

# Resource Use Pattern among the Ethnic Groups of Eastern Himalaya: A Reflection over Nyshi, Monpa and Apatani Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

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**Abstract** – The eastern most State of Arunachal Pradesh is inhabited by as many as 25 major tribes and more that 110 sub tribes each having their own customary institutions of resource management, exchange and distribution guided by its respective customary laws (Duarah,1990). In a communitarian economy like Arunachal Pradesh, all available natural resources are used to manage by the various ethnic groups of the State. However, incursion of macroeconomic factors to the traditional tribal society brought about significant changes in the traditional society in terms of community resources availability, social norms and thoughts, identities of property right institutions, livelihood strategy, etc. The process gradually results in losing the well-defined identities of Common Property Resources [1] as well as the strength of some age-old traditional institution like Kebang of Adi, Nyats of Nyshi, etc. which has led to a situation of class conflicts among the tribes and degradation of environment.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Group, Common Property, Dependency, Management Institution, Conflict Resolution

## I. INTRODUCTION

Arunachal Pradesh, the eastern most State of Himalayas, is endowed with rich natural resources like forest, water resources, wild life, etc. As per the data base of satellite imagery, forest area in the State constitutes around 81.90% of the total area of the State. This is one of the highest among the States of North East India. As a result, forest is one of the most important sources of livelihood for the indigenous people of the State. The State is inhabited by as many as 25 major tribes and more that 110 sub tribes

each having their own customary institution of resource management, exchange and distribution that contribute to the human mass in the State. All the individual tribes have a rich cultural heritage and the government is making all out efforts in helping conserve their traditional heritage. The society of Arunachal is patriarchal and primogeniture and the fundamental laws of inheritance with variations are not uncommon. They follow endogamy and strictly observe the rule of clan exogamy. In such a communitarian economy all available natural resources used to manage by the various ethnic groups of the State. It is their well loved home and source of income. However, incursion of macroeconomic factors to the traditional tribal society brought about significant changes in the traditional society in terms of community resources availability, social norms and thoughts, property right institutions, livelihood strategy, etc. This process gradually deprives the poor people from their age-old access to these resources accentuating the problem of poverty. Again, the excessive use of these resources has negative implication to the environment and its sustainability. Under the circumstances the present study aims at analyzing the resource use pattern and its management system in light of some field level observations as well as secondary information.

## II.METHODOLOGY

The evidences presented here are based on field survey conducted during various undergoing research of the author [1]. However, available secondary information were also utilized wherever it is necessary. Three districts namely

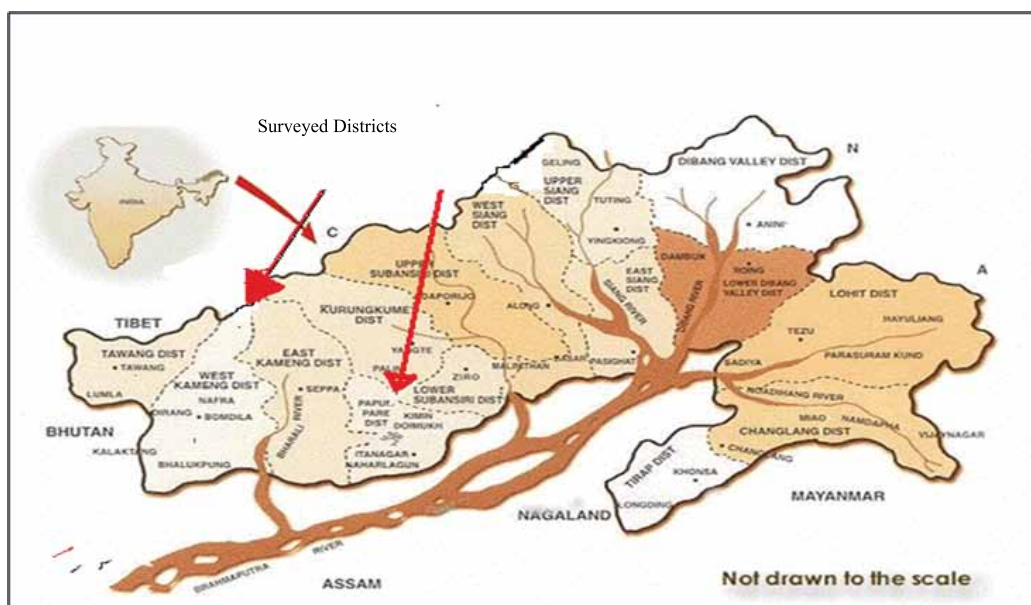


Fig.1 Location Map of Papum Pare West Kameng and Lower Subansiri Districts of Arunachal Pradesh

Papum Pare, West Kameng and Lower Subansiri were taken up purposively for detail investigation. In order to have a conceptual idea of the surveyed area, a location map of Papum Pare and West Kameng districts is shown in figure 1.

Villages, rather than households, are the ultimate unit of observation. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for selection of villages from the circles. The different stages under the technique are as follows:

- Stage I : Selection of districts
- Stage II : Selection of circles
- Stage III : Selection of villages

In the first stage, three districts namely Papum Pare, West Kameng and Lower Subansiri were selected purposively. The districts were selected to represent three different tribes as well as their management institutions at local level. At stage II, two circles namely Doimukh and Sagalee were selected from Papum Pare district, two circles namely Bomdila and Dirang were selected from West Kameng district and one circle namely Zero was selected from Lower Subansiri district purposively. The circles were stratified into different categories mainly on the basis of their accessibility. Efforts were made to select the circles from remote areas so as to get a representative picture of rural areas. Villages were selected randomly from the selected circles. From each village information were collected following a PRA<sup>1</sup> technique.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ownership of land and the individual right to use it is determined by tradition and custom of the people. Some un-codified customary laws [2] are effectively prevailing in the State. In spite of having numbers of tribes, there is a similarity amongst these un-codified customary laws. The land tenure systems practiced amongst the different tribes may be described as follows:-

- i) Village or community land: It includes outlying forest land use for hunting and forest produces. Sometimes these land earmarks separately clan and sub-clan.
- ii) Clan land: In the area where the shifting method of cultivation is followed, all lands as a principle belong to the clan or village.
- iii) Individual land: The individual ownership of land is by inheritance or by purchase. However, selling and purchasing can be made within the village community only.

While the forest land is concerned, almost all the tribes have community forest which is under the execution of the village community. In some areas, clan ownership of forest land is also recognized within the village jurisdiction. For instance, the Nyishi has only community forests. The Nyishi are not used to living in permanent settlement as their homestead used to move along with the shifting of the

TABLE I RESOURCE USE PATTERN IN USF AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS OF A.P

Ethnic Group	Ownership Type	Resource Use
Apatanis	Individual	BIJE [2], SANSUNG [2] and Some forest areas
	Kinsmen ownership	Immediate cousins /brothers owned common Bijе, Morey [2], Sansung
	Clan Land	Only Morey
	Community or Village	Forest owned by villagers
Nyshi	Community	Burial Grounds, Grazing Grounds, Community Hunting for, Festival Sites, Community Worship During Festivals.
Monpa	Individual	Bamboo-pine Groves, Plantation of trees and bamboos,
	Clan Land	Burial Grounds, Hunting Grounds, Wood for House Construction, Religious and Sacred Areas.
	Community or Village	Burial Grounds, Grazing Grounds, Community Hunting for, Festival Sites, Community Worship During Festivals.

Source: Field Survey, 2008

TABLE II INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT IN THE SURVEYED AREAS

Name of Tribes →	Nyshi	Apatanis	Monpa
Resource Ownership ↓			
<b>1. Forest Land</b>			
(a) Own Collectively	√	√	X
(b) Own Collectively with private ownership of village	X	X	√
(c) User rights to all members of village	√	√	√
(d) Open Access	X	X	X
(e) User right to villagers but others pay entry fee/need permission	X	√	√
(f) User rights to other villagers of the same community	√	√	X
<b>2. Cultivable Land</b>			
(a) Own Collectively	√	X	X
(b) Own Collectively with private ownership of village	X	√	√
(c) User rights to all members of village	√	√	√
(d) Open Access	X	X	X
(e) User right to villagers but others pay entry fee/need permission	X	X	√
(f) User rights to other villagers of the same community	X	X	X
<b>3. Local Commons other than forests</b>			
(a) Own Collectively	√	√	√
(b) Own Collectively with private ownership of village	X	X	X
(c) User rights to all members of village	√	√	√
(d) Open Access	X	X	X
(e) User right to villagers but others pay entry fee/need permission	X	X	√
(f) User rights to other villagers of the same community	√	√	√

Source: Field survey, 2007-08.

cultivation site (Pant, 2000). They have not held land and forest on individual basis but have own community basis. So the entire forest is considered to be community forest. Among the Apatanis, there are four types of ownership over land and forest. These are individual, kinsmen, clan and village or community ownership. Likewise among Monpas there are three types of ownership viz- individual ownership, clan ownership and village or common ownership. Table I shows the resource use pattern in USF base on ethnic groups.

As per the control over the natural resources is concerned, the State is unique in having traditional right of various tribes over land and forest resources within their jurisdiction. Each tribe or community exercises its age-old control over the natural resources within their surroundings. So far, there are no records of land ownership in the State. However, the traditional boundary demarcation of land and forest between the villages, tribes and clans are observed in the surveyed villages. Most recently, demarcation of land and forest among the families or households to a limited extent has also being emerged and it has been gradually growing up. The ownership pattern and user right of different category resources are shown in Table II.

The ownership rights to land and other natural resources differ from one district to another depending upon the socio-cultural practices. The Nyshis [2] worship nature and make animal sacrifices and traditionally practice shifting cultivation. Under shifting cultivation lands are owned the community. The permanent cultivation is also practiced wherever feasible. Whenever dispute arises the village leaders have to play an important role in settling disputes. Their traditional institution is called Nyele, where the members called Nyats (village leaders) and in their role of intermediaries are referred to as Boot or Gingdung. Now-a-days, most of the Nyats have been recognized as the Gaon Burhas. However, the right to use and transfer of land, in principle, are governed by the customary laws. In the context of Nyshis, the sons inherit the paternal property. The daughters have no role in the inheritance even in absence of male child in the family. In such instances, the clan members inherit the property. However, rules are slowly changing presently due to modernization as well as the shift from traditional non-monetized economy to a monetized one.

The Apatani society is patrilineal and segmented. Patrilineal descent is important in determining the social identity of a person, inheritance, prohibitions and prescriptions pertaining to the choice of marriage partners. Clans, rather than villages, make up the basic unit of the society. Clans are exogamous, but there are several exceptions: some clans considered as 'brothers' do not intermarry, whereas there are several instances of two sub-clans of the same clan whose members freely intermarry (for example within Hage and Koji clans). Polygamy is permitted but rare, as is also divorce. Group endogamy is still prevalent.

Apatani do not practice jhuming, so the mountains surrounding the village have not been deprived of the beautiful forests as compare to other parts. Some a forestation programme taken up by Apatanis are SALE, PIISA, SANSU, BIJE, etc. The planting of pine sapling is carried out in the month of February-March from the sapling collected from nearby mature established plantation areas. The Apatani women normally collect seedling from open hilly slope or in landslide area as large number of seedling is found in these areas. It is an age old tradition that after harvesting one pine tree, one should atleast plant 4-5 seedling in harvested area for future use. This ensures proper management and continues supply of the material.

Bamboo called BIJE in Apatani, the poor man's timber is much sought after for different end use. Bamboo plantation is fenced every year with bamboo itself. Traditional knowledge recommended the cutting of 3 year old bamboo Culm from the plantation every year to ensure proper growth of new culms. An established plantation will regenerate on its own and can be continuously exploited for a number of years. It was recorded that an established bamboo plantation had bamboo upto 5000 culms per hectare. However, this is all the more remarkable that there was no centralized authority in the traditional society, not even at the village level. Settlements of disputes within the village were managed in a somewhat informal way by a council of clan representatives (*buliang*).

*Tsorgam* the traditional institution of *Monpa* is a representative democracy and is theocratic [2] in nature as its elected head also acts as the religious head in the village. Use and conservational dynamics of rare tree

species [2] are associated with the cultural institutions of Monpa community. Chhopa, the traditional institution plays important role in mobilizing and sustaining this tree species. The Chhopa is headed by Gaon Burha. Different rules and norms, formulated by elder community members and headed by *Gaon Burha*, are strictly followed in managing the common grazing lands. These arrangements have a bearing on issues, such as group grazing and avoiding over-grazing or non-seasonal access.

The local religion plays a spiritual role in the process of accepting the conservation and preservation of natural resources. The Buddhist religion restricts the member of *Monpa* tribe not to plug the bamboo shoot at an early stage for consumption. It is considered to be as bad as killing a baby. The dynamics of the ecosystem and food security has forced them to use bamboo leaves as the fodder for their yak and *Dzomo*. Therefore, the cutting of grass is restricted from yak grazing lands. However, under scarcity, bamboo leaves are cut and fed to the *Dzomo*. When ice-freezes cover the grasses during winter season, local yaks are allowed to scratch the ice and graze.

An indigenous institution called *Mila* is formed with the homophilous resource-based *Monpa* women for the collection of ethnic fruits, vegetables, timber and other products from forests. To sustain forest resources under the *Mila* system, there are several rules which assure that access to the forest will be in the form of groups, instead of individuals. Nobody is expected to pluck or harvest the forest products in surpluses.

For the outstanding efforts in *in-situ* and *ex-situ* indigenous agro-biodiversity conservation, the *Monpa* women deserve praise. They resort to a variety of strategies that are primarily compatible with their customs, culture, socio-economic conditions, and biophysical parameters of locality, exchange systems of biodiversity, spirit, food habits and ethnic values (Singh, 2003a).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study reveals various ethnic groups have its own way of resources management exchange and distribution and they these resources. These resources are very much important and crucial in the socio-economic lives of the tribals. They have been exercising their age-old control over the use and management of these resources. However, incursion of macroeconomic factors to the traditional tribal society brought about significant changes in the traditional society in terms of community resources availability, social norms and thoughts, property right institutions, livelihood strategy, etc. the process gradually deprive the poor people from their age-old access to these resources accentuating the problem of poverty. Again, the excessive use of these resources has negative implication to the environment and its sustainability. Hence there is an urgent need for the sustainable management of these resources in order to avoid the *tragedy of common*. Revival and empowerment of ethnic institution may serve the purpose to a greater extent.

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ANNEXURE

ANNEXURE I A VIEW OF APATANIS PLATEAU



Annexure II Bije (Bamboo) and More(Pine tree) plantation of Apatanis

