



## ***Kebang* (Social Council) of the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh**

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### **Abstract**

Customary laws and practices are study across the world were consulted in the contemporary times in order to understand their nature and relevance for the indigenous societies were brought under the modern legal regime. Day-to-day criminal and civil cases are executed under customary law. However, in the present-day customary law is challenged from many quarters such as statutory law, international law etc. and there is recognition of the fact that these will have to change in response. The Adi, is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh, popularly known as ‘the land of rising sun’, with varied topography and enchanting landscapes, is the home of heterogeneous tribes. The state is abode of 26 major tribes and more than 100 minor tribes. The Adis are concentrated in the Siang Valley. The objective of the paper is to examine the social council (*kebang*) in the study area, its present impact in the society, how it is working till date, roles and what are the changes occurs and its continuation.

**Keynotes:** Adi, *Kebang*, continuation, Roles and Changes.

### **Introduction**

Pospasil (1971: 9) writes, “Law has traditionally been regarded as the property of only the ‘higher’ cultures and civilization. Roberts in *Ingold* (1994: 962) has mentioned that the very concept of ‘law’, claimed that it is separation of the cognitive and normative domains, its identification with a discrete sphere of the ‘ought’, may not always find counterparts in the small scale and technologically simple societies (which anthropologists have traditionally studied). According to Davis et al., (1962: 45) this restricted view of law, ‘unless there are official agencies to decide disputes by interpreting and applying legal rules to given situations- that is, unless there are courts- there is no law as defined here’. Jok et al. (2004), In ‘*A Study of Customary Law*’ in Contemporary Southern Sudan has pointed out that, “During two decades of civil war, customary law has been the principal source of social order and stability within the region and it remains the predominant source of law in contemporary southern Sudan”.

According to Horam (1975: 79), “As far as the regulation of a tribal social life is concerned, it has throughout the ages remained in the hands of village authority. Traditionally, the territorial area being usually a village, each group was organized under a chief aided by a council of ministers called the Village Council. All the members of the group had the right to use the common property resources, practice shifting cultivation, and other livelihood related activities like hunting, fishing and gathering of forest products”. These rights were socially sanctioned and behind these lay the force of custom. Talukdar (1994:1) writes, “The Village Council is the custodian of these custom and its decisions are supreme and final and to be abided by the community without violation. Nothing in the village could be done without the approval and sanction of the Village Council. It punishes the wrong doers and those who violet the

prescribed rules. The above thus, sufficiently indicates that the role, which Village Council plays in the management of shifting cultivation, is highly important. It is in this context an anthropological inquiry into the role of Village Council is eminent”.

Arunachal Pradesh, state of Indian Union is the homeland of many tribes, of which in numerical strength 26 are distinguished as major. Located in the North Eastern corner of the country, the state shares international borders with Bhutan, China and Myanmar. The villages of the state are divided into an important unit in their history identified as social, religious, political and economic unit. Further, the Village Council, which every village of Adi tribe has its a unique distinction of function in the state. Village Council is the custodian of the land, the very means of the livelihood support system for the people. What the Village Council decides is supreme and abiding to all the villagers. Under such a strong role of Village Council all the people get justice.

## Methodology

Both the primary and secondary data are used for collecting data. For primary data interview method and observation method are used. The data are collected from different villages namely Sile, Oyan, Lumpo, and Nari, in both the district of East Siang and West Siang. For secondary data collection news papers, books, published paper and district library etc., are the various sources used.

## Adi

Comprising one - third of the total population of Arunachal Pradesh, the Adi is a major tribe of the state. Among various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Adis are the most advanced group. The Adis has been known as Abor for a long time. According to Saikia the meaning of the Abor is “One who does not owe allegiance to others” (cited in Nyori, 1993:2). The Adis do not like to be called themselves as *Abor* but prefer to be called as the Adi, which their own language means ‘hill’, thus briefly the ‘Hillman’. Elwin gives the information about the division of the Adis (1959:18), “The word Adi today covers a large number of tribal groups, united by a language that in spite of dialectical variations is fundamental everywhere the same and a similar culture and temperament. The Adis fall into two main divisions – one division includes the Minyongs, Padams, Pasis, Panggis, Shimongs, Boris and the Ashings and Tangams. The other division includes the Gallong group, with which may be associated the Ramos, Bokars, and Pailibor of the far north”.

Siang valley is inhabited by a number of tribes of which the Adi forms the most dominant group. The Adi tribe is composed of many sub tribes - Ashing, Bori, Bokar, Gallong, Karko, Komkar, Milang, Minyong, Padam, Pasi, Panggi, Pailibor, Ramo, Shimong, and Tangom. Elwin (1959:66) described Siang as “One of the fascinating and exciting parts of NEFA’ and said, ‘the People are charming, hospitable, and filled with a zest for life: tribal institution still retains their vitality. It is a country of song and dance, of hard eager work, of fine spinning and weaving, where the rich and varied tapestry of NEFA is displayed”. The Adi belongs to the Mongoloid stock. The Adi language comes under the Tibeto - Burman branch of the Sino - Tibetan family. The Adi is a patrilineal tribe and live-in pile houses constructed with bamboo, wood and palm leaves. They are agriculturalists and their day-to-day life is principally depending on jhum cultivation. Rice is the staple food of the Minyongs. Along with rice, the rice beer (*apong*) and rice cake (*etting*) and it is supplemented by maize and millet, in their food. . The Adi coat (*galuk*) is used as the upper garment by the male. Adi coat are of several designs and are open in the front with laces in the middle. Minyongs women of the lower region wear full - sleeved black blouse with yellow bands of border designs as their upper garments. Besides jhuming, they also practice gathering, fishing, hunting and domestication of animal. The Adi girls are expert in weaving. Local disputes among them are generally solved through a social council (*kebang*) as per their pristine customary law. There are different types of marriage prevalent among the Adis. Traditionally they worship their forefathers and different deities reside in hills, fields, jungles, rivers, homesteads, etc. It is pertinent to note here that, religion is expressed

through different components of a culture like beliefs, rituals, magic, mana, omen, taboo, fetish, sacrifice, divination, and so on.

## Result and Discussion

The village organization (*kebang*) is a popular word and it is the court of justice for the Adi. Singh (1991:32), "It has been the custodian of the unwritten customary law which governs the social conduct. The *kebang* is so important in the Adi society that practically no aspect of their life is beyond its preview". Panchayat Raj System was introduced in India after post independent era but in the area of Arunachal Pradesh the administration has preserved the indigenous system of imparting justice. Social council called *kebang* guide each and every Adi village. *Kebangs* are organized in dormitory. Without the approval and sanctions of *kebang* nothing can be put into practice. All the matters and common interest of villages are placed before the *kebang*. Wilcox (1825:28), "He briefly mentions their "hall of audience and debate" where the *kebang* meeting was held". Ering (1978:25) writes, "Traditionally all male members of the village are counted as members of the village *kebang*.....A man who does not participate and ventilate his thought in the *kebang* is ridiculed by his friends as eunuch". Any interested person of the concerned village and villagers can attend and listen to the discussion over any case. In the *kebang*, members of all clans and families are represented. All the male members of a village are its general members. The members are also known as *kebang Abu*. Highest legal and judicial powers are exercised by elders through the council. Roy (1948:218), "The administrative structure of the Adis, is essentially democratic; autocracy in any form has not been known to them and in the absence of a distinct class of nobility, oligarchy has remained unknown". The village headman (*gams*) is chosen from within the village on the basis of their personal merit, ability and knowledge of the traditional lore. It was also agreed that all disputes and claims of the human beings should be submitted to the *kebang*. The findings, decisions and directions of the *kebang* must be accepted and observed by all (Bomjen, 1977).

When two people in the village have any dispute regarding any issues *mime melo* (husband wife) property, *among* (land), house boundary, *doppiyong* (theif), etc., then the victim calls the *kebang*. Traditionally in the *kebang* the head gam is the chairman, and any two educated youth from the village will be made as member of the *kebang* and they will draft the *kebang* for both the sides. As soon as the *kebang* is over, the two draft members will read out for the both side their opinion in front of the people present there. After the discussion and argument listening from both sides the verdict will be announced in favour of the right side and both the parties have to sign in the paper drafted by the member. With this signing of the verdict the *kebang* is over.

*Kebang* play a very important role in the Adi society. It is believed that from the inception of the Adis in this earth *kebang* existed. *Kebang* is known as the backbone of the Adis. The *kebang* is an integral part to maintain peace, harmony and to give justice to the people equally. The *kebang* functions with its natural vigour for administration of justice and the institution is still very active. If any social evils like drug, drinks, etc which disrupt the stability of the society, the role of the *kebang* member is to bring them back to the main stream of the society. If any adult members of the village are found practicing any evil, then the other villagers and family members of the adult first calls *dusung kebang* (small *kebang*). *Dusung kebang* means a small gathering by the adult family members at home to make him realise and understand the evil in which he/she is trapped. If she /he is again caught disobeying the *dusung kebang* then the villagers will call for *kebang*. The role of the *kebang* is various depending on the situation.

The present status of *kebang* is still as strong as the old *kebang*. The *kebang* body is constituted by head *gam* and *gam* which are appointed by the government. There is only one head *gam* in the village. And the *gam* member's numbers depend upon the populations of the village. The government of India is still not interfering in its work and has given the liberty to give decision or the verdict. Till date, any

issues, either personal or social, villagers' first choice is to approach *kebang*. Instead of going to court and police station and accepting the verdict given by law, people rely mostly on *kebang* decision and accept it unanimously and do not go to challenge it either in court or in any other village council.

In the present days, the Head *Gam* and the *Gam* of the villages are appointed by the state government with the approval of the village people. The *Gam* plays an important role in controlling and maintaining law and order in the village. The verdict of the head *gam* is equally respected and treated as the verdict of the court. The *gam* can punish the guilty. His order is also followed by the police. Before punishing the guilty, the villagers gather in the *dere* (dormitory) and discuss with the fellow villagers. Without any discrimination, whether they are poor or rich, the verdicts are fairly given. Now a day, the *kebang* assembling are very less. With the increase of education and modernisation in the society women *gam* called *gambhuri* are equally respected by the people. By appointing the women *gam*, the Adi society shows the women empowerment. Women in the villages now take part in the *kebang* and give their opinion. Previously women do not take part in *kebang* unless and until the issues are related to her. Any woman who is a victim can call for *kebang* by consulting her family members and *Gams*. In the present days the women are also made as head *gam* and *gam* of village. Depending on the oratory skill, the women are also approved by the government for the *gam* post which are proposed by the villagers. The women related issues are taken up by them. At present not only women related issues but also causes of social evil are taken up. At present women equally participate in *kebang*. All who are interested can come and attend the *kebang* and now a day with advance of time and the modern thought the educated women in the village come and share their opinion about the case in the *kebang*.

Now a days, since the village older *gam* are uneducated, the educated people have come up with an idea of having one secretary and joint secretary in the village for the smooth running of *kebang*. The victim first approaches the secretary and joint secretary of the village and these both secretaries tell the problem to the head *gam* and according to the advice of the head *gam* the secretary sends the notice to the villagers. Once the complaint reaches, it takes 2 to 3 days to give the circular. The date of *kebang* is fixed and decided in the circular. If the victim or the opponent for whom the *kebang* is called is absent from the *kebang* then the *kebang* members will take fine from the particular person. And also, in future the *kebang* will not accept any complaint filed by the particular family. Absence from *kebang* is considered as insult of *kebang*, the villagers and those who gather in the *kebang*. The rate of the fine depends upon the crime that has been committed. If the victim is not satisfied with the verdict, then they can appeal to the PI of the circle office. Then later the case is taken up by the village *gam* for one more chance in the *kebang* and again if the victim is not satisfied, then the case is referred to the DC and moved to the court. But generally, all the cases are mostly solved in the village level.

*Kebang* is a still a continuing process in the Adi society. Till today any dispute in the village, marriage issue, etc are reported to the village head man. All the issues in the village are first reported to the village council. All the illegal happenings in the village are first informed to the village head man. Any social functions, gatherings and religious activities which are going to be organised in the village are first discussed with the *gam* in *kebang*. On the *kebang* day tea, biscuits, betel nut and arrca nuts are served to the people who are gathered in the dormitory from both the side as the *kebang* begin. As soon as the *kebang* is over the villagers representing both the group are given rice, local rice beer, and meat in their respective homes at night. The *kebang* takes sometimes to give verdict. Sometime within 2 /3 *kebang*, a victim can get verdict and in other cases it takes longer time to get verdict depending upon the situation of the case. The *kebang* usually takes place in the village dormitory. But there are certain cases also where the *kebang* are taking place where the incident has happened.

## Conclusion

From the fore going discussion it is clear that the *kebang* is one of the oldest institutions in the Adi society. The whole society is being bond with the law of *kebang* from their origin to till date in order to

maintain peace, harmony and order. With the passage of time and even with the impact of modernisation and education also cannot change the Adi society to keep away from *kebang*. They still believe in the judgment of the *kebang* and continue to approach to *kebang*.

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