Solung, Mopin, Nocte:- Chalo Loku, Mishmi:- Reh, Tamladu, Apatani:- Myoko, Dree, Monpa:- Losar, Torgya, Tagin:- Si-Donyi, Shingpho, Sangken etc.

“Verrier Elwin has classified Arunachal culture into three broad categories. Firstly, the Buddhist pattern. The Monpas, Sherdukpens, Akas and Khambas of the Kameng district are

largely of the Tibetan - Buddhist cultural traditions and the tribes like Singphos and Khamtis of the Lohit district are of the Burmese Buddhist cultural traditions. Their life style is based upon Buddhist ideas. They are characterised by their expertise in carpet making, weaving, dancing, painting, wood-carving, musk making and elaborate dresses. Secondly, the cultural pattern, which includes the tribes of Upper Subansiri (except for Apatanis) Siang, Lohit and some eastern part of Kameng area. Tribes like Adis, Nishings, Sulungs, Mijis, Akas, Khowas, Tagins, Hill Miris and Mishimis etc. constitute this group. Their notable features are use of bamboo and cane, practice of shifting cultivation, weaving, domestication of pig, goat, mithun etc. & scanty dress. Thirdly, the communities of Tirap of southern Arunachal witness clear impact of neighbouring cultures. The Nocte, the Wanchos and the Tangsas are known for their masculine dances, use of elephants in timber work and art of carving. They have been known for their association with practice of head-hunting and their contacts with Burmese tribes and have thus been influenced by Burmese culture⁸.

The political organisation of the first and second groups of tribes centre around the village councils except among the Nishings. The third group has strong chieftains as their political head⁹.

Social Institutions:

Dormitory and slavery are the important social institutions of the Arunachalee tribes.

Dormitory:

Among many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the institution of youth dormitory has traditionally been one of the most important social institutions. Youth dormitory is a place where the youth (boys and girls), usually those who have entered into adolescence become its members. Dormitory life was directly related to village protection, group work including hunting, teaching of art of warfare, craft and oral tradition to the new comers. The dormitory system is called by different

tribes of Arunachal by different names. The Minyong calls it as Dere, Padam terms it Mushup and among the Millang and other allied groups it is known as Nyaptek and Ashing calls it Bange¹⁰. The Adis call their girls dormitory Rasheng. The Tangsa community formerly had their bachelor dormitory known as Loo-pong, though Loo-pong has now disappeared. There are dormitory for girls in some Tangsa villages. The Noctes have their Morung for boys, in all villages and dormitory for girls in some villages, the Wanchos have their Morungs for boys and girls¹¹.

Haimendrof (1962) has mentioned about the existence of youth dormitory 'Patang' among the Apatanis. However, like many of the traditional tribal institutions and values, the dormitories also seem to be in a state of decay. The reason for the decay may be partially attributed to the introduction of modern education system and modernization of people's outlook.

Slavery:

The institution of slavery existed among some tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, like the Adis, Akas, Mishmis, Bangnis and Nishings. In Arunachal, the slaves were integrated in their societies but formed a separate class by themselves. The different tribes, called slaves by different names. The Akas called their slaves as Khulos and Adis called them Mipak or Pakbo. In the Aka society, they were not considered to be a part of their society. Even the distant relatives of a slave could not escape stigma of slavery. So was the case also with the Adis. The Mishmis also maintained this difference between a freeman and a slave and no marital relation between the two was allowed. Sometimes, slaves often win a good position in their master's homes and naturally after a period of years, come to be accepted as members of the family. The owner provides his slaves with food, clothing and shelter. He arranges his marriage and pays the bride price. In some areas, a slave is allowed to keep part of any earnings he may receive. In Nishing - society, Haimendrof writes, "the slave owners usually receive the children of their slaves with

the status as that of dependent. If at any time they could acquire wealth by virtue of their talent and initiative, they could become freeman of the Dafla society"¹². Thus, there existed among the Nishyi society, no hereditary slave - class. The Singphos, for instance, treated their slaves as members of their family. They eat together, work together and sleep together, and to an outsider there is nothing to their social inferiority.

The nature of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh was different somewhat from the notions of slavery in the west where the slave was practically a servant hired for life. Unlike in the west, the treatment of the slave in Arunachal was quite humane. Their clothing, food, housing and other general requirements did not differ materially from those of the masters. It was not only a human institution but was limited to a small section of population.

In Arunachal Pradesh the slaves were objects of merchandise, a slave by definition was something they could be bought and sold. Many NEFA slaves were used as merchandise. And a slave could be bought and sold a dozen of times in course of his lifetime. It is thus, incorrect to say that there was no real slavery in NEFA and that the slaves should be called serfs¹³.

Government of India took some measures for the abolition of slavery, particularly after the government of the union territory of Arunachal Pradesh was formed. There were three ways to free the slaves. First, the government of India has sanctioned a fairly large sum of money for the ransoming of slaves. It has now been agreed that part of it may be spent on rehabilitating the slaves after their release. Second through insistent but tactful propaganda, meetings are held, individuals are persuaded, the people are told that slavery is against the law. And the people are asked to regard any child born after August 15th 1947 as free. No one born in free India can be a slave. Third, the slaves themselves were also persuaded to be free with the help of the government and the village council. In some cases, liberated slaves have continued to work for their former masters with a new status, of their own

free will¹⁴. Very recently the Deputy Commissioner, Seppa issued an order No. PD(SW) 7/99-99 dated Feb.'1999 (5th Feb, 1999. Echo of AP) that all the bonded labourers (Sulung or Puroik) should be released. Thus, thanks to the above mentioned government measures; the institution of slavery is disappearing in the state.

Economy :

The basic economic structure of Arunachal Pradesh is agricultural. Nearly 80% of the population of the state is engaged in agriculture. The traditional method of agriculture is Jhuming, a kind of shifting cultivation. The forests are cleared and crops are raised for one to three years, depending on the fertility of the soil. Thereafter the cultivators move on elsewhere. It is normally carried on by the women folk. The main crops are rice, maize, millet, vegetable, tapioca, ginger and arum etc. The administration is trying to change the (jhum) cultivation system by introducing and encouraging settled cultivation. Now a days, terrace-rice cultivation and wet-rice cultivation are practised. However it is limited to plain areas bordering Assam and a few valleys and plateaus. Steps have also been taken to diversify the agricultural economy by encouraging cash crops like potato, mustard oil, and horticulture crops like apples, oranges, and pineapples etc.

Besides agriculture, animal husbandry - Industry, cottage industries, trade and business form an important part of the economy of the people.

The territory has a rich tradition of handloom, handicraft and weaving. It constitutes another important part of specialised economic activities of the people of Arunachal. It is a heritage. Monpas, Adis, Mishimis, Khamtis and Wanchos are among those, known for their skill in weaving and handicrafts. Carpet making, cane work, woodcarving, carpentry, etc are now widely practiced and this heritage is preserved by encouraging cottage and village industries.

Industrially, Arunachal is in a developing stage. Government is giving stress on the growth of industries 7

phases. A considerable progress has been achieved in small scale and medium scale industries. Around 80% of industries established in the state, are wood based industries and it has been the main source of income of the people and state government. However, wood based or forest based industries are paralysed due to a ban by the apex court in 1996.

Industrial development is yet to pickup in the state and the pace of industrial development is slow. The main factors are lack of infrastructural facilities, such as power, roads, private entrepreneurship, technical knowledge and skilled labour etc.

Language :

According to Grierson's linguistic classifications, a number of languages spoken in Arunachal from the West Kameng district to the Lohit district are put together under the 'North Assam group' of the Tibeto-Burma speech family. This affiliation is obviously geographical rather than philological¹⁵. Thus language /dialects spoken by the tribes of Arunachal are Tibeto-Burma language group as per Grierson's linguistic survey of India. In Arunachal Pradesh there are 108 languages / dialects¹⁶ spoken by some 25 tribes and 101 sub tribes. The languages of almost all tribes except Khamptis and Monpas are without any script. But they are rich in oral literature. The Khamptis and Monpas have scripts. The Khamptis follow the Tai script, while the Monpas follow the Tibetan script. English is the official language of the state. Hindi and Assamese are the spoken languages or link languages of the people.

Religion :

The religion and culture of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is of great variety and consists of beliefs, ideas and faiths which are profound, complex and subtle. Buddhism is one of the major religion in Arunachal which is practised by 13.13% of total population. Monpa, the largest Buddhist tribe, is followed by Khamti, Memba, Singpho, Kaman/Miji Mishmi and Khowa. Khampti, Singphos and possibly the Mishmi belong to

the Hinayana sect of Buddhism, whereas Monpa and Membas prefer the Mahayana form of Buddhism. Thus, we find that the Buddhists of the Hinayana school are in Lohit and Tirap side and Buddhism of the unreformed Tibetan (lamaistic form) sect are in Siang and the reformed ones are in Kameng. The Singphos who have accommodated the religious practice of their neighbours follow Buddhism and have decorated their temples with images of different gods and goddesses. The Tawang Monastery in the Tawang district is the oldest and the biggest monastery in Asia which dates back to the 17th century A.D. The library has about 850 bundles of old scriptures mainly Kanjur and Tanjur. The Chorten at Gorham in Zeminthang area under Tawang district is one of the largest Buddhist Chorten in Asia. The stupa at Vijayanagar in present Changlang district depicts Buddhist culture of Hinayana sect¹⁷.

Hinduism penetrated into the far-flung region of Tirap by the 18th century through the efforts of the disciples of Sri Sanckara Deva of Assam¹⁸. Noctes of the Tirap district are the largest followers of Hinduism and Nishi tribe is the second largest in this respect, followed by Mishmi, Mishing/Miri, Tangsa who all adopted Hinduism¹⁹. The ruined temples like Malinithan in West Siang, Tamreswari, Siva Linga and Parusuramkund in the Lohit district are the ancient Hindu religious sites in Arunachal Pradesh.

In the foothill areas of Arunachal Pradesh, particularly Lohit, Papum Pare, Lower Subansiri, East Siang, Dibang Valley, West and Upper Siang districts the missionaries have been making determined efforts to spread the gospel of the Christ and have made considerable headway in bringing a sizeable number of tribals into the fold of Christianity.

The majority tribes of Arunachal Pradesh profess Animism, as their religious faith. All indigenous faiths, beliefs and practices which are found among the tribes, constitute their religion. According to 1971 census it constitutes 63.46 per cent of the total population of the state. Most tribal communities believe in the existence of spirits, give different

names to them and worship them in their own distinct ways.

The tribal religion is associated with social ethics that unite the tribes in discipline and makes for a certain nobility of conduct. The great virtues are discipline, devotion to work, generosity and hospitality, truth and kindness. Amongst the tribes of Arunachal who are practicing animism are Apatanis, Adis, Nyishis, Akas, Khowas, Mishmis, Tangsas and Wanchos. These tribes believe in several types of heavenly spirits and offer sacrifices to propitiate them. They are worshippers of the sun and moon, called Donyi-Polo in local dialects. Thus, they derive strength to face the problem of death, whereby it can be made more tolerable and reconcile themselves to the frequent exigencies of life.

PART-II

Indigenous Village Councils:

The village and the village councils were the basic political units of all tribes of Arunachal Pradesh till the introduction of the Panchayati Raj²⁰. In Arunachal Pradesh, till 1969, there were no representative institutions, except the village councils. Though far behind in political development, the people of Arunachal Pradesh were not entirely unfamiliar with self-governing institutions at the village level. Each tribe of Arunachal Pradesh has its own village council reflecting its own nature and requirement, which still exists and continues to function side by side with the statutory panchayat system. The political organisation of the tribal community is based on traditional system way in which the society recognises the exercise of authority. This authority may be vested in a single individual acting as the headman of the village or it may be entrusted to a few chosen representatives of the village forming a council of elders and acting on behalf of the whole village community whose confidence they may command, as it is supported by social and religious sanction.

The centuries' old popular forms of village council were evolved as an administrative mechanism for fulfilling local

needs. This village council, as Sir Charles Metecalf writes, "the little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of foreign relations, they seem to last where nothing else lasts. This union of village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great fortune of freedom and independence"²¹. Further, Mr. V. T. Krishnamachari wrote, "Owing to the life in the village communities and the measures of autonomy they enjoyed, that we achieve social cohesion and stability and succeeded in preserving our traditional cultural values over many centuries. This survival of our values during long period of foreign dependency is certainly due to the continuity of the village organisations. We must, therefore, recognise that modern democratic government can have a solid foundation only in villages."²²

Thus these popular forms of centuries old village councils were evolved, as an administrative mechanism for fulfilling social needs.

Types of village councils:

The traditional village councils have been very strong and the village often acted like sovereign bodies deciding all internal matters. Basically the village councils performed three types of functions - judicial, administrative and developmental. The functions of the village councils of all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh were more or less the same. However, functions of the village councils of some tribes were more elaborate than the others. The character and social policy of the tribes were different and this was responsible for variation in the role and function from tribe to tribe. Hence, chieftaincy system was found among Noctes, Wangcho, Tangsa, Singpho and Khamtis and the theocratic types of village council was noticed among almost all the Buddhist tribes such as Monpas, Sherdukpen and Khamtis, while the democratic type of village council were found among Adi, Hill Miri, Apatani, Monpa, etc.

The village council is known by different names in different tribes. In organisational matter also the village councils differ

considerably. The variation in the tribal councils was due to the social outlook and psychology of the tribes. Thus, some villages were least organised while others were well organised. The Sherdukpens, the Akas, the Monpas, the Tangsas and the Adis were better organised than the others.

Mangmajos of Monpas:

The Monpas have a well-developed village self governing institutions existing for at least past thousand years with democratic tradition. There is evidence to suggest that the Monpa village councils existed as far as 11th century. The village council of Monpa is called "Mangjom" or "Mangmajon" in which Mang or Mangma means people and Jom or Jombana means assembly. The village council, besides the Tsorgen (Gam), Thumis (next to Tsorgen in rank) and Gamins (Messenger), as members, also has some elderly members having knowledge and experience in tribal justice. Their opinion is often the final verdict of the council, which is promulgated by Tsorgen²³.

Tsorgen is elected from a panel of names of persons suitable for election and is drawn by Tsobla (local headman) after making a consultation with the villagers. The most suitable person who is considered fittest to become the Tsorgen, from the panel of names, is finally elected through deliberation. The person elected is approved by Tso-Tsangzon (general assembly) by an election process through the use of ballot box and ballot paper. Finally Tsorgen is recognised by the Deputy Commissioners in modern days. The Tsorgen is elected for a period of three years. Generally he is re-elected every three years. So once elected, he remains the chief until he dies or resigns. However, Tsorgen can be removed from office for inefficiency or wrong action by Tso-Tsangzon (general assembly). As head of the village council, the Tsorgen has to perform manifold duties with the help of his officials and other elders. He is guide, friend and philosopher in all the matters to the villagers. He has to see that the religious ceremonies, festivals are duly celebrated and the

maintenance and the repair works of Gompa are regularly done.

Tsobla and Gomin assist the Tsorgen in day to day administration. Tsobla is also elected for a period of two or three years and Tsoblas are the local representatives of Tsorgen. The functions of the Tsobla are generally analogous to those of the Tsorgen. Gomins (messengers) usually hold office for a year. In most villages, owing to the arduous nature of its duties, the appointment is given to each householder in turn year by year.

All the heads of the families are the members of the General Assembly. However, right to attend the meeting of the general assembly and the right to cast vote are strictly confined to those who have made regular contribution to the Khrein (Village Fund). The household, whose head does not attend the general assembly when it meets, or fails to take part in the voting, is fined. Nonetheless, a family, whose head is unable to attend, may depute any adult member or even minor or servant representing him to exercise all or any of its functions in the general assembly. But in case of minor or servant, they cannot take part in the discussions or cast votes.

Jumba of Sherdukpens:

The Sherdukpens are a small tribe and the society is divided into two classes, the royal and subject class. The royal class is known as Thongs, and they claim to be the descendant of the king Japtang Bura, while the subject class who is called "Chaos" is said to have descended from the attendants of the king²⁴. The village council and the village affairs are controlled by the royal class.

The village council of Sherdukpens is called as "Jumba". The council "Jung" consists of Gaon Bura (Thik Akhao), the ordinary members of the council (Jung Me), courier (Kachung) and Chowkidar. The members of the village council are elders of the village and elected by the villagers. All the heads of the family participate in proceeding of the village council meeting. The head of the village council or Gaon Bura after selection or

election is later recognised by the administration. There may be more than one Gaon Bura and the Gaon Bura must belong to the Thong class. The office of the Gaon Bura is not hereditary. There may be two or more Kachungs in a village to help the Gaon Bura in discharge of his daily duties and Chowkidar assists the Gaon Bura. However, the final decision rest with the Gaon Bura.

Melley of Aka :

The Aka society has developed a kind of democratic form of local government from chieftaincy, which was prevalent prior to independence. The last vestige of chieftaincy still evinces the lineage of the presence of Aka 'Ranis' (Aka queen) who are the successor of the lineage of the former chiefs. The 'Ranis' occupy a respectable position and their advice is always given weight. However, their role is now primarily advisory.

The village council of the Akas in local language is called 'Melley' but the Akas now have a preference for the Assamese word 'Riaz', which signifies the people. In Aka society, age is respected and importance is given not so much to wealth or property. Therefore, while selecting a village head or Gaon Bura, age, knowledge and experience are seen and not the wealth and property. The selection of Gaon Bura is made by the people of the village themselves, particularly elder members of the village and later recognised by the local administrative authority. All the elder members of the village are the members of the Aka village council. In the local language, the Gaon Bura is called 'Nuggu' (Greatman). Generally, he is the most popular, competent and influential person of the village. The Gaon Bura is helped by two junior associates who are called 'Borah' and the 'Gibba'. The function of the Borah is to hold the responsibilities of the Gaon Bura in his absence and he is next to Gaon Bura in authority. The Gibba keeps a watch over the people, their activities and movements as well as character and informs the Gaon Bura where necessary.

The meeting of the village council is presided over by the

Gaon Bura. However, decision is taken by consensus or by majority votes because the ultimate authority of the village council is the people of the village who form the general assembly. Apart from village council meeting, the Akas have the meeting of the neighboring villages, which is convened periodically in order to promote cordiality and goodwill among the neighboring villages. Such meeting usually takes place every sixth or seventh year. But in case of emergency, it can be convened when necessary.

Nyele of Nishis :

Nishings are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and are basically individualistic²⁵. The traditional council of Nishing is called 'Nyele'. However, Nyele is not a regular body. It is convened only when there is a conflict or dispute²⁶. Another institution of Nishing is called 'Gindung' (intermediaries). V. Elwin writes that the Gindung (messenger or intermediaries) in the old days used to arrange for the ransom of captives and still represent the parties in any dispute. They go to and fro in the interest of peace and compromise and finally convene a council or Nyele, which consists of the people particularly, the Gindung, local elders and official headmen. The council debates the matter in a very informal way and compensation is decided according to the wealth of the defendant. Oaths are taken and there are ordeals to test a man's innocence or guilt²⁷

Buliang of Apatani :

Apatanis are one of the most fascinating tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Dr. C. Von Furer Haemindrof who visited the Apatani plateau twice, first in 1962, wrote in his book "The Apatanis and their Neighbour" about the village council or traditional political system of the Apatanis that Apatanis village lacks a centralised authority mechanism but they manage their village affairs in a somewhat informal way by a council of clan representative known as Buliang. The representatives of the clans who in their plurality constitute a kind of village-government, are the Buliang, men of the character and ability,

drawn from among members of a lineage, owing to its wealth and status, always furnishes one or two Buliang, or chosen on account of their personal standing in the community²⁸.

The Buliangs were collectively the upholders of the laws and justice of the Apatanis, but they are primarily the spokesmen of their clan or clan group and not village headman with absolute authority. Their duties are those of arbiters rather than of judges, and they usually do not take action unless a dispute has become a public issue which has to be dealt with by the community as a whole, be it by mediation or the use of force. The power of Buliangs, no doubt, is limited and they neither constitute a tribal government, nor do they function in the manner of judges as in a court of law, but even in such cases there is provision for a strict limitation of the use of force.

There are three types of Buliang. The Aka Buliang, the Yapa Buliang and the Ajang Buliang. These are the branches of the Buliang or council.

The Aka Buliangs are the old men who are wise, aged and experienced persons. They are consulted on all-important matters. The Yapa Buliangs are middle aged men, who are most active and lead the day today conduct of the village affairs. The Ajang Buliangs are the young boys, who act as messengers and guards of the village. As messengers, they help the Buliang in many ways.

Normally, the meeting of the Buliang takes place in public platform, called Lapang. Another system of maintaining peace among the 7 (seven) villages of Apatani and neighbouring Nishing villages is called Dapo (non-aggression).

This Centuries old Buliang system, today has become weak. The modern political institutions like Panchayat Raj, party politics, education and modernisation have eroded the value and importance of Buliang.

Abala of Idu Mishmi, Pharai of Digaru Mishmi :

The Mishmis are another individualistic tribes, who live in widely scattered villages. The traditional village council of Idu

Mishmi is called Abala. It is usually composed of elderly men of repute, influence, knowledge and experience. Its jurisdiction is restricted to judicial matters only, and does not include village administration²⁹. In old days, there was no village authority in Mishmi society because one or two or three houses constituted a village.

The Kaman Mishmi who are also called Digaru Mishmi have their village council known as 'Pharai'. The members of the village council have a great responsibility because they are supposed to scrutinize the claims of both the parties and then come to a provisional decision. They have a hard task to persuade the parties about justness of their decision and to bring about a settlement. This naturally entails long discussion and endless coming and going to the house of the plaintiff and the defendant, until at length the decision is accepted by both the parties. The members of the village council are entitled to a portion of the compensation demanded from the accused, and they get a remuneration from the complainant for their service. However, the Kaman Mishmi believe in settling their dispute by negotiation. Their temperament is very different from that of the Idu Mishmi and when necessary they approach some men of substance and influence of the area and who summon what they call Pharai, a gathering of local elders representing each clan from several villages in the vicinity as well, of course, as parties to the disputes. The matter is publicly discussed and normally the chairman, after ascertaining the views of the elders present, gives his decision and decides the compensation to be paid.

Mokchup of Khamtis:

The Khamtis' political authority vests in the village chief, who normally belongs to the royal clans. "The Chief occupies highest position in the social hierarchy and is regarded as fountain of justice"³⁰. The chief is the political head, but he exercises his authority through a council of members recruited from the people of various social status, and this council is called Mokchup. According to the Thamasat (Sacred text), the

members should not be less than six for deciding any legal case. The office of the chief is hereditary in the clan, but not in the family. A chief continues to hold his office till he either dies, or is incapacitated by old age.

The Thamasat, (sacred text) contains a good deal of secular laws such as criminal law, law of contract and civil law. The chief and his council while deciding the case, consult the sacred books Thamasat to determine the nature of any punishment to be administered. In Khamti society still, Thamasat (sacred text) is highly respected.

Ngothun of Nocte:

Once the Noctes were a tribe of warriors and headhunters, who were involved frequently in inter village disputes and raids. The political life of the people was maintained by the chief and elders, a body which is called Ngothun. This council maintains law and orders, decides disputes within the village and with other villages and also organise developmental activities. The chief is the head of the village council and presides over the meeting of the council. The chief is called Lowang and he is hereditary. The members of council are head of the important clan of the village.

The next to chief is called Ngonwa, who is normally a senior member. In a village there can be two or three Ngonwas, it depends upon the Chief³¹. The Ngonwa in all-important matter has the privilege of private discussion with Chief. Tenwa (Priest), is allowed to attend the meeting when council discusses the matters of cultivation only. Remwa (announcer), has the function, to inform the villagers about any activities or decision taken by the council. The common people are not allowed to attend the meeting of the council. However, in the Nocte society, there is variation in the structures of the village council from village to village.

Normally, the meeting of the village council takes place in the chiefs' house. But in case of theft, marriage, murder and divorce, the meeting takes place in the Morung (Community Hall), in local language it is called 'Paang'.

Ngajowa of Wancho:

Wancho is another tribe of Arunachal having chieftaincy or authoritarian types of village council. The chiefs of the Wancho are same as that of Noctes, each controls a number of villages. The chief of the village council is called Wangham. Every village has a council of elders called the Ngajowa. The members of the council represent each clan. The members of the council assist the chief in different functions. However, the number of the members and their designation, vary from village to village. Generally, the council meets are held at Morung or Chiefs' houses where all the members are invited. The main functions of the council are to maintain law and order, warfare, settle disputes, development and welfare activities.

The decision of the council is final in respect of village disputes. Nevertheless, the council is a consultative body, totally dependent on the chief, especially if the chief is powerful and dominating.

Kebang of the Adis :

The village council of the Adis, is called Kebang. Verrier Elwin, in his book 'A Philosophy for NEFA' (1964) writes that "the most highly developed and effective of all tribal councils is the Adi Kebang, which may well become a model for the whole of NEFA"³².

S. Dutta Choudhury, former Editor Gazetteer of East and West Siang Districts also writes, "of all tribal councils in Arunachal Pradesh, the Kebang or village council of Adis of Siang is the most remarkable in many ways. It is a highly organised and powerful self-governing body, exercising effective control and authority over the residents of a village sanctioned by centuries of tradition of the people. The Kebang is essentially a democratic institution in its character, the composition and function. In fact, the socio- political life of the Adis, is inconceivable without their Kebang"³³.

Since the present study is aimed at the study of Kebang the attempt is made to provide a detailed account of the evolution, function and present status of the kebang system in

the proceeding chapters.

Theoretical Classification of Traditional Village Councils of Arunachal Pradesh.

There are almost as many types of village councils, as there are tribes in the state. However, they do not present uniform pattern of political system. Therefore, attempts have been made by the scholars to give some broad framework of theoretical classification of different types of village councils of Arunachal Pradesh. K. A. A. Raja, former Lt. Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, classified them into five distinct types of village councils of the state³⁴ (i). The Republican type of Adi, (ii). The Autocratic type of Nocte and Wancho, (iii). The Theocratic type of Monpa, (iv). The Individualistic type of Mishmi, and (v). The Apatani type (clan council). Dubey.S. in his book, 'Dynamics of Tribal Local Polity and Panchayat Raj in Arunachal Pradesh', classified them into three types of village councils³⁵. (i). Democratic type where he included Adi, Monpa, Aka and Sherdukpen, etc. in this category. (ii). Theocratic type, under this category he included almost all the Buddhist tribes of the state, as the head of the village councils are also the religious head of these tribes, and (iii). Chieftaincy type where he included Nocte, Wancho, Tangsa, Singpho and Khamti in this type.

Thus, broadly speaking, when we analyse the power, functions and and composition of the different tribes of state, we find four types of tribal village councils in Arunachal Pradesh.

1. Theocratic Type.

Although, Mangjom of the Monpas and Jumba of the Sherdukpens have democratic systems and Mokchup of the Khamtis has a chieftaincy system, but it has strong bias for theocratic element as its heads are also expected to function as religious heads of the village.

Therefore, almost all the Buddhist tribes such as Khamti, Monpa, Sherdukpen and Zhakrang whose socio-political lives

centre around Buddhism can be grouped under this category. Traditionally, in the Monpa society, after the election/selection of the candidate his name is forwarded to Dzungpon (religious head at district level, appointed/deputed by the supreme government of Tibet) for his approval.

2. Chieftaincy Type.

The eastern tribes of Arunachal likes Noctes, Wanchos, Tangsas, Singphos and Ki:amtis practice chieftaincy system. There is certain variation in actual practice among these tribes, but largely it is the chief, who occupies the superior position in the Council. However, the Chieftaincies are of milder type and are never autocratic.

3. Oligarchic Type.

Apatani and Sherdukpen have a oligarchic types of system. The Buliang of Apatani are only individual heads of the clan or clan representatives and they all together form a somewhat informal council, in the time of need. The Jung of Sherdukpen is also dominated by the representatives of the Royal class. Therefore, we put this tribes under this category.

4. Democratic Type.

Adi, Monpa, Sherdukpen and Aka have a democratic type of village council. The election or selection of the head of the village councils are quite democratic, as all the village community participate in the election /selection of the head of the village council and head of the village council are elected/selected on merits. However, Monpa and Sherdukpen also have theocratic elements as the head of the village councils and they have to function as religious head of the village. But, amongst the tribes who have the democratic type of village council, the Kebang of Adi, is the most developed among the traditional self- governing institutions of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and it has acquired a certain degree of sophistication and formalities in it's functioning.

Common Characteristics of the Traditional Village Council of Arunachal Pradesh.

There are many common features of the traditional village council of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh despite of typological differences.

a). All type of the village councils were very strong and often acted like sovereign bodies. Even when a new village is formed out of the migrated people of a former village, they form a village council of their own and are independent from their parent village.

b). All type of village councils have a gerontocratic tendency. Age, experience and knowledge of traditional laws are the criteria for the selection/election of members of the village.

c). All type of village councils have certain democratic ethos in their operatives and draws their authority from the people. Even in chieftaincy system, there are some democratic elements in them.

d). All of them mainly concerned with the administration of justice, although they also concern with the general administration of the village and developmental activities.

e). Almost, in all the tribes of Arunachal, generally the women do not participate in the traditional village council. Their role is still very limited.

d). Decisions are mainly based on public opinion or general consensus, custom and tradition. Since there are no codified laws, laws are largely conceived of in terms of the kinship bound and identical with the ethical norms in all the tribes.

It may be said that there are several types of traditional self-governing institutions among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

and they are fit into different theoretical models. All the systems invariably include a council of the people or their representatives in one form or the other.

Notes

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