

Interpreting History Through Ponung

Tamo Mibang

Ponung is a voluntary song and dance performed by a mixed ring of males and females. Every member of the society irrespective of sex, status, young and old, friends or foes equally participate in Ponung they derive fun, delight and pleasure from it. It preserves folk-tales history, literature and poetry of the Adis and is of two kinds - Gidi Agam Ponung or festival and ritual song like Solung Ponung, Etor Ponung, Aran Ponung, Miri Bari, etc, and Luman Ponung, i.e. entertainment or recreational song. It is usually the 'Ponung Irging'¹ who sets the pace and tune to the dance. Ponung reflects the simple matters of tribal life and the concept of their origin, the sun, the moon and the creation of the universe.

According to Adi legend, the God of the Sky had a flute and a Jew's harp. One day He dropped them to the earth and these were picked up by Irki-Leni Uyu, the Goddess of music. She died with the flute in one hand and the harp in the other. Two women - Doni Yasi and Liko-Yaman came near the dead body. Doni Yasi took the flute to the Padams and taught them Solung Ponung. So, the Solung Miri of the Padams remained sweet as the music of the flute. Liko Yaman took the harp to the Minyongs and from her came the Uyu Miri and the Bari. For the Minyongs became talkers and the Padams sweet singers²

There may be certain fictitious plots in the tale to amuse and entertain the listeners. But then, here certainly the genesis of Adi cultural life is referred to. It remains an account of the past connecting the missing link in our history. And it is historically true that the Minyongs are great talkers and the Padams are sweet singers.

In Miri hymns there is a reference to Engo Kojum Kojé, Takar Kojum Kojé, Engo Hojume didume, Takar Kojume didume³. That there was a prosperous land with flourishing civilisation. It was Kojum Kojé land but it was destroyed by flood. In this land, there was an influential man, Kosam Luntong. One day with

his people he turned a stream to get fish. A big fish Ladang-Angur-Potung was trapped and killed. A bat carried the news to Ladang Layo, the God of the river, who was weeping for his son. Ladang-Angur-Potung. To take revenge and annihilate Kosam Luntong Ladang Layo called upon all the powers of water to rise and destroy Kojum Kojé land. He also sent two huge snakes to undermine a cliff under which the civilization was built. Flood came all around ; Kojum Kojé was blotted out, all were buried under water. Thus a civilization was destroyed.

It is said that the heads of the people sprung up as trees, bamboos of different kinds and the hearts of the people as ginger and onions. How far is it true ? Was there really a flourishing civilization ? We cannot come to any definite conclusion. But then it is surely a data which can motivate a student of history to search for more and further evidence. I believe further research may link this buried civilizations with recent excavations at various places in the foot-hill areas of the state.

The song and dance are numerous and so also the music. Solung Abang ⁴ is sung during Solung festival. It totally deals with the mythology on the creation of the universe. It begins with 'Keyum' - nothingness - and transforming through various stages of cosmic vibration ; it evolved to a concrete solid form which had life and this stage of solid form of the transformation is called Sedi Melo ⁵. He is the origin and creator of the universe in Adi belief. In Abang genealogy of evolution is traced as Kiyum, Yamkang, Kasi, Siang, Abo, Bomuk, Mukseng, Sedi-Malo, Diling, Dimem, Dikong, Litung, Tuye, Yepe, Pedong-Nane, i.e. the rock and finally Tani, the man ⁶. Then it proceeds on dealing with the creation of animal world by taking the source of life from Limir Sobo ⁷. "These Abangs are nothing, but the mythology on the source of light and knowledge of civilization and advancement in faith belief and practices of the Adis which roll down like a flame of light giving life to the society from generation to generation from time immemorial"⁸.

Stories are told in songs. The peculiarity is that these stories varied slightly with different narrations. Though variation is not so wide, yet in certain cases some words-name of places are omitted. Even in same village there is variation and it leads to argument among the singer . The story of the creatin of the world as prevalent among the Minyongs of the central part of East Siang District runs :

There was nothing and nothing, but rocks and water all around.

The first living beings were the rocks ; they were soft and they could move about. From the rocks, a female rock Eling-Litung Tune was born and from her another female rock Pedong-Nane was born. She grew naked and married another rock, Eling-Limuk-Muktum, and she conceived ; her first son was the fish, it went to a mountain stream to live in. Then she gave birth to the frogs, then insects and reptiles, etc. which live in water. Then after Pedong-Nane left her husband and went to the sky village 'Engo Takar' among the stars where she married Karba-Bojong. From him she had many children - Ninur Bote, Lomang Bote, Doni Nibo and Doro-Robo. After giving birth to all of them she died. Nibo and Robo prepared rice bear for the funeral. When the millet was ready and they poured water over it, a great cloud arose, and from it was born Polung Sobo, the methun ⁹. In this way, we find a series of variations, but one thing is clear, the main substance remained the same and no Ponung miri would ever distort the facts. The songs are continuous and stories are long last for hours together. These are song in style and people listen to them with great interest.

A trading song 'Pasi Kongki' tells us about trade relations with Tibet. On the hills of Kubo Puleng there was a big honeycomb. We cut it and brought it home in a pot ; then made wax of it. Ear ring and bangles were made in a local goldsmith. With these we went to Tibet and sold them in exchange of beads and other things. We returned to our village with full basket. And we were happy ¹⁰.

Here a social situation is referred to. There were extensive trade relation between the Adis and Tibet. Honeycomb might be an imaginary one but not Tibet. It is true that the Adis sold their goods in Tibet and in exchange brought back beads, bronze pot, etc, which are available with them till these days.

The love song : "Oge ge mane semua ; Oge ge mashe semua ; Oge ge"¹¹ is very much popular in upper areas of Siang Valley among the Ashings, Karkos and Shimongs. Lovers express their romantic feelings and imagination, some times face to face and some times lonely. The central theme of this song is that there were two lovers. The girl was exquisitely beautiful. Suddenly, she was kidnapped and married off by a Tibetan. She was gone for ever. The boy remained weeping and weeping. Ultimately he consoled himself through songs. This song certainly relates to an incident and it also reflects a historical truth that there were matrimonial relations between the Adis and Tibetans during those old days.

Oral information becomes the only reliable source in areas where the documentary evidence are inadequate and especially for a society like Arunachal where and of whom history is yet to be written.

Now let us see how Luman Ponung - entertainment song is important as sources of contemporary history. Luman ponung is usually performed by girls of same age group in their Rasheng in the evening and sometimes in open field on all possible occasions simply for recreation. The ponung Iring leads the party with female attire and the girls with traditional skirts and blouse Gale, Galup and Nog-tampilang, etc. The Adis consider this young folk as the representation of legendary Karpoong and Kardook, who once conceived the idea of ponung at 'Eugo Koje Didum', the land of civilization¹². They were madly in love and to express their love and happiness to outside world, they consummated the outburst of sweet melody - the Ponung -melody of entertainment.

The movement for independence in the country was hardly known to the average people of Arunachal, then NEFA. But when the country achieved independence on August 15, 1947 from the yoke of the British imperialists, the Adis also celebrated independence with song and dance :

Go Raja paabona
 Gandhi Raja paabona
 Go Raja paabona ;
Go Raja paabona.
 Go Raja paabona
 Mikka Shaadin paabona
 Go Raja paabona.

(Gandhij has brought independence to the country. He was the king of kings. It was because of him that we could become free citizens of a free country). This Ponung is a kind of rich tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. The Ponung party goes on repeating the same line in chorus by clapping their hands as if they have won a big trophy. In the same tune Ponung continues :

Aiye Dilli Mahatma Gandhi
Aiye Dilli Mahatma Gandhi

(Delhi itself is Mahatma Gandhi ; Yes Delhi is Mahatma). To an Adi eye, Delhi is nation's glory. It represents India's past, present and future. It is the image of Mahatma Gandhi,

Appreciating the charismatic personality of the visiting dignitary while welcoming him in their midst, the Ponung sings ;

Ai remi kampo

Haldipur Migom

Ai remi kampo

(Oh, Haldipur saheb, you are really handsome and healthy. We heartily welcome you). Naturally, when the guest is welcome with such appealing melody, he feels at home and opens his heart to the people. In the same une Ponug may add more melody :

Deloia momode

Momod me mibange

(We really like and love your personality from the core our heart). Such Ponungs are sung at an appropriate occasion which rouse the emotions of the visiting dignitary and at the same time boast up his moral to serve the people. While Ponung is in full swing one forgets the world. It really gives solace to a widow, joy to an orphan, amusement to a lover, pleasure to a guest and may others.

As a matter of fact, Ponung is an entertainment and recreation of the youthful generation. Batches of young girls with colourful gale and galup encircling the Irging dance and sing to the tune of rhyme of the jingling of a sword. Men's every yearning and sometime finds itself at a lost ; feels repentance for losing dearest one or any other inanimate object coveted. In such situation, he consoles himself ;

Tai gamsi e goone

Lamdo yoyob me,

Tai gamse ;

Goone lamdo youobe.....

(Oh, what to do we lost that long road to others. Today transports are plying on this road caravan after caravan. Yt, we are in old tract. Our village is in the jungle) In nostalgia, the same melody follows on ;

Adai adai tai mamo

.....Adai adai tai mamo 13.

(Why I left, why I left ! My heart is burning). Leaving his ancestral property to others for his own fault, he finds himself at a loss ;he is no where in this world. Thus his repentance is expressed in Ponung. Here some of the present day specific social realities are manifestly depicted, and so important for social history. History is always written from the contemporary point of view - what we see and hear presently and it records the past seen and understood

at that particular time. I believe, as time advances, Adi Ponungs will serve as sources of Arunachal history.

Notes & References :

1. Irging is a good singer and dancer. He is the overall in-charge of village Ponung.
2. It is a popular legend prevalent in Adi Minyong society.
3. It was the land of first civilization according to Adi myths.
4. Solung Abang is the ornamental cultural literature of the Adis.
5. Sedi-Melo is the creator of the universe.
6. These are stages of human evolution.
7. Limir Sobo means the Methun.
8. "TalomRukbo, Solung : the central feature of Adi culture", read on 1st September, 1986 at Pasighat Solung ground.
9. Verrier Elwin, *Myths of the North-East Frontier India*, p. 19.
10. Talom Rukbo, 'Pasi Kongki', *Rali monthly*, Pasighat, Vol. x, No. 4, p. 11.
11. It is a song of love affairs.
- x2. The antiquity of Adi song is traced to the legendary love episode of Karpoong and Kardok.
13. These songs are my own collections from Adivillages; Meanings are interpreted accordingly.