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MAN AND NATURE : THE PLACE OF FOREST IN PRE-COLONIAL ADI SOCIETY

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Abstract : An attempt has been made here to study the intimate relationship that existed between the traditional Adi tribe of North East India with their natural surroundings. The Adis were dependent on nature and natural elements in almost every sphere of their life. They depended on forests for food, agriculture, hunting, and for their livelihood. Forests and its resources not only formed an essential ingredient of Adi inter-tribal trade, but also occupied an integral position in Adi folklores and myths. The interdependent relationship made it easy for the Adis to utilize natural resources for satisfying their wants on the one hand, and protect nature through the imposition of societal norms and religious practices on the other. This strong sense of mutual interdependence and belonging towards the natural environment of their immediate surroundings slowly began to show signs of disintegration with the introduction of monetary economy in the region. Initially, it had begun with the arrival of colonial administration in the region in the first decade of the twentieth century. The felling of *Simul* forests of North East Frontier for making tea chests was the initial step in exploiting the forests of the region for commercial profits. Prior to this, instances of commercial exploitation of timber and forest resources in the Adi territory were unheard of. Unlike other parts of India, the British did not embark on implementing its regular policy of forest administration over North East Frontier till the third decade of the twentieth century. The region was incorporated in British India mostly on political ground. Large scale exploitation of forest resources for commercial purpose began only after Independence. Poverty, lack of education and scarcity of job opportunities in the region prompted the people to take up timber business. They had to shed off their previous forest based taboos and beliefs to earn their livelihood. The rate of forest exploitation in Arunachal Pradesh had increased so much after independence that in 2006 the Supreme Court of India had imposed a ban on timber felling in the region.

Key Words : Forests, Pre-colonial, Environment, Interdependence, Exploitation, Tribe

Introduction

The tribal communities of North East India have developed intimate relationship with forests since early times. Forests and forest based products have been connected with every aspect of tribal life in an integrated manner. A relationship of interdependence between the people and the natural habitat existed right from the beginning. Like other tribes of North East India, this had been true to the Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as well, who constituted the

largest tribal population of the region. Literally the word 'Adi' denotes hill men. It is an umbrella word that includes a number of specific sub groups namely *Ashing, Bokar, Bori, Gallong, Karko, Komkar, Milang, Minyong, Padam, Pailibo,Pangi, Pasi, Ramo, Shimong, Tagin* and T*angam*. The Adis are divided into two major subdivisions namely the *Boums* and the *Bomis* and under each sub-division there are a number of sub tribes as mentioned above. The *Galongs* are another group of Adis having seven sub groups.[1] There is no social hierarchy among these Adi sub groups. Earlier the Adis were termed as '*Abor'* a word basically of Assamese origin which meant savage or unruly. George D.S. Dunbar has provided us with valuable information regarding the origin of the different sub-sections among the Adis and their migration towards their present habitat. According to him, the desiccation of central Asia may possibly have driven their ancestors through the passes of the north down into the mountainous zone they now occupy.[2] According to the existing legends of the Subansiri *Daflas* , the Adis had originally come from the east. Dunbar suggests that the *Minyong* Adis were the original inhabitants of a place called Telilideng, while the *Pasi* clan of the same community had come from the banks of the Siring river and gradually descended to a place known as P*asi* from which this group of people derived its name. As regards the *Padam* clan, Dunbar observes that they have gradually crept down the Yamne Valley on the one side and towards the Dibang on the other.[3] In terms of their language, tradition and culture, the Adis belong to the Tibeto Burman group. At present they occupy the entire east, west and upper Siang Districts, a part of Dibang Valley and Upper Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh, also known as the land of the rising Sun.

The territory of Arunachal Pradesh is a prosperous region in terms of its forest resources and, with its varied altitudinal and climatic conditions, the region harbours all the important tree types described in Indian Forestry. The tropical rain forests of Tirap and Lohit districts have magnificent evergreen forest types such as *Terminaliamyriocarpa*, *Amoorawallichi*, *Cancriumresiniferum, Cedrelatoona, Artocarpuschaplasha, Michella species,* etc. The Siang and Subansiri districts have semi evergreen and sub-tropical forests and are also rich in various species of the genera *Canerium, Ailenthus, Terminalia, Schima*, and species of *Magnoliaceae.* Above this zone, comes the massive temperate zone of blue pine, silver fir and *tsuga* that extend between 1500 metres to 4000 metres. The extreme limit of the Lohit district is composed of *Pine merkusii(Tennesrin Pine).* Above the belt of around 4000 metres, the vegetation gradually merges into Sub-Alpine and Alpine levels. This zone lies in the lower Sela area, Jhang valley and above Tawang and Mego in Kameng districts. This forest type gradually leads to the snow line where rhododendron and its associates abound. As regards the forest type found in the Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Champion and Seth have classified the forests into thirteen categories. These are : (1) Assam Valley Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, (2) Upper Valley Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, (3) Assam Valley Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests, (4)Sub Himalayan High Alluvial Semi Evergreen Forests, (5) Secondary Moist Bamboo Brakes, (6)Eastern Hillock Forests, (7) Eastern Himalayan Wet Temperate

Forests, (8) Eastern Himalayan Moist Temperate Forests, (9) Cypress Forests, (10) East Himalayan Dry Temperate Coniferous Forests, (11) Larch Forests, (12)East Himalayan Dry Juniper Birch Forests, (13) East Himalayan Sub Alpine Birch Forests and (14) Moist Alpine Scrub Forests.[4] As many as 550 types of orchids are found in Arunachal Pradesh.

Forests constituted an indispensable element in the social, cultural, economic and religious life of the Adi people in every phase of their life. In the pre-colonial days, forests and natural products played an important part in all aspects of Adi life. Social and cultural norms were related to forests; economic dealings were based on natural products and religious beliefs mostly revolved around forests. Clearly, in the traditional Adi society dependence on forests was almost total. This article intends to discuss the role of forests in traditional Adi society on the observations made and information gathered in the course of the present study. It also makes an attempt to have some idea about the intimate relationship that the people shared with their natural countryside during the period before the arrival of the British administration in the region. Though the people used forests and natural products for their regular day-to-day requirements, instances of rampant destruction of forests by the Adi people for fulfilling their needs are not found in the course of the study. Their relationship with the forest was more of interdependence than oppositional. The close relationship that the people shared with their natural habitat can be discussed under the following heads:

Forests in the Social and Cultural Life of the Adis

As indicated earlier, forests occupied an important position in the social life of the Adi people. The mode of agriculture practiced by the people was shifting cultivation that was usually carried out in forests. However, in recent times terrace and wet rice cultivation are also being practiced by the Adi people. Though the shifting mode of cultivation was the usual form of agriculture in the pre-colonial days, the people were not nomadic in nature as we find in the case of some other tribes of North East India. The Adi villages were permanent in nature and the people did not change their habitat with the change of their site of cultivation. Along with agriculture, flocks and herds of cattle were largely domesticated for food and for other purposes. Earlier, before the circulation of money as a medium of exchange, livestock animals were used for economic and social transactions. Pecuniary punishments, transfer of assets, food, and bride price were paid in the form of livestock.[5] Hunting, fishing and collection of natural products like wood, thatching grass, fruits and other things formed an important part of Adi occupation. Each community had their own hunting areas defined by natural boundaries. There were individual forest areas as well as the homestead lands known as '*Eda'*. The hunting expeditions were collective efforts where animals and birds except tigers were snared, trapped and hunted by large parties with bows and arrows. Dogs were also used in hunting. There was a hunting ceremony among the Adis where a competition among the individual hunters to hunt in their individual hunting grounds, known as '*Edas',* would be organised. Eating the flesh of tiger was considered to be a taboo by the Adis, while other

animals hunted were mostly consumed.[6] The people performed community hunting thrice a year on various occasions. Community fishing was also undertaken on various occasions. Several festivals connected with community hunting were organized of which mention may be made of '*Dorung Kiruk'* and '*Unying Aran'*. The former was a group hunting festival performed thrice a year and the later was the spring festival celebrated in the month of February-March of every year. The male folk went to the jungles for trapping birds, squirrels, etc. and made a stay in the jungles for two three nights, but came back to the village before the commencement of the celebration.[7]*Unying Aran* was an individual hunting festival where there was a competition among the village folk to hunt within their own '*Edas'*, which meant individually owned forest land. These hunting festivals are still in vogue among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh.[8]

Forest lands were divided into three segments according to the Adi system of land classification. Land within the jurisdiction of a village belonged to the people residing in it. It was considered as a communal property and was distributed on the basis of the following conditions : (a) land kept for residential purpose, (b) land reserved as hunting ground, (c) and lastly, land set aside for agricultural use. Every year fresh selection of lands for agricultural purpose was undertaken by the headmen (*gam*) of the village in consultation with the village elders and with the blessings of the spirits. The selected plots were then properly distributed among the villagers. The *Padams* (a sub-group of the Adi) classified the soil into five varieties according to their gradation of fertility, namely, *mane, marak, mongham, leru* and *liyak*. Agricultural lands, when kept fallow after the shifting cultivation process, were often used as grazing grounds. The Adi calendar was divided into twelve months depending on the agricultural activities undertaken in different seasons.[9]Agricultural land was known as '*patat'*, which after being allotted to a clan was further sub-divided into small segments called '*ariks'*.[10] Since the Adi society was patrilineal in character, land was usually inherited by the male member of the family who was the actual progeny. Transfer of land was mainly done through lease, sale and exchange. But it seems that land was never rented out.[11] Along with land, slaves also formed an important part of Adi households. They were mostly obtained by the victorious parties in their raids or attacks on neighbouring areas and the captives were turned into slaves, often due to their inability to pay the imposed fines. Slaves were also bought who were mostly children and would cost up to Rs. 160 or equivalent to a *mithun*, *danki* (these were objects made in Tibet and ornamented with Buddhist symbols and were often used as a mode of transaction by the Adis) and other material property. They were properly treated and looked after by the owner of the house. But he had also the authority to kill a slave if the situation so demanded. Although slave owners had complete power over them, the act of killing slaves was strongly disapproved by the community.[12]

The political institution of the Adis known as *Kebang* played an instrumental role in deciding issues relating to lands and forests belonging to the people. It was a democratic body where all male members of the village could participate in the deliberations and proceedings with

full freedom of expression. It also acted as a court of justice for local tribal people, which consisted of two types of members : general members and the *gams* (or village headmen). All male members , by virtue of their birth in the village, were general members of the '*Kebang'* with the authority to express their opinions. The '*gams'* were chosen by villagers on the basis of their personal merit, abilities, and knowledge of traditional lore. They were also referred to as '*Kebang Adus'* and they exercised considerable influence over the affairs of the village and administration of the '*Kebang'*.[13] Four tiers of '*Kebang'* functioned at various administrative levels, such as, (a) the family, (b) the village, (c) a group of six or more villages known as the *Bango*[14] , (d) a section called *Bogum Bokang* that dealt with inter-tribal wars and also decided disputes and cases relating to lands and forests.[15]

The Adi village was a self-contained and self-sufficient unit with its own economic and political functions. The village produced its resources for its own consumption. Within the village, resources were allotted to individual households in order to increase the household level production, while theoretically the ownership of land rested with the community. The residents of the village kept a vigilant watch over the natural frontiers and communal resources consisting of land, forest and water bodies within the village. No outsider could encroach or poach on resources lying within the jurisdiction of the village.[16] Most of the Adi villages were located on hilltops which provided natural security to the villagers from inter-village feuds. The Adi system of governance was based on democratic principles. Each village was independent and self-governing in nature. It had its own administration, both legislative and executive. The '*Kebang'* was the village court of justice. The people felt as if they were the masters of their own affairs. As stated earlier, any male member of the village who had attained the age of maturity could become the member of the '*Kebang'* assembly. The villagers elected their village headman known as '*Gam'* who administered the village for five to six years. If any one of them died before the expiry of his tenure, his son succeeded to his office or the vacancy was filled up by fresh election. Laws pertaining to the welfare of the village were framed by the villagers and the *Gam* had no authority to modify them but only could approve and enforce them.[17] Everything given on public ground was regarded as a public property intended to benefit the whole village. Anyone committing damage to such properties was regarded as a public disgrace.[18] All decisions regarding the village were taken in consultation with the village elders and the members of the *Kebang*. Even after India's Independence this institution was retained, considering its importance and influence over the local inhabitants. Describing the significance of the *Kebang* in Adi life in the post-Independence period, Verrier Elwin has made the following observation :

> 'The *Kebang* still settles administrative matters such as when and where to clear the forests and sow the seed, when to go on hunting and fishing expeditions, when and in what manner a festival will be performed and sacrificed offered. They have judicial powers and offenders of all kinds are brought before them and sentenced to various kinds of punishments'.[19]

Apart from the *Kebang*, other forms of social institution, such as, dormitories existed within Adi society that played a vital role in forest-based activities like hunting. The male dormitory of the Adis known as '*Moshup'* functioned in multifarious ways. It was used as the training centre for the various hunting expeditions undertaken by the people. It was the place where the hunting gods were propitiated and the skill of chase was taught to amateur hunters. It was also the platform where the deliberations and proceedings of the '*Kebang'* took place. In this sense, the '*Moshup'* was also a meeting area of the 'Adi' youths where they slept until they got married. '*Moshup'* based on the dormitory pattern formed a ready defence force against any external attack.[20] This institution had a ubiquitous presence within the Adi community although it was referred to by different names by the various Adi sub-groups. The *Minyongs* called it '*Dere'* while the *Padams* called it '*Moshup'*. According to Dalton, the *Padams* also called it '*Morang'*. The other allied groups called it '*Ngaptek'*, while the Boris and the Ashings termed it '*Byango'*. There was a separate dormitory for girls known as '*Reshing'*. These dormitories played a significant role in the marriage system of the Adis. Dormitory life provided the basis for selection of partners which ultimately materialised into marriages. Payment of bride price was an important element in Adi marriage system, which still continues, though in a different form.

Forests in Adi Religious Belief System

Faith in the existence of natural spirits formed the most important element of traditional belief system of the Adis. Forests were the abode of spirits and those were intimately connected with the social and cultural norms of the people. In the Jamo village of Arunachal Pradesh, the Minyong Adis believed that it was the habitat of '*Gumin Soyin'*, the guardian god of the village.[21] Apart from felling trees for building and domestic purposes, the Padam Adis also cut trees to retaliate the spirits of woods in case of disappearance of a child from a village.[22] The people believed in the existence of a number of malevolent spirits residing in forests and considered them responsible for sickness, death and various other forms of misfortunes. According to them, these malevolent spirits could be propitiated by sacrifices and certain rites. The spirits of air, water and earth were called by various names and propitiation to avert the wrath of the spirits was an important phenomenon of the traditional Adi religion. In the words of George Dunbar,

> 'His [the Adi's] untutored mind sees a demon everywhere, in the sun and in the thunder, in the earth and in the water. It is a spirit of evil that takes life from all things that have breath that smites with sickness that, in a questionable shape of a kinsman from some distant villages, lures the unfortunate to his doom in the dark recesses of the forest. And the beginning and end of his religion, in sickness and in health, in seed time and in war, in the agonies of death and in the burial that follow, is to appease the malevolent spirits of an unseen world.'[23]

Forests bore great religious significance in Adi life. The '*Hollok*' tree was regarded as the abode of the wood spirit which was also believed to be the most sinister spirit that often took

the disguise of a kinsman from a distant village and lured people into the jungle and killed them. So when anyone was found missing in the village, the people usually went to a *Hollock* tree armed with swords, bows and arrows and said, 'Oh Holok Tree, give us back our brother and we will make to you a sacrifice'. After this demonstration of faith and reliance, they went back to the village and it was expected that the missing person would return. If the man returned, a *mithun* or a pig was sacrificed as a thanks giving feast.[24] It was believed that the spirits responsible for sickness, death, destruction existed everywhere in the forests, particularly in certain trees like *Hollok*, rubber and plantain and in earth, sky and water. If anybody fell sick during the time of clearing of jungle for shifting cultivation, it was attributed to the anger of the spirits at the destruction of its home which could only be satisfied by the propitiation with a sacrifice. Pig was usually the animal dedicated by the Adis to *Nipong*, the spirit of the forests.[25] Along with the sinister spirits, various elements of nature such as the earth, air and water were worshipped. They believed that the supreme power of the universe was the source of all heavenly objects like the sun, moon, stars, earth and also source of the organic elements like air, water, heat and light necessary for human existence and therefore, should be revered. Their curiosities to know the creator and controller of natural phenomenon led the Adi people compose a number of legends, hymns, myths, etc. on various aspects of nature.[26]

Though they worshipped various spirits, the presence of a Supreme Being was recognized. The belief in the worship of the natural elements in the form of spirits had probably led to the emergence of the indigenous religion of the Adis known as *'Donyipolo'*. The Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh follow this religion according to which there is an unseen supreme power in the universe manifested by heavenly objects like the sun, moon, stars, earth, which is also the source of organic composition of elements like air, water, heat and light. This Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient Supreme Being is *'Donyipolo'*. In Adi language, the term '*Donyipolo'* carries different meanings. Firstly, it refers to the Almighty. Secondly, it is used to denote the sun and the moon and lastly, it also denotes the traditional belief system of the people.[27] All the meanings illustrated under the term *'Donyipolo'* form the components of this indigenous religion of the Adis. The myths and legends of the community also contribute to a great extent in shaping the basic elements of '*Donyipolo'*. The festivals of the Adi society are *'Mopun', 'Pombi', 'Lune Solung'* and *'Aran'* which are celebrated in connection with the beginning, cutting and storing of the harvested grains. On these occasions the domestic spirits are propitiated and sacrifices of pigs are made.

Forest Products in Adi Trade and Economic Transactions

Forest- based products constitute vital ingredients of trade among the Adis with their neighbouring frontier communities. The Adi community had flourishing trade relations with communities across Assam and those of the bordering countries of Burma (now Myanmar), Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, and China since the first quarter of the 17th century. Along these trade routes, Tibetan cultural elements and tenets of Buddhism passed into the region. The principal

trade routes passed through *Bori* and the *Bokar* countries to *Gallong*. On the right bank of the Siang River beyond Ripa and Damoro on the left bank, the Yamne trade flowed to a great extent from the north. The trade routes which connected the Assam plains with these hill men were known as '*Duars'* and was managed by officers known as '*Duaries'*. Sadiya was an important market for the exchange of trading products. Annual fairs were held at Udalguri and Doimara. Pepper, ginger, *mishmitita*, wax, iron, masks, Tibetan salt, utensils, etc. were bartered for glass, beads, cloth, salt, utensils etc. The tribes carried on trade on forest products also. Rubber, ivory, and timbers formed essential articles of trade. The Wanchos and the Noctes of Namang, Borduria and Kolegaon had trade relations with the plains and the chief articles of commerce were salt and ivory. Endi silk cloths and metal products were exchanged for salt from the Assamese. With the arrival of the British in the region, fairs in the different places of the foothills were encouraged and a variety of items like rubber, timber, opium and elephants along with ivory were traded.[28]*Mithuns* and slaves had great commercial value and were exchanged for commodities from the plains. The mode of economic transaction used by the people mainly consisted of articles like metal, domestic animals, hides and skins of wild animals. All types of metal utensils were used in the mode of transaction. Amongst them, the '*danki'* or the bell metal cauldron imported from Tibet was considered to have the highest denomination. The next in importance was '*mithun'*. The latter was an animal which played a very important role in the socio-economic life of the people. The possession of '*Mithun'* indicated the social status of the possessor and was an essential animal to be sacrificed in the religious rites, festivals and feasts of the Adi people. It was also a necessary item to be used as the mode of exchange.

Forests Manifested in Every Aspects of Adi Life

Apart from the uses mentioned, forest- based products were utilized for such purposes as making houses, bridges and artefacts. It was their regular practice to build houses with timber, bamboo, cane and thatch. The dormitory building was a magnificent structure made of timber, thatch and bamboo. Timbers of special significance, such as *Eyum*, *Siput* and *Galing* were used for the construction of its pillars and the roofs were thatched with '*tak'* a kind of particular leaf also used for thatching houses, huts, and granary etc. The wall was made of timber and the floor was constructed with bamboo. Among the Padams, Minyongs and Pangi Adis, the fire places in their houses were constructed by fixing wooden trays in gaps between floor matting and covering them with earth. Over the hearth a three tier bamboo shelf hanged for drying fish, meat and for keeping fuel. The fuel consisted of tree branches and bamboos. The Adi also made utensils from bamboos.[29] The bark of trees was also used as clothing. They wore a kind of dress made from the bark of the *Uddal* tree which performed the dual purpose of clothing as well as a carpet to sit upon. It also served as a pillow while sleeping at night.[30]

Forest products, such as bamboo and cane were used for making hats of various types. Verrier Elwin had mentioned that some of these hats were worn as crash helmets during wars

while others were worn during dances and other social occasions. The Adi tribes always constructed their villages over difficult and not easily negotiable parts of the hills and protected them with bamboo palisades and stockades of wooden trunks. The personal forest lands often consisted of bamboo and palm groves. Wood, cane and bamboos were often used for making weapons, bridges and agricultural implements.[31] They also had immense skill in constructing different types of bridges. They constructed cantilever bridges made of bamboos, suspension bridges with rigid bamboo footways, trestle bridges and combination of both types. Verrier Elwin had described these bridges as 'marvels of untutored engineering skill'.[32] Apart from the above, shifting cultivation undertaken in the forests was an integral part of their economy. Forest products like ivory, rubber, cane, etc. were traded by the Adis with the neighbouring areas. Along with forest products, other natural products like iron and stone were used by the people for the making of weapons and implements. Workers on iron implements existed in every villages but they cannot be termed as smiths as their anvil was made of stone. In the areas neighbouring the plains, the Adi women engaged themselves in weaving. They made coloured cloths and rug like fabrics with cotton ginned in a machine made by them. They also produced cane works like hats, baskets and mats. The Adis manufactured some pottery works as well. They also made bows, arrows and fishing nets used by them in their hunting and fishing expeditions. [33]

Herbs, barks, seeds and leaves collected from forests served the medical needs of the people. They consumed opium for curing dysentery. The fauna available in the forests were used for various medicinal purposes. Kasturi, (*Kasturi Mriga*) a species of deer was found in the high altitudes of the Himalayas. The people killed them for curing body pains. *BhalukTita* was the stomach of bears which was used for treating dysentery and malaria. Fox meat and gall bladder were used as remedies to body pains. The oil prepared from Horn Bill was an important tribal medicine for different ailments. Apart from these, different herbs found in the forests were used by the people for treatment of common ailments. Aconite, *jaja* plants, wild garlic and *mishmiteeta* were some of the important plants used for medicinal purposes. *Mishmi Teeta* was a common article of inter-tribal trade. [34]

Natural forces and phenomena held a significant position in the oral literature and folk lore of the Adi community. It was found that the people rarely applied scientific analysis and knowledge to explain the natural phenomena and preferred to look at them with awe and wonder. Such a mental orientation was reflected in their strong belief in the evil spirits that were supposed to be present in natural objects. In a way, belief in the spirit world helped protecting nature from frequent human incursions. Natural phenomena, calamities and creation of the world were explained as the contributions of forest gods and natural spirits. As a justification for the creation of this world, the *Minyong* myth suggests that 'Polung Sabbo (the *mithun*) had dug a pit with his horns and when the water (of the universe) had poured into the pit, the dry land appeared and earth came into being.[35] In the same way, the rainbow is compared to a ladder by which god climbs from the earth to meet his wife in the land of moon,

high in the sky, or to a bridge by which a bride goes to her husband's house, or of the four water spirits white, black, yellow and red who live in springs among the hills and wander across the heavens for seeking wives for themselves.[36] The folk lore of the Adis dedicate a major section of stories about the creation of the world, the sky, sun, moon, thunder and lightning, water and earthquake. In the Adi mythological characters, gods, human beings and animals are accumulated in a single whole where the gods were portrayed as having human qualities, animals were shown to speak and behave like humans with human beings resorting to animal sacrifices to appease those spirits which were held responsible for natural events.[37] Thus the Adi world view is centered around natural objects and elements which are intimately and inseparably connected with human life, and whose actions could be explained in terms of cause and effect phenomena involving the organic world.

The symbiotic attachment of the Adi tribe with their natural surroundings remained intact till the arrival of money economy in the region that initially began with the appearance of British administration in the territory. The people had a strong sense of possession for their natural countryside and resisted with all their might, the attempts of external encroachments and poaching over their natural frontiers. This was reflected in the clashes that took place between the Adis and the colonial government when the later encroached into the Adi territory for collecting *Simul* timbers for the manufacture of tea chests for Sissi saw mills. The clashes culminated in the murder of Mr. Williamson, the political officer stationed at Sadiya and Dr. Gregorson by the *Minyong* Adis with the majority of their party members on 30th March 1911. In retaliation, an expedition to the Adi country under Major General Bower was sent in 1911-12 to impose peace on the offending villages. Between December 1911 and January 1912 peace was established and the whole of the Adi land was brought under British occupation.[38] The entire region was named as the North East Frontier. With the implementation of British control over the region, the forests and the natural resources of the country came under colonial jurisdiction. A political officer was stationed for the area who exercised control over the forests demarcated as 'protected'. Some forested areas were administered under the *Assam Forest Regulation* of 1891. By the first decades of the 20th century, a preliminary examination of the types of forests existing in the region was undertaken and by 1923-25 a report was submitted by Mr. Cooper, the Divisional Forest Officer stationed in the region, on the categories and kinds of forests found in the area. On the basis of information provided by Mr. Cooper, commercial forest types were identified and forest conservation was started in the North East Frontier since then.

Till independence, the commercial exploitation and form of forest administration in North East Frontier remained at the minimal level. The commercial exploitation of the forest species of the region began on a larger scale after India's independence. The tribal people who once resisted felling of timbers for commercial purposes began to indulge in such activities for economic gains. This was mostly so because the region lacked in offering jobs and opportunities for people who had lesser options but to indulge in such activities. Now, the previous inhibitions

on the felling and killing of certain natural elements are gradually on the wane and forests are being felled for commercial profits. The *Hollock* tree, which was previously believed to be the abode of sinister spirits and anyone causing damage to these trees had to suffer the wrath of the spirits, are being felled for financial gains as a single tree fetched around Rs. 65,000. The people do not show slightest hesitation in cutting trees for pecuniary profits. In this context Mamang Dai states:

> 'Once to cut down a big tree was taboo. Today however change has taken the state in a major way. The commercial extraction of timber has resulted in a marked reduction in forest area raising urgent environmental concerns. In the heyday of timber operations a single *Hollong* tree fetches a price of Rs 65,000. In this lucrative business vast tracts of forests have been destroyed forever. Development, road building and influx of migrant labourers have contributed to habitat fragmentation which has resulted in the disruption of stable biotic communities.'[39]

Conclusion

Thus we find that forests, which held a significant position in the traditional life and culture of the Adi community, are of lesser importance today. In the pre-colonial days, forests were related to and connected with every aspect of tribal life that depended on nature for the satisfaction of its essential requirements and needs. The type of relationship demonstrated a sort of interdependence where men in return of using natural products to meet their needs also revered and protected nature through the practice of societal norms and religious beliefs. The taboos on certain natural elements and religious faith connected with some trees and animals acted as means to protect the natural landscape. The sense of attachment that the people felt for their natural surroundings safeguarded it from external encroachments and attacks. This relationship between man and nature began to show signs of disintegration with the beginning of monetized economy in the region. This had initially begun with the arrival of colonial administration in the region. The felling of *Simul* forests of North East Frontier for making tea chests was the initial step in exploiting forests of the region for commercial profits. This was, however, a one-sided policy of the colonial government that had encroached over Adi forests for commercial exploitation. In the course of study, no specific instance of indigenous Adi resorting to commercial exploitation of timber and forest resources could be established. The British however did not adopt any regular policy of forest administration over North East frontier till the third decade of the twentieth century, unlike other parts of India. The region was emphasised to be incorporated within British India mostly on political grounds. The exploitation of forest resources for commercial purposes began on a larger scale after independence. With the introduction of money, a large section of the people have become economically poor which, coupled with lack of educational skill and scarcity of job opportunities in the region, prompted the people

to go for timber business. They had to shed off their previous forest-based taboos and beliefs to earn their livelihood. The rate of forest exploitation in Arunachal Pradesh had increased to such an extent after independence that in 2006 the Supreme Court of India had imposed a ban on timber felling in the region. It is not that everything has changed automatically after that and the people no longer indulge in any illegal activities detrimental to forest protection and preservation, but it at least has a salutary effect on the way things were allowed to move so long. It has strengthened the hands of tradition-loyalists. But not all Adis are tradition-loyalists today, nor can it be said that all Adis display a strong sense of commitment to forest treating it as an inseparable component of their collective existence which takes the form of an integrated whole. A political value is now attached to the forest by the people who use it as a symbol of identity. This particularly involves control of forest and its disposition, keeping in view their self- interest and fixed priorities. In a sense, this is a reminder of the pre-colonial situation when the onus was clearly on community ownership.

Notes

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[3] Ibid. pp. 12-14.

[4] Rai, M B. *Census of India 1981, District Census Handbook*, Director of Census Operations, Arunachal Pradesh. .

[5] Anonymous. 1984. *Glimpses of Arunachal Pradesh*. Shillong: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, p. 16.

[6] Dunbar, op cit. p 45.

[7] Mibang, Tamo and Behera, M.C. (eds.). 2004. *Tribal Villages in Arunachal Pradesh, Changing Human Interface*. Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, p. 24.

[8] This information has been provided by Sri T.K.Kopak, the Senior Tourism Officer in the Arunachal Bhawan situated in Salt Lake, Kolkata through personal communication on 17th June 2011.

[9] Roy, Sachin. 1966. *Aspects of PadamMinyong Culture*. Shillong: North East Frontier Agency, pp. 123-124 and 126.

[10] Sengupta, Sarthak. (ed.). 1994. *Tribes of North East India: biological and cultural perspectives*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, p. 55.

[11] Roy, Sachin. *Aspects of PadamMinyong Culture*, p. 123.

[12] Dunbar*, opcit.*pp. 60-61.

[13] Singh, Usha K. 1991. *Arunachal Pradesh: A study of the Legal Systems of Adi Tribe*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House. pp. 37-39.

[14] A sacred place within the 'Kebang' compound was also known as the 'Bango' where the common youth were not allowed to sleep and the trophies of the village, horns of hunted animals, tiger teeth, head of snake, etc. were kept. A fire place was also attached to the Bango. For details see Mibang, Tamo and Behera, M.C. (eds.). 2004, pp. 162-163.

[15] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[16] Banerjee, GouriSanker. 2008. *Adis of Arunachal: A chapter in the Social History of North East India*. Kolkata: Best Books, p. 66.

[17] Payeng, Habung. 1998. *Economic and Social Change in North East India.* New Delhi: Criterion Publications, pp. 12-21.
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[19] Chowdhury, JyotindraNath. 1973. *Arunachal Panorama- A Study in Profile*.Shillong: Chapala Book Stall, pp. 170-171.
[20] Payeng, opcit., pp. 12-21
[21] Mibang and Behera ed., opcit., p. 20.
[22] Dalton, opcit., p. 22.
[23] Ibid, p. 63.
[24] Dunbar,opcit., p. 82.
[25] Ibid,pp. 70-71.
[26] Tripathy, B. and Dutta, S. (eds.). 2008. *Religious History of Arunachal Pradesh*. Delhi : Gyan Publishing House, pp. 60-62.
[27] Ibid., pp. 61-62.
[28] Payeng, opcit., pp. 56-57.
[29] Barthakur, J.K. *Census of India 1971, Arunachal Pradesh*, Series 24, Part 1 A, Director of Census Operations, Arunachal Pradesh,pp. 259-260.
[30] Wilcox, Lieutenant R. 1832. Memoir of a survey of Asam and the neighbouring countries executed in 1825-28, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol XVII, p. 333.
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[32] Elwin, Verrier. 1957. *A Philosophy for NEFA*, Delhi: Gyan Publishing House,pp. 6-7.
[33] Ibid, p. 44.
[34] Kar Choudhury, AmalenduBikash. 1984. *Tribal Songs of North East India*, Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, pp. 36-37.
[35] Banerjee, GouriSanker,opcit.,p. 147.
[36] Ibid., p. 140.
[37] Ibid., p. 149.
[38] Hamilton,opcit., p. 40.
[39] Dai, Mamang. 2004. *Arunachal Pradesh The Hidden Land*. New Delhi: Sky Prints Pvt. Limited, p.22.

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