

Traditional Political Institution of the Adi Tribe of East Siang District in Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract: *The Adis, are the hill people who constitute a major tribe in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. every Adi village is run by a council called 'Kebang'. All the adult members of the village are its members and they participate in the sessions of the Kebang. Normally the sessions of the body take place in the 'Musup/DERE' or the village Dormitory. The Kebang has three main organizational institutions. They are; the Dolung Kebang(Council of a village), the Banggo Kebang(Council of villages) and the Bogum-Bokang Kebang(the Council of the Tribe). The Dolung Kebang deals with the affairs of the village. The Banggo Kebang deals with the affairs of some villages within a compact geographical area. When a problem goes beyond the village jurisdiction, automatically the Banggo Kebang come into the picture or it takes up the matter. The Bogum Bokang Kebang deals with problems connecting the tribe as a whole, problems of the tribe or dispute or feud involving sub-tribes or clans are brought up to this Kebang. The Kebang with its wide powers performs various functions namely administrative functions, judicial functions political functions, developmental function, welfare measures, training of youths, etc. It decides when and where to clear jungles for seasonal Jhiuming. The Kebang arranges inter- villages relict and help in time of distress and need. the Kebang can levy any sort of taxation on the village by giving certain rulings in time of need. The Kebang trains the youths of the village in its procedures and in traditional laws and customs, by involving them in its functions. All disputes between villages, families and individuals over land, water, properties, possessions, etc are brought up to the Kebang for discussion and judgement. After the discussions and hearing Kebang Abu takes the decisions. Punishments are given to the guilty persons in the form of oaths and ordeals. The Kebang in its simplest form a living democratic institution. The Adis maintain their solidarity, integrity, unity, cultural affinity and democracy through their Kebang. But today the influence of modern education and the latest democratic ideas were changed the young generation. Though the continuity of the Kebang is still liked by the old people, educated younger generation of the society seems to have a different attitude towards it. Today, they approach the court of law for settlement of a case if they are not satisfied with the decision of the Kebang. However, now a days such cases are directly reported to the District Administration and the party concerned is put under the provisions of Indian Penal Code.*

Key Words: *Kebang, Dolung Kebang, Banggo Kebang, Bogum-Bokang Kebang, DERE, Dere Kos, Kebang Abu,*

Introduction

Every primitive society has its own codes and customary laws, which have been evolved over centuries of adjudicate disputes and conflicts in order to maintain social order. The enforcement of such customary laws and norms is made through their indigenously setup organization or village council. Such type of village organization of Adi tribe is called "Kebang" or "Village Council of Elders".¹

The Kebang is a collective body of village elders in an adi village. It is the Assembly/Council of the village in which affairs disputes, problems concerned with the village/individuals are discusses of debated and decisions are arrived or debated and discussions are arrived at. Normally the sittings of the body take place in the MUSUP/DERE or the village Dormitory. After the full and disputes of the body passed the decision or judgement. The deliberations of the Kebang is guided by 'Kebang Abu', who are well versed in tribal lores' experienced and excellent in oration, and whose views are respected in arriving at decisions in the Kebang.²

Different Tiers of Kebang

The Kebang has three main organizational institutions. They are;

1. DOLUNG KEBANG or Council of a village
2. BANGGO KEBANG or Council of Villages
3. BOGUM-BOKANG KEBANG or the council of the Tribe

1. DOLUNG KEBANG
Dolung Kebang is the most effective body of the Adi society. It deals with the affairs of the village. It carries out the administrative, legislative and executive functions of the village. Its jurisdiction is limited within the boundary of a single village.³

2. BANGGO KEBANG

Banggo Kebang deals with the affairs of some villages within a compact geographical area. It exercises its traditional authority within the limit of the Banggo or area.⁴ When a problem or dispute goes beyond the village jurisdiction, automatically the Banggo Kebang comes into the picture or it takes up the matter. All the active members of Dolung Kebang became automatically the members of the Banggo Kebang and take part in its proceedings.. All the inter- village disputes are settled here. The proceeding of the Banggo Kebang continued for two days and ultimately the dispute was resolved amicably.⁵

3 BOGUM – BOKANG KEBANG

The Adis regarded the Bogum Bokang Kebang as the authority of Kebang's system. The Bogum- Bokang Kebang is an unbroken chain, patronizing social, political, judicial and religious and cultural system of Adis. When the village Kebang (Dolung Kebang) cannot decide a case it goes to Banggo Kebang and then Bogum- Bokang Kebang. Then the Bogum- Bokang Kebang with a heavy hand and crushers anybody who is on the wrong side. the decision of Bogum – Bokang Kebang is final. There is no other institution of Kebang as powerful as Bogum- Bokang.⁶ Bogum- Bokang Kebang was an age-old institution, which the Adis had given up in course of time, and retained village Kebang only. However, with official patronage, it was revived in 1948 with the objectives to bring about their unity and to work for greater interest of the whole Adi Community.

All influential members of Banggo Kebang constitute the Bogum- Bokang Kebang. A President and a General Secretary are selected from amongst the members who steer the whole proceedings of the Kebang. This body generally, settles all serious problems faced by whole community such as inter- village, inter-Banggo, inter- tribal disputes, etc.⁷ It is a popular belief that evil spirits also joined the meeting along with men. The men with poor health and mind become easy prey of the evil spirits. Therefore, during early days, people used to participate in Boum Bokang Kebang dressed in wardress, which gave them psychological edge against untoward incidents.⁸

Venue of the Kebang

Normally the sittings of body taken place in the MUSUP/DERE or the village Dormitory at sort notice. When the is in progress in the DERE, the Kebang Abu who sit around the MEROMS(hearth) patiently listen to the arguments put forward by the aggrieved and the accused parties and give their opinion in loud voice standing at the centre of the DERE. Generally, all the oaths and ordeals are performed in the DERE by invoking the divine spirit to witness the ordeal and punish the wrong doe.⁹

Powers and Function of the Kebang

The Kebang, with its wide powers performs various functions. Almost everything in the village, whether it primarily concerns the individual family, clan, village or inter-village falls within its jurisdiction. Some important functions of the Kebang are;

Administrative Function

The most important function of Kebang is administration of justice. The aims of these laws and practices have been to maintain internal peace, law and order. The important administrative measures taken by Kebang are;

1. It decides when and where to clear jungles for seasonal Jhuming
2. When and where to go and conduct community hunting and fishing.
3. When and in what manner traditional festivals and taboos are to be performed.
4. Where to construct village tracks, paths and bridges.
5. The Kebang arrange inter – village relief and help in time of distress and need.
6. It decides when and how to construct or repairs the MUSUP/DERE or village dormitory.
7. It keeps itself informed about happening or likely happenings and cautions the villagers about possible dangers, etc.¹⁰

Judicial Function

Kebang is the judiciary or court of the people. The Kebang can levy any sort of taxation on the village by giving certain ruling of the time of need. All disputes between villagers, families and individuals over lands and water, properties, possessions, rights and liberties are brought up to the Kebang for decision and judgment. It tries and decides judicial cases of all nature. Civil and criminal cases like money suits, theft, rape, adultery, divorce, etc are lodged to the Kebang. Punishments and fines are awarded to the wrong doers or guilty persons.¹¹

Political Function

The Kebang calls upon the people of the village to meet and resist any threat or aggression from outsiders. Offensive measures peace negotiation (dapo) are taken in the Kebang. In the past, Kebang used to be essentially a war institution. Anger or feeling of settlement or unentertainment or disapproval over certain policies or matters are expressed through the Kebang.¹²

Developmental Function

It receives and entertains developmental schemes of the Government and undertakes the execution of such schemes. The Adi people involves themselves in various developmental activities like the construction of roads, paths, bridges, etc under the control of the Kebang. It encourages the villagers to work for the improvement of general health and spread of modern education in the villages. Kebang inspires the people to celebrate seasonal festivals and maintain traditional cultural faith and belief of the people.¹³

Welfare Measures

Welfare functions of the Kebang includes extension of relief and help to the needy and distressed persons like widows, orphans, etc in the construction of houses and so on.

Training of the Youths

Kebang trains the youths of the village in its procedures and in traditional laws and customs, by involving them in its functioning. The youth boys of the villages are engaged in various odd jobs of the Kebang, in serving notices, in preparing the DERE for its sessions, serving the elders food, water, tea, rice – beer (Apong) etc. They are allowed to watch the working of the Kebang from close quarters to learn the art. The boys of the DERE (DERE KOS) are encouraged to participate in the deliberations of the Kebang.¹⁴

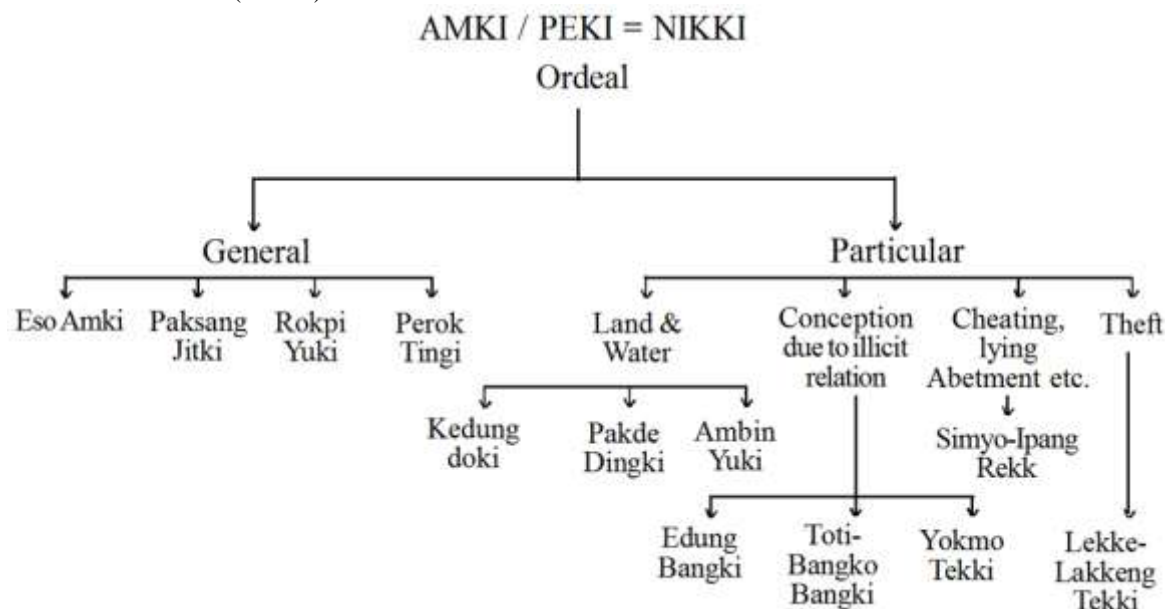
In olden days when the DERE KOS (boys of the DERE) were used to sleep in the DERE. The Kebang Abus used to visit the DERE in the evening hour and tell them interesting fables with moral values, history of the glorious past and impart training in the art of handicraft, arrow shooting, hunting, war tactics, etc to the young boys. Thus, thought and trained by the Kebang Abus, the youths of the village in due course of time became well versed and acquainted with the traditional customary laws and socio- cultural traditions of the society and prove themselves as good Kebang Ami (members of the Kebang) in future.¹⁵

Oaths and Ordeals

The normal procedure of Kebang is to give a patient hearing to the grievances expressed by the agitated party and then in the argument in defence put forward by the accused. The Kebang judgement begins with the narration of the history of conformity to the traditional laws and impartial justice. This narration is given by a Kebang abu, who has long experience, wide knowledge for traditional lore and good oratorical skill. This introductory speech is popularly known as 'Aabey'.¹⁶

The members of the Kebang give a patient hearing to all arguments and examine the evidence. After hearing them, Kebang Abus compare their arguments and merit and demerits. They cite one or many similar cases decided earlier and take decisions.²⁰ When the evidence is inadequate to decide arise among the councillors, take oath and ordeals to establish the truth. These ordeals are performed in the court of Donyi – Polo (God-sun and moon) to get final decision from Him. That ordeal is called 'AMKI' or 'PEKI-NIKKI'.¹⁷ They are classified in two. They are;

AMKI/PEKI-NIKKI (Ordeal)



General Ordeals

1. Eso Amki

Mithun, the most sacred animal of the Adis regarded as a witness of truth in matter of dispute and used to prove truth. The aggrieved person puts a mark on the ear of the Mithun belonging to the accused and the accused put a mark on the ear of the Mithun belong on the ear of the Mithun belong to the aggrieved invoking the evil spirit in the name of Donyi-Polo. The Mithuns are set in the jungles. The Kebang sets a period of time from two to five years depending upon the age of the Mithuns to get the result. It is believed that the Mithuns of the guilty would meet an early and tragic end.¹⁸

2. Perok – Iyyi Tinki

In this case a fowl is sacrificed and the aggrieved and the accused are made to drink its blood. If the dispute is regarding land or water, some soil is mixed with the blood. It is believed that the guilty person vomits and later he falls sick and dies.¹⁹

3. Paksang Jitki

Another ordeal Paksang Jitki is that a piece of lead is melted and the melted lead is poured on the palm of the accused. It is believed that if the accused is innocent he will come out unscathed. Subsequently, going out of skin of the hand, attack of diseases, biting of tiger or snake or the death of family members within the stipulated period is considered proof of guilt. Generally three months to a year of period is fixed to observe.²⁰

4. Rokpi - Yukpi

Two “EDONG” (bamboo tubes) filled with water and egg are placed in two large fires. When the water start boiling, an egg is put into it. The accused sits by the side of the fire. When the water is full boiled, he approaches the tube and put his hand into the tube and tries to take the egg. The hand of the innocent remains unscathed while that of guilty get scathed.²¹

Ordeals to settle land and water Dispute

1. Kedong Doki

This ordeal is performed to revolve land or water dispute. Each of claimants takes a lump of soil from disputed area. It will be mixed with “Takeng”(ginger powder) and “Nokne”(unpressed rice-beer). After invoking the evil spirit to harm the wrong claimants and inviting the omniscient Donyi – Polo to give that verdict, they swallow the mixture. It is believed that the wrong claimant will meet an early tragic end.²²

2. Ambin Yuki

It is the easiest and safest ordeal. Both claimants bringing a handful of “AMBIN”(Rice grain) and covered in “TAN” leaves separately. Some selected Kebang Abu goes to the disputed areas with the claimants and each put a stick at the place which claims the boundary lies. Then the Kebang Abus put the rice packets under the earth appealing the “Tusin Rodong” (Guardian diety of land and water) to eat up all the rice grains inside the packet belonging to the liar over night or within three days. The particular spot where rice grains are buried, are protected for stipulated period. Violation of such rules invites heavy fine and rejection of this claim. At the end of the prescribed time, the Kebang Abus and the claimants unearth the rice packets and examine the rice grains. The one whose packet is lost or damaged is deemed to be the liar and the boundary is marked as per the claimant.²³

Ordeals for Abetment, cheating, lying, etc

Simyo – Ipang – Bekki

In this ordeal, the aggrieved and the accused are required to bite the “simyo ipang”(teeth of a tiger) and invoke the “Banji – Ban – Mang (evil spirit) to kill the guilty. It is believed that the guilty will be disfigured by the animal’s attack or even killed by a carnivorous animal like tiger, leopard, bear, snake, etc.²⁴

Ordeal for theft

Lokeng-Lakkeng Tekki

The aggrieved and the accused cut one of their fingers in a public place or in DERE. It is believed that the blood jets out from the wound of the guilty. Whereas it only bleeds from the wound of the innocent. It was found that the oaths and ordeals discussed above are not practiced in more. The people themselves do not like to encourage them. The ordeals that end up with the loss of life.²⁵

Conclusion

The Kebang occupies a dominant position in the Adi society. It is responsible in looking after the welfare and well-being of the people. People of the Adi society have strong faith in it. For a long time the Kebang is functioning and exercising as an indigenous traditional institution of the people. It may be noted that, it is a universal truth that "tradition die hard", and this maxim is well applicable in respect of the Adis. The situation, however, is changing gradually as changes in society means changes that take place in the structural components of the society. Though its continuity is still liked by the old people, educated younger generation of the society seems to have a different attitude towards it. Today, if they are not satisfied with the decision of the Kebang, they approach the court of law for settlement of a case. However, now a days such cases are directly reported to the district administration and the party concerned is put under the provisions of Indian Penal Code.

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