



MIGRATION, LIVELIHOOD CHANGES AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AMONG THE ADI TRIBE OF SIANG RIVER BASIN, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Migration is a constant and dynamic phenomenon. Most of the migration are analyses in the context of push and pull factors. Shifting of settlements leads to discarding of many old systems and adoption of new system, adaptation to new place. However, emotions and sentiments, food habits, languages and religion use to continue with gradual changes in long run. As a result of the migration of people, their cultural traits, agricultural practices and ideas are diffuse along with them. A new and modified cultural landscapes are evolves.

The present study is an attempt to analyses the impacts of the migration on the livelihood, socio-economic life and their changes on the Adi tribe of Siang River Basin, Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: *migration, tradition, livelihood, changes, practices.*

Introduction

Migration is a constant and dynamic phenomenon. Most of the migration are analyses in the context of push and pull factors. The push factors are those which drive the people to move to a new place leaving their original place. The pull factors are those which attract the people towards a new destination. Demographic patterns, socio-cultural system, economies of the people and physical environments of old and new areas are affected. Shifting of settlements leads to discarding of many old systems and adoption of new system, adaptation to new place. However, emotions and sentiments, food habits, languages and religion use to continue with gradual changes in long run. As a result of the migration of people, their cultural traits, practices and ideas are diffuse along with them. A new and modified cultural landscapes are evolves.

The impacts of the migration on the people may be positive as well as negative. The various changes of socio-economic condition and related changes due to the migration can be assessed by comparing the present with old life pattern of the people in the areas of migration. The impacts of migration on the livelihood and socio-economic life of Adi of the Siang River Basin have been discussed in the following;

1. Changes in Agriculture system.
2. Hunting and fishing



3. Demography,
4. Education and health,
5. Food habits,

1. Changes in Agriculture System

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Adi tribe. The Adi practiced variety of agriculture system ranging from traditional shifting cultivation to permanent sedentary cultivation. In Siang Basin, about 82% of total geographical area is hilly and mountainous. The tribal people are bound to practice jhum on hilly slopes and river valleys.

One of the greatest impacts of the southward migration of Adi, especially in the plain of river Siang is the adaptation of terrace cultivation and the sedentary form of agriculture. Initially the forefathers of these people were shifting cultivators in the hill slopes prior to the migration to present places of settlement.

Today, most of the Adi villages of Pasighat, Billat, Sille-Oyan, Ruksin, Mebo and Namsing Circles of East Siang District, practice only the sedentary form of agriculture. Now they have assured sources of food supply and in turns, they raised their standard of living. They have introduced new crops like High Yielding Varieties of rice, maize, mustard, etc. they have also adopted new techniques of ploughing the field by using tractors and power driven machines, etc. Even, the cash crops like tea plantation, horticulture fruit plantation and rubber cultivation, etc. have been adopted and sell their products in the market. But those who live in the hills still practice and maintain most of the traditional method of cultivation.

The patterns, techniques and practices of cultivation have been modified with the movement of people from north towards south. These changes may be because of the migration of people towards the foothills and plains in the southern part. Though, the jhum is practiced in the foothills but the system of cultivation differs from that of the hills in upper region. Today, people (of foothills) do not give much importance to rituals related to agriculture. Where as it is still the part and partial of the cultivation among the people living in the hills of north. In the foot hills, river valleys and plain, the people are practicing wet rice cultivation and sedentary cultivation. Dry land farming of the cash crops like mustard, maize, pulse, ginger and tea plantation, etc. is grown.

Today, all the suitable lands of the inhabited parts have been either converted into terraced or wet rice cultivation. The accessible and gentle slopes have been converted into fruit or horticulture gardens. These kinds of agriculture have become permanent in nature. But the plots of such cultivation are done in very small areas and production is not sufficient for the family, which compel them to continue shifting (jhum) cultivation especially in the upper hilly region. Insufficient land for wet and permanent field, sources



of fresh vegetables, fire woods and emotional and cultural attachment to forest are the other factors which lead the tribal people to still cling to the shifting cultivation.

On the basis of agricultural system they practiced, the Adis can be divided into three groups:

- a. Adis who are living in northern most part of Siang River Basin in temperate zone which still practices and continuing traditional farming.
- b. Adis who live in the sub-tropical zone. They practice mixed system of both traditional as well as modern system of cultivation. They practice shifting cultivation on the hill slope; the gentler slopes are converted into terrace cultivation where wet rice or horticultural fruit crops are cultivated.
- c. Adis of plains and foothills. They practice mostly sedentary form of cultivation. They cultivate wet rice cultivation besides the cultivation of cash crops like pulse, mustard, maize, tea, rubber and horticulture fruit crops.

Even in some villages people who used to cultivate shifting cultivation have discontinued it due to so many factors. Reduction of the shifting cultivation is not only due to migration of people from north to southward. The changes in the agriculture system induced by the various combined factors besides the migration were exchanges of ideas and knowledge, development of technology and modernization, etc. The people inhabited in the interior areas are also now exposed to the knowledge of modern world. They also know the benefits of use of new techniques of cultivation. Through, the various knowledge, they adopted and change their system of cultivation.

A number of changes have occurred in the way of shifting cultivation. The reduction of the size of the jhum field is because of its conversion of most possible gentle slope into terrace field; introduction of horticulture and cash crops such as orange, cardamom, tea and rubber plantation, etc. Most of the families now depend on semi-permanent or permanent type of cultivation. The jhum fields are now raised mostly for vegetables such as chilies, pumpkin, arum and other cash crops for domestic use and surplus are sold at local markets. A new trend has also developed especial near the urban centre, in which farmers who left jhumming earlier are again reviving it for growing of vegetables (cash crops) which are highly demanded in local markets. Thus, these changes in the agriculture system induced by the various combined factors such as migration, exchanges of ideas and knowledge, technology and modernization etc.

2. Hunting and Fishing

Like other tribal people, the Adi also practice hunting and fishing which come next to the agriculture. In olden days, it was a chance to relax from arduous jhumming. During those days the human population was less and number of the animals was plenty. The rivers were also full of variety of fishes which were caught only through traditional method and techniques.



In olden days hunting and fishing was done to supplement the shortage of food from agriculture. To some extent hunting was done to protect the crops from damages done by the wild animals. They used bows and arrows to hunt the animals while traditional traps were used for fishing purposes which were prepared and designed out of locally available materials. But after migrating to south in the present locations, people have changed a lot in their hunting and fishing equipments and techniques. Today, they are equipped with sophisticated weapons for hunting and fishing. Hunting and fishing are mostly done by the urban dwellers as pastime sports. The modern methods have led to quick depletion of the animals and fish.

They have replaced the bows and arrows by the fire arms. Even sophisticated guns with telescopic facilities are also being used. Hence, the single hunter has become more powerful than a group of traditional hunters. Commercial, illegal hunters and poachers have entered deep into the forest. Every herd of elephants is followed by some poachers. As a result, it is hardly seen, elephant with trunk in their herd now.

Traditional techniques of fishing are also replaced by new ones of which netting (*phasi jal*) is more common and popular. The chemical poisoning, blasting and electric fishing through portable generator, etc. are also being used for fishing. The commercial fishing (*engo mohol*) has been introduced, in which gill nets are used by *masuas* – groups of professional fisherman hired from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, etc. This method is more responsible than any other form of fishing for depletion of the fish population.

The rituals related to hunting and fishing are also being neglected, especially those who have embraced Christianity. The shortage of priests is also one of the factors responsible for such changes. Earlier, villagers shared the meat of wild animals killed but today many of them prefer to sell it in the market. Many persons do not follow the taboos and restrictions. Accident related to hunting and fishing has also increased more than earlier.

The community hunting has now remained as a story of the past to most of the villages. Due to the decrease of forest cover and wild animals are some of the causes of abandoning of community hunting. Not only this, but the people associated with hunting also gone down. Most of the changes mentioned above are directly or indirectly related with the migration, the growth of population and modernization of the people.

3. Demography

Population pattern of the both the place of departure and destination are affected due to the migration. In the case of early migration of Adi tribe, whole populations migrated together to a new place. But now a day, the trend of migration is different and it is age and sex selective. Population composition has undergone mark changes especially in the age and sex composition. Today, the number of children has reduced among the



people of plains compared to hills. But the dependency ratio has increased due to sending of their children to schools and other higher education institutions.

According to legends, during the time of migration of Adi from north to present locations in the Siang River Basin, most of the areas were virgin without any population, except some Mishing (Miri) people who inhabited in few pockets of the region. The Adi migrated into the Siang Basin following the course of Siang River in phase wise and group/clan wise. Thus, the population of Adi increases due to migration as well as natural growth. Ultimately, the Mishing population were outnumbered by the Adi population, so the Mishing left the region and migrated southwards to the Assam plains. Adi scattered and settled in the various locations over the region. The number of Adi population has been raised to 1,09,725 persons of which 54,591 are male and 55,134 are female (2011 census). It constitutes 57.4% of total Schedule Tribe population in this Siang River Basin. Thus, the size of population and migration are interrelated with each other. Sometimes the migration led the growth of population while population also causes migration of people from one place to another and vice-versa.

4. Education and Health

The formal education and scientific health care facilities first came in the foot hills which gradually spread to hills. Adi tribe got exposed to formal education and system of school only after India got independence in the year 1947. The first school of Arunachal Pradesh was opened at Pasighat in the year 1947. Till 1950, the Great Assam Earthquake, majority of the Adi people did not know about the system of reading and writing. But the trend has changed, today majority of the Adi have become literate. If we categorize the Adi inhabited areas of Siang River Basin, East Siang district has literacy rate of 63.07% with male literacy of 68.26% and female literacy of 57.77% as per 2011 census. In the Upper Siang district, literacy rate of Adi population is 51.51% with male literacy of 57.34% and female of 44.95%. In the Adi inhabited belt of West Siang district comprising of eight Administrative circles has 47.32% literacy rate in total with male literacy of 55.01% and female had 38.88%. In term of educational institution, East Siang District has in total 284 numbers, including three degree colleges and 11 higher secondary schools. In Upper Siang district, there are total of 88 educational institutions including one degree college and 4 higher secondary schools besides the middle and primary schools. In Adi dominated belt in West Siang district (including Siang District), there are 61 educational institutions including three higher secondary schools and two secondary schools besides the middle and primary schools. The Table given below shows the literacy rate and numbers of educational institution in Adi dominated areas in Siang River Basin.

Table No. 1. Literacy rate of Adi dominated areas in Siang River Basin (2011)



Sl. no.	District	Total Literacy (%)	Male literacy (%)	Female literacy (%)
1	Upper Siang	51.51	57.34	44.95
2	East Siang (including Pangin-Boleng CD Block of Siang)	63.07	68.26	57.77
3	West Siang (Adi inhabited), Siang	47.32	55.01	38.88

Source: Statistical Abstract Arunachal Pradesh (2011)

Today, most of the schools and colleges are located in the southern zone. The people living in the foothills and plains in the south have better access to educational facilities, better economy, etc. so, they have attained better education as compared with the hills dwellers. In the hills, shifting cultivating parents do not have any financial source to send their children to the higher education.

Table No. 2. Educational Institutions in Adi dominated areas of Siang River Basin (2011 Census)

Sl. No.	District	College	HSS	SS	MS	PS	Total
1	Upper Siang	1	4	3	20	60	88
2	East Siang (including Pangin-Boleng of CD Block of Siang)	3	11	26	107	137	284
3	West Siang (Adi inhabited) & Siang	0	3	2	11	45	61

Source: Statistical Abstract Arunachal Pradesh (2011)

The health sector of the region is also improving in comparison with the past. In olden days, in the absence of medical facilities, they used to perform rituals to cure the diseases. In many cases epidemics were also one of the factors responsible for people to migrate. Many a times, they considered their old place to be haunted and possessed which led them to abandon such places. They considered them to be the works of evil spirits. With the development of science and technology, the people are now slowly getting rid of such superstitious belief.

Today, various changes have been occurred in the society, especially in the southern foothill region. The number of workers in the agricultural activities has reduced with the adoption of modern technology and equipments. The number of females is more than the male in many villages. The maternity death has decreased with the improvement of medical facilities. The longevity of the life has also increased. People are now aware and conscious of the family planning and its benefits which led to the reduction of fertility. In all, the health condition of the people has improved. But in the interior villages it has not changed much.



Table No. 3. Health centre of Adi dominated areas in Siang River Basin (2011)

Sl. No	Category	Upper Siang	East Siang (including Pangin-Boleng CD block of Siang)	Siang and West Siang (Adi dominated)
1	General Hospital	01	01	00
2	Community Health Centre	04	05	02
3	Primary Health Centre	02	15	07
4	Health Sub Centre	13	07	00
5	Ayurvedic dispensary	00	01	00
6	Homeopathic dispensary	03	01	01
7	TB hospital/Centre	01	01	00
8	Mobile Medical unit	01	01	00
9	Total	25	32	10

Source: Statistical Abstract Arunachal Pradesh (2011)

5. Food Habits

The traditional food habits of the Adi are simple. In early days, they simply depended on forest for most of their food, except few items like salt and tobacco. The *adi arik* (jhum) was main source of their food items. Rice is the staple food of Adi and other tribal population of Arunachal Pradesh. Beside this, they eat maize, millets, pulses, sweet potato, arum, gourds and variety of green vegetables which are grown in their jhum field. They also collect different varieties of wild leaves, fruits, nuts, roots, bamboo shoots, meats and fish, etc.

Apong made of rice and millets are the local beverage. It is used at all the social, religious and other occasions. It is also offered to persons of all age and sex groups. These people seldom drink in excess; hence drunken men are rarely seen. Most of the adults consume *Sali mayat* (tobacco).

Food habit has undergone lot of changes. People though, have not left mother's taste but have added many items in the list of food habits. Today, most of the Adi have spicy and oily foods. Spicy food which lure by the taste, made them to consume more than the average limits which led to cause different health problems. The amount and



frequency of consumption of fresh and green leafy vegetables have considerably declined in their food. They are now regularly consuming meat and fish which are easily available in the market. They have adopted swing of *tamul-pan* (betel nut), *bidi* and cigarette (smoking), etc.

With the introduction of Indian Made Foreign Liquors, the people are more addicted to drinking; ultimately more death due to excess and prolong consumption of liquors. Death due to drinking was almost absence in early period when locally made *apong* only was used, but the trend has changed. In every occasion Indian Made Foreign Liquors is replacing the locally made *apong*. One of the negative impacts of the external influences of the Adi society is alcohol and drugs. Today, it is common to see people in drunken state which were hardly seen in olden days. The school and college going youths are also seen addicted with drugs like opium and ganja (marijuana). Most of the road accidents are due to alcoholic, especially among the youth. This kind of influences, accelerate the changes in the culture of the people.

Conclusion

Thus, in the process of migration, development and modernization, the tradition and culture are changing gradually. Such changes in tradition can be highly noticed in the urban areas than the interior villages. The various traditional activities are still performing in the interior villages. For example, the people living in the interior hills still maintain and practice most of the traditional methods of cultivation and rituals in festivals. Whereas the people migrated to the urban areas have discontinued various traditions of their own. They adapted to new culture and practices. The way of living, education of children and health care systems, etc. has improved in and around the urban area, but in the interior areas they have not changed much.

The Socio-cultural changes are not uniformly progressive; there may be positive as well as negative impacts of cultural changes on the society. The development of science and technology has improved much on the human development. But at the same time, they are also losing their traditional culture and practices. Thus, human development is dynamic phenomenon and so the socio-cultural change with general consciousness is inevitable.

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