

**PROCEEDINGS OF  
NORTH EAST INDIA  
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

**NINTH SESSION**

**GUWAHATI ; 1988**

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HISTORY ASSOCIATION



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9

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**Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee**  
General Secretary  
on behalf of

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## PREFACE

*The ninth session of the North East India History Association at the Gauhati University was indeed the fulfilment of a long cherished objective of the Association to hold a session in the premier University of the region. In fact, there had been efforts on the part of the Association ever since it came into existence in 1979 to hold a session at the Gauhati University. We are thankful to the authorities of the Gauhati University for inviting the ninth session and organising it in an excellent manner.*

*Shri Bhisma Narain Singh, the Governor of Assam, inaugurated the session. Professor D. P. Barooah, Vice-Chancellor, and Professor J. N. Phukan, Head, Department of History, Gauhati University did the Association a great honour as Chairman of the organising committee and Local Secretary respectively for the session. It was presided over by Professor Bhupen Qanungo of the North-Eastern Hill University. More than one hundred and fifty delegates attended the session in which eighty-five research papers were presented and discussed.*

*The present volume is the proceedings of the ninth session of the North East India History Association held at the Gauhati University on November 3-5, 1988. I am thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. O. P. Kejariwal, Dr. M. S. Sangma and Dr. D. R. Syiemlieh for the help in selecting and editing the papers and publishing the volume. We are also thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for the generous financial assistance extended to the Association.*

**J. B. Bhattacharjee**

*General Secretary,*

North East India History Association.

Shillong

The 25 August 1989

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## ADI Society in Pre-independence Period

*Tamo Mibang*

The tribal societies in Arunachal Pradesh were organised on the basis of clan or village, and the social relations were determined by Kinship and locality. Despite social and cultural variations there were some factors common to all the tribes. In fact, each of the tribe was endogamous, and divided into a number of exogamous clans. Marriage was legitimate within the tribe, but not within the clan. Clan was a very important element in the organisation of the tribal society, and a break of the clan rule was considered to be a serious offence<sup>1</sup>. The smallest unit of the society was family consisting of father, mother and children. A domestic group also included other persons related to the family, such as widows, orphans and infirm persons.<sup>2</sup>

The attitude towards the father, the father's brothers, and the grandfathers was one of respect, and usually the father was considered to be the authoritative head, who had an effective say in all matters that concerned the family. He had control over the activities of his wife and children. It was his responsibility to arrange the marriages of his sons and daughters. Above all he had supreme authority over the household possessions as well as landed property. He could purchase or dispose off properties including land for the welfare of the family. He could distribute his properties equally among his sons<sup>3</sup>. Though his word was always final, wife's approving consent was also sought by the loving husband while disposing or distributing properties among the sons.

In fact, land had been the most important property of the family and as the family split economically after the death of the father, it was generally divided equally among the sons<sup>4</sup>. Another important immovable property was the house<sup>5</sup>. Usually the elder son used to start independent household during the life time of their

father; the youngest son came to in automatic possession of it after his death. Other movable properties such as domestic utensils, implements, ornaments, beads, live-stock and forest trees like jack fruit, bamboos etc., were also equally divided<sup>6</sup>. In case a man had no issue, his property usually passed on to his brothers and if there was no brother, the property was succeeded by the nearest agnate. And when a father died leaving behind his minor children his brothers took care of the property till the minors attain maturity. The wife of the deceased could also look after the property. The daughters were however, entitled to receive ornaments, clothes etc., at the time of marriage. The mother was also equally respected by the members of the family. All the domestic works centred around her. The mother's brother was treated with a degree of intimacy and affection.

The Adi families were generally small in size. The system of joint family was totally absent among them. Adoption was prevalent among the Adis. The main motive of adoption of a child in a household was to ensure inheritance, adoption had always implied adoption of a son. If adoption was not done, according to their custom, the property was automatically<sup>8</sup> inherited by the nearest patrilineal relatives<sup>8</sup>. Slavery existed in the Adi society, but practically there was no castism or racialism though social grades existed which was a common phenomenon in human society.

Men and women worked jointly for the subsistence of the family, and the work load on the males and females was almost equal. Men's work was confined solely to hardwork which the womenfolk were not capable of doing, such as felling of trees, burning the Jhum, construction of houses etc. All other works such as sowing, planting and harvesting and all domestic works were women's work. The family tradition was valued above everything and the primary duty of the head of the family was to ensure that family tradition in all matters relating to life were perpetuated by their solemn observance, however, unmeaning-

ful they might begin to appear as conditions changed. The traditional authority of the head over the other members of the family was so awe-inspiring that the members never thought of expressing their differences whatever their conviction might be. Family members lived together joyously and with everyone doing his appointed duty; chances for quarrel or disputes were remote.

Women enjoyed a good deal of respect in society. She was never confined to house, she was allowed to work and move freely, she was allowed to choice in the selection of her husband and was allowed to marry according to her understanding and judgement.

Captain Dalton writes, "The Abor women, in features and complexion, approaching nearer to the Chinese than any other known type, are not much distinguished for beauty; but amongst the host of happy faces, massed in front of the tent, were some merry youthful ones that were almost pretty and would have been quite so with a freer use of water and more becoming coiffure. They are hard worked, but the whole burden of field labour is not thrown upon them as in the custom amongst most of the hill tribes. Wives are treated by their husbands with a consideration as marked, as it is singular in so rude a race; but then in marriages the inclinations of the parties most concerned is consulted, and polygamy<sup>10</sup> is not practised. This is a notable characteristic" Only in one case, woman was debarred from inheriting land<sup>11</sup> and other valuable property except female beads. In social life, no woman would formally join a Kebang (Village council) though she was not hesitate<sup>12</sup> in making her voice heard and her opinion felt. This distinction of man and woman made itself manifest in the behaviour of the household members and unconsciously young boys and girls had their character and outlook moulded in the traditional form.

Regarding the dress of the Adis, Father Krick wrote in 1853, " The dress, Government and customs will not be devoid of interest for Frenchmen; so a few details on that subject will,

I expect, be welcome. I have very little to say about their mode of dressing, as their clothing is reduced to minimum somewhat to primitive; however, the full dress sometimes worn by man deserves, a short notice. It is composed of ...1st, a loin-cloth; 2nd, a long loose mantle open in front, and sprinkled all over the designs of shining colour such as star etc; 3rd a cuirass painted black and made of camel hair; it covers the chest and the back, the head passing through a hole in the centre, and is used as a defensive covering against the thrust of lance"<sup>13</sup>. Their cloths were usually yellow and black, white and red which were made of cotton. They were ornamented with band of artistic needle work, in various colours, generally red and blue, along the short edges. Their cloths were used as shawls or for carrying children, or sometimes grains, but the ordinary upper garment was a second coloured cloth wound round the body so as to cover the breasts. Loin cloth for the men were made either of material similar to the plains white cloth, or of vegetable fibre.

Weaving was confined to women only. The colour sense of the people was very well marked and was particularly adopted to the surroundings. The original colours were chocolate-brown, black, dark, blue, green, scarlet and madder, which they used to produce from the bark of trees. The cotton rug 'Abor zim' was of special type which they woven<sup>14</sup>. It was used for bedding or as a wrapper during the winter.

Ornaments such as necklaces, ear rings and bracelets were used by both the sexes. In describing the beautiful ornaments of the Adis, Wilcox noted in the eighteenth twenties the larger necklace of blue beads looking exactly like turquoises and had the same hue of greenish blue<sup>15</sup>.

As regards the hair style of the people, neither women nor men were fond of long hair; they did not allow it to grow beyond two or three inches in length. Their hair was closely cropped and it was done by lifting it on the blade of a knife and chopping it with a stick all round.

In fact, hair style of the Adis - Minyongs, Pasis, Padmas, Karkos and Shimong except the Gallongs was almost uniform. The Gallongs dressed their hair in a fashionable way. The men cut about two inches of their hair round the head and made it pointed towards the nape of the neck. Gallong women wore their hair long parting it in the middle and making roll on the neck<sup>6</sup>. Rice and its products like rice beer (Apong) and rice cake (etting), maize, millet etc., were the main items of their food. They had rarely practised any process of cooking other than boiling. Frying was unknown to them. It was the tradition for every house to brew its own apong and serve everybody young and old. It was considered to be an important item of their food.

Mustard, country bean, punkin, small onion, brinjal and bamboo shoots were their main vegetables. They were non-vegetarian. Mithun meat, pork, chicken squirrel and fish etc. were their favourite meat. Meat was frequently roasted. A large variety of wild leaf vegetables such as 'Ongin' Oyik, Okomamang, Rori etc., were taken in large quantities. A meal usually consisted of boiled cereal i.e. rice and some boiled, green leaves seasoned with chillies and salt<sup>7</sup>. Their diet has been considered to be satisfactory on the whole and the health and body built of the people were good.

The domestic articles of Adi house usually consisted of agricultural tools, a loom with accessories for weaving, baskets of various types domestic utensils of wood, bamboo, cane, earth and metal, weapons of war and chase, fishing baskets, gourd vessels and bamboo container for fetching water, and skulls (specially horns) of animals sacrificed in the past were nicely decorated in the front wall of the house. Valuable beads and gun were considered the most treasured possession.

The hand made earthen vessels were called 'Kedeng-peki' and were used for cooking. It was almost spherical in shape with a narrow neck and a wide mouth. It was generally used during festivals. it is said that these potteries were

manufactured in Adi Pangi areas<sup>18</sup>. Now also, it is found in some Adi houses.

Metal pots were not used for domestic purposes. These were either used as currency or as charms. Dangki, Kiku, Leku, Marbang, Lelat, Lemok and Merang etc. were important metal pots<sup>19</sup>. These infact, served the purpose of currency to a great extent among the Adis.

The amusements of the people were, singing, dancing and flute 'Tapung', Gangang and kering, Yoksa etc., were used as musical instruments<sup>20</sup>. Dance and music were an important medium through which the art and culture of the people found expression, The dances performed by the people on different occasions were broadly classified as rituals, festive and recreational. Indeed these dances reflected their social customs, religious beliefs and their exuberance of life. It is important to note that their dances in most cases were communal rather than individual.

In Arunachal recreation was not a luxury, it was considered to be a duty. By making the people happy, it eliminated anxiety and discontent; by filling the time fruitfully, it raised the morale. It was an important means towards the development of tribal culture.

### Notes and References

1. **Gazetter of India**, Arunachal Pradesh, Lohit Dist., p. 79.
2. Sochin Roy, **Aspect of Padam-Minyong Culture**, p.24.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 210
5. Ibid
6. Ibid.
7. Mother's brother was profoundly regarded by the children in Adi society. It was believed that eyes, ears, hands, fingers and legs etc., belonged to him. to him.

8. That was the prevailing custom of the Adis.
9. T. Mibang, "Social change among the Minyongs between 1947-1981", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, p.59.
10. W. Robinson, "Captain Dalton's visit to Membu", **India's North-East Frontier**, p-258.
11. S.S. Sashi, **Night Life of Indian Tribes**, p. 22.
12. Sochin Roy, op.cit., p. 210.
13. N.M. Krick "Account of an expedition among the Abors in 1853"; W. Robinson, **India's North-East Frontier**, p. 244.
14. Sochin Roy, op.cit., p.86.
15. R. Wilcox, "Memories of Survey (1825)", **Asiatic Researches**, Vol. XVII, see W. Robinson, op.cit., p.80.
16. It was the hair style of the Adis which is prevalent till these days.
17. This was the normal diet of the Adis.
- 18.. Sachin Roy, op.cit., p.80.
19. These were valuable movable properties of the people.
20. These were indigeneous musical instruments of the Adis.