

Culture of Friendship Among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The Apatanis of Ziro Valley are a tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. The community is known for their sedentary agriculture among all dry farming communities in this state. It is sustained without the use of draught power and an indigenously developed irrigation system. Inhabiting a small sequestered plateau, their agriculture represents the most efficient in terms of energy use. Among the traditional institutions of the Apatani is the labour gang known as the Patañ. Its composition is based largely on village friendship cutting across genders that are equally represented, in addition to kinship-based unity. This aspect is evident in a tradition during Myoko festival where friends visit across villages to renew their ties. The festival and its associated rituals also assign a special position to friendship. The paper seeks to explore the ritual aspect of friendship and its relevance of friendship in the circulation of labour for sedentary agriculture.

Keywords: Culture of Friendship, Apatani tribe, Patañ, Don Khalo, Myokuñ, Abotani, AtoSiiki, BiineAjiñ, Arunachal Pradesh, India

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Introduction

Friendship in its common usage signifies the relationships between people that are based on mutual affection, spiritual closeness, and common interests. Friendship has a personal aspect to it, which is characterised by voluntariness and individual selectivity, internal closeness or intimacy and stability (None, 1970-1979). It becomes imperative to distinguish between friendship as a social system, a moral sentiment and a specific form of interrelationships. Depending on whichever dimension of friendship one seeks to explore, either exploring its social or psychological aspect, one can derive the actual meaning of friendship.

Earliest treatises on the institution of friendship are found in Greek philosophy and poetry. (Carpenter, 1917: 3). The philosophers sought not only to understand the custom itself but also explored the inner sentiments which inspired these customs. Here, the reference point was the literate and state society of Greece where the interpersonal friendship-comradeship provided succour to the intellectual endeavours. Plato had brought in the idea of love-friendship, thus, barely distinguishing it from erotic love within the philosophical discourse (Carpenter, 1917: 15). Aristotle tried to extract friendship from the realm of eroticism by making a clear distinction between friendship-comradeship and love-friendship by declaring that friendship was a highly individualised relationship not containing nuances of the erotic (Carpenter, 1917: 59). Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* writes thus:

Friendship is a thing most necessary to life, since without friends no one would choose to live, though possessed of all other advantages. . . . Since then his own life is, to a good man, a thing naturally sweet and ultimately desirable, for a similar reason is the life of his friend agreeable to him, and delightful merely on its own account, and without reference to any object beyond it; and to live without friends is to be destitute of a good,

unconditioned, absolute, and in itself desirable; and therefore to be deprived of one of the most solid and most substantial of all enjoyments (Carpenter, 1917: 57-58).

Aristotle's discussion of friendship, therefore, provided the basis for the stoic idea of the 'cosmopolitan' community of wise men. To him, friends were the philosopher's reference-group, and therefore, they provided the intellectual stimulus to the philosopher in his discourses. It was, therefore, a group of few sustained by common interests forming the cultural and intellectual base of society. There was, however, no ritualistic aspect assigned to it. There is an aspect of symmetry and structure in the type of friendship he alludes to. The relation between friends was regarded as on the same plane with that of brothers. No treatise on morals would have been thought complete, had this subject been omitted.

Cicero, in his treatise on Friendship, (as cited in McCloskey, 2004: 2) tells us "Friendship can only exist between good men. For there is nothing more lovable than virtue," and also, "I can only advise you to prefer friendship to all other things within human attainment". The context here was the treatise on the friendship of Laelius and the younger Scipio Africanus, which Cicero commemorates in a dialogic format in his *De Amicitia*. It traces the trajectory of their legendary friendship, which began in their boyhood and continued without interruption till Scipio's death (Peabody, 1884: 9-11). The Christian philosophers and theologians discussed the importance of friendship. St. Augustine states that: "No one can be known for who he is except through the friends he has." St. Augustine's mentor, St. Ambrose, says that "a friendship that can end was never a real friendship"(McCloskey, 2004: 2). In the history of philosophy, we find friendship being explored at the level of ethics.

The close links of friendship and philosophy are deep in classical philosophy, and the consubstantiality of the friend and the philosopher was taken for granted. Among the 19th century philosophers Nietzsche, in his

discussion on issues of political philosophy, viewed friendship with a spirit of ambivalence (Thompson, 2007). While stressing on the necessity of friendship, he showed a certain degree of this distrust which was his crucial strategy. His works contained references to agnostic friendships instead. In fact, as he discusses the master-slave morality, he links friends and enemies within the values of master-slave morality.¹The subject elicited sentimental discourses about the love and loyalty between friends providing a touch of the ineffable practically constituting it into an elusive subject (Rezende, 2007: 8). This overview of the place of friendship in the realm of ethics, typical of Western modernity²bore strong moorings on individuality and volition. This treatment of friendship failed to encapsulate its essence as a social relationship profoundly impacted by social and cultural factors.

It is essential to contextualise my area of study as being an exploration of an institution in the light of the complex of enmeshing of relationships in tribal societies. According to Marcel Mauss, in a tribal society, the "social phenomenon contains all threads of which the

¹ The German romantics, who created the modern cult of friendship, viewed it as a refuge from the egoism of the bourgeois world. The Utopian socialists advocated the establishment of friendship among all people. The first empirical studies on friendship by psychologists and sociologists were begun in the late 19th century.

². The term modernity is highly contentious as each society is different with its nuanced socio-cultural values; ethnicity, consumption patterns, etc. (see Appadurai, 1996). The word 'modern' is derived from the Latin word 'modo' which means 'just now' (Appignanesi et al., 1995: 6; Bhattacharyya, 2009: 79). While the notion of modernity is linked to 'Enlightenment thinking', the process of modernity is connected to varied forms such as the application of science and technology, urbanisation, the process of economic liberalism (neoliberalism), multi-culturalism, ethicality, etc. (see Appadurai, 1996; Appignanesi et al., 1995; Bhattacharyya, 2009). In this article, I try to highlight the ethical issues of the culture of friendship amongst the Apatanis. This article also tries to display how the process of modernisation has gradually entered into the Apatani community through India's urbanisation, the economic reforms of the 1990s, also known as neoliberalism (Bhattacharyya, 2009).

social fabric is composed. In these total social phenomenon, all kinds of institutions find simultaneous expression; religious, legal, moral and economic" (Mauss, 1966:1).

As my area of exploration is a community-based society, I seek to understand friendship as a social institution which is crucially enmeshed into the social fabric of the Apatani. As in pre-literate societies, friendship was not regulated as in modern western societies, instead was profoundly embedded and regulated within the asymmetrical structure or was constituted as a blood relationship resembling kinship. The paper seeks to understand the cultural history of the Apatanis, by exploring an important institution of social cohesion, which continues to exist despite being exposed to outside cultures and religion. It is within this framework of understanding that I shall try to posit my study of the pre-literate Apatanis.

The paper begins with a description of the geographical location of the region. This follows a description of the Apatanis and their various forms of friendship. Following this, I discuss the contemporary society, which is in transition and operates via a blend of both conventional value systems of the Apatanis as well as the modern values accrued through neoliberalism.

Locating the Region

Outlining the spatial dimensions of present Arunachal Pradesh is imperative. Arunachal Pradesh, which receives the first ray of the dawn, is a land inhabited by multiple ethnic groups. The state is an abode of 26 major tribes and 110 sub-tribes. Linguistically, these tribes are affiliated to the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages. As regards to their racial affiliation, they have been described variously as belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid, Proto-Mongoloid, Paleo-Mongoloid and so on. The State has a total area of nearly 83,743 sq. Km. A predominantly mountainous terrain; it constitutes the southern slopes of the Eastern Himalayas. It straddles international borders from Bhutan in the east along the south of the Tibetan plateau to the tri-junction wherein it shares territory with China, taking a syntaxial

bend along the Irawaddy-Salween divide. Running southwards along the Patkai range it borders present Tuensang district of Nagaland. The Brahmaputra valley skirts it south. Many traversable passes dissect Arunachal across its eastern and western frontiers, consequently at the crossroads of population movements from both the north and its east. This is evident from the shared cultural and religious affiliations of the ethnic communities living on its margins.³

It had remained peripheral to the state systems in the early historical period, though the first epigraphic reference is alluded to in the epigraphic records of 11th century Assam. The Chorabari grant of Ratnapala, mentions this mountainous terrain north of Kamarupa-Pragjyotisha as the land of the descendants of Jamdagni. The context was the marriage of his son Purandarpala to princess Durlabha from this lineage (Baruah, 2007:125). Various material remains in forts, temple complexes across the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh are dateable to the 10th and 13th centuries and is credited to the polities of the Chutias, the Kacharis and the Bara-Bhuyans. Through these myths and legends in currency, this region has been deftly incorporated into the 'narrative of the Indic civilization'. It was in the 15th century that the encounter of the Ahom state with the various tribes in this frontier brought them within the narrative of state policy.

The colonial state did not directly administer the territory, yet, it was a narrative of intermittent interventions. As instruments of governmentality, they continued with those adopted by its predecessor state with in dealing with the ethnic communities through *posa*, *duars*, trade and *kotokies*.⁴ The nature of these

³ The Monpas, Sherdupens, Membas, Khambas inhabiting the northern extremities are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. The Khamptis and Singphos who migrated in the last quarter of the 18th century follow Theravada Buddhism. The Noctes (Eastern Nagas) accepted Vaishnavism, a dominant faith in Assam.

⁴*Posa* is a payment in kind to the tribes by the Ahom state from resources in the neighbouring plains. The *duars* were foothill passes or entry point marked by rivers designated to distinguish the territory under the state and that beyond it inhabited by the tribes. It was

institutions, which earlier reflected elements of a balance between dominant state power and symbiotic relationship were altered to suit the exigencies of the colonial state. Along with other hill tracts, the 'northern frontier' of Assam was separated from the ordinarily administered areas in the demarcation of the "Inner Line" through Regulation I of 1873.⁵ In 1911, it was designated as the North Eastern Frontier Tracts and subsequently, renamed as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954.⁶ On 20th January, 1972, it was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh with the status of a Union territory and was granted Statehood on 20th February 1987.

Each of the major tribes retains their distinctiveness in terms of their dress, customs, and their socio-linguistic systems, their religion and political institutions. This is despite many of them claiming ancestry from the same cultural hero or ancestor. Among the 26 tribes of the state, the Apatanis of Ziro valley are one of the tribe, well known to the world outside for their indigenously evolved sedentary cultivation.

collected from individual households at specific periods of a year. The *kotokies* were mediators between the Ahom state and the tribes for communication.

⁵In the late nineteenth century, notions of a 'stable internal frontiers', 'for political security' was brought into play through a regulation for 'loosely administering' the frontiers of Assam. Designated as 'Inner Line' it was proposed to be applied in spaces bordering the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, while segregating the Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Chittagong Hills. This demarcation was not a 'boundary line' rather designated the end of 'civil jurisdiction' beyond which the British subjects were excluded from entering, without a license or pass. The natural contours of the landscape and in its absence the remnant of a road, path or river was to be followed for demarcating the space.

⁶ The North-East Frontier Agency, better known as NEFA was created for the first time on 23rd February, 1954. It was administered by the President of India through the Governor of Assam as his agent. The Governor was assisted by an Adviser who was the administrative head. NEFA initially was consisted of five administrative divisions, viz., Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. Tuensang now a part of Nagaland was separated from NEFA in 1957.

The Apatanis

The Apatanis, whose society I seek to study are said to belong to the Indo-Mongoloid racial stock and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman family. They trace their descent from one legendary ancestor called Abotani. The Apatanis inhabit an area known as Ziro Valley of roughly 32 sq. km. The valley is sequestered by the hills and ranges in all directions and a small river, locally known as Kiile flows through the valley from the north to south. The river along with its tributaries supplies sufficient water for the wet-rice cultivation practiced by the community. Their oral traditions allude to their migration to this magnificent valley from the northern direction, from an earlier habitation from beyond the Kuru and Kime rivers (Habung 2009: 3).

According to Census of India 2001,⁷ the total population of the Apatani Valley is 24,703 (approx.) of which 12,572 is urban, and 12,131 is rural, and 12,478 is male, and 12,225 is female. Their literacy rate is 55.72. The population has been spread over fifty-one villages of which seven villages are traditional, while the rest are modern villages.⁸ Despite settling in different villages, they strongly maintain their social relationships and reinforce social cohesiveness through various ritual associations with the older habitat.

Colonialism came late to the Apatani valley in Arunachal Pradesh. C V F Haimendorf an Anthropologist-administrator in 1944 set up a temporary government outpost. (Blackburn, 2003:335). Thus, the Apatanis came in contact with a minimal government presence. His ethnographic studies brought the history and culture of the Apatanis into academia. However, Stuart Blackburn contends that the colonial encounter pre-dates Haimendorf's visit to the region to as early as 1897 (Blackburn,

2003: 335). There were no records of the limited colonial contacts with the Apatanis, limiting written sources for understanding their history. Therefore, construction of the history of the community is gleaned through the functioning of its societal institutions. For this reconstruction, a scholar has to depend on the oral traditions which help in providing an insight into the working of the social phenomenon.

The community is known for their sedentary agriculture among all dry farming communities in this portion of the Eastern Himalayas. The Apatanis are an enterprising and industrious community of Arunachal Pradesh. The practise of sedentary cultivation in a small sequestered valley heavily dependent on human resource had to evolve ways to maximise the use of labour. Their agricultural practice is sustained without the use of draught power but with the use of a hoe and digging stick. In addition, they have a remarkable system of irrigation which was indigenously evolved. Their agricultural system was planned enough to check soil erosion and deforestation with provision for efficient water management. As they practiced wet-rice cultivation, individuals held inalienable rights over their land and the agricultural plots were not rotated. With the right to inheritance based on patriliney⁹ women generally did not have right to claim over the land. Besides this, land could not be transferred to a person who did not belong to the same tribe and village (Ghosh and Subba, 2003: 245).

The nuclear family was the basic unit of the society. However, the relationships extended to those of a clan and finally extending into village loyalties. Besides the omnipresent family group, we frequently find in tribal societies a type of unit that resembles the family in being

⁷ Though the population of the Apatanis in 2011 Census is 27,792, yet it has not been possible to segregate specific data regarding rural-urban divide and number of males and females as the unit has been Lower Subansiri District.

⁸ According to Habung in 2007-2008, the number of villages expanded to 51.

⁹ The terms patrilineal and patrilocal bear subtle differences, though at times they are used as synonyms (Ember and Ember, 1971). It is generally assumed that the tribal societies of North East India are matrilineal (genealogical relationship flowing from the mother's side) (see, Mizinga, 2000), as in the case of the Khasis. However, in the Apatani society, as opposed to matriliney, the society practices the descent through the father's line.

based on kinship but otherwise differs fundamentally from it. It is the clan which is a unilateral kinship group is generally traced either through the father or mother, depending on the lineage pattern adopted within a particular society. The clan relationship, on the one hand, excludes kinsmen of the relations ties distant relatives as members of the same unit. The community, therefore, is united through this bond of kinship, which regulates social relationship regarding prohibiting same clan marriages and at ritual levels. This same kinship despite its rules of segregation also creates bonding at material level of religion, polity and economy in building community cohesiveness.

For the sustenance of their social fabric there operated many community-based institutions like the Builañ (Village Council), Gorra (organiser of community rituals). To meet the diverse needs of agriculture, the Apatanis have an institutionalised gang-labour system called the Patañ. From their childhood, every Apatani boy and girl identifies with a Patañ. Reciprocity in agricultural activities is an overarching phenomenon in communities' dependant on subsistence dry farming. The primary form of reciprocity occurs in the labour exchange by an individual who performs the service and expects the service to be returned. This is to meet the requirements of labour, which is scarce despite the use of slaves for agricultural purposes. The entire agricultural activities in the Apatani valley operates through a kinship bonding in which, both men and women whether young or old join hands together in the field.

It needs to be outlined that all societies practicing dry farming sustain their livelihood activities through reciprocal exchanges of labour at the level of the village/clan. However, they do not have a fixed institution to ensure such reciprocity, which is a unique feature of the Apatani society. It is pertinent to mention that not only did they live in a sequestered valley, but also the Nyishis, a dominant tribe, surrounded them. As a result, their access to the trade networks was extremely minimal.

Therefore, to sustain the population within a closed valley, a sustainable agricultural pattern was evolved.

Patañ and Friendship

The Patañ is a group comprising of a fixed number of individuals along a gendered division of labour. There are myths associated with the beginnings of the labour gang, which is said to follow the practice of sedentarisation of agriculture.¹⁰ Initially, it alludes that the individuals responsible for organising the agricultural practice carried out the activities individually. It was the requirement of additional labour that led to the evolution of the patañ (Mammu, 2010: 10). The reciprocity embedded in its structures was symbolic of both exchanges between human and supernatural beings and exchanges of labour among networks of individuals necessary for production. The ritual association here seeks to provide social sanction of this institution at the temporal level. This combined labour structure also extended to activities for collecting house-building material.

The patañ formed on the basis of the age groups are termed as Hime Patañ and Akha Patañ respectively. The Hime Patañ consists of young children who are initiated into the nuances of agricultural operations from the age of seven. This group of child labour is not necessarily even in terms of gender. They are made to work on the fringes of the paddy fields and the kitchen gardens and in the early hours before dawn. One or two elders usually accompany the children. This association cuts across age and gender. Robert Lowie alludes to this characteristic of 'primitive tribe' stating that the social units are not just based on kinship but work through a variety of 'associations'. He further states that:

¹⁰According to a legend, the first couple named *Don Piisang* and *Liibo Taney* after settling in their present habitat became aware that they had no knowledge of cultivation. A woman named *Gelyu Yairing* taught them to cultivate wet rice, while *Timpi Talu* transmitted knowledge for cultivation on dry fields. The first couple and their associates formed the first labour-gang called the *Don Khallo*.

...We find that in most tribes every individual is simultaneously a member of a variety of social units. He is born into a sex, a moiety,¹¹ a totem sib and a class, with all of which his affiliation is permanent; he is also born into a certain status from which he advances through a special ceremony into that of maturity, and by less perceptible stages into that of a full-fledged elder. At any one period of his life, his duties and privileges may depend as much on his associational as on his kinship connections (Lowie, 1920: 270).

Individuals between 15 and 50 years constitute the Akha Patañ. A fixed number of five men and five women here constitute the Patañ. It is the same group of people who voluntarily form the Patañwork in rotation on the paddy fields at the request of the owners of the fields. Depending on the time of the day during which the agricultural operations were carried out there were accorded different nomenclatures' like the Konchi-Patañ and Aloh Patañ. Based on the specificity of the work like the creation of repairing dykes, creating nurseries and transplantation of seedlings the patañ's were also assigned different names. The patañ is, therefore, a community-based organisation which anchors all material activities and therefore, forms the core of their livelihood. This system of reciprocity seems to reflect what Marcel Mauss defines as a system of exchange visible through enactments in rituals of lifecycle and trade. The leitmotif of this exchange is in terms of the exchange being associated with a spirit and therefore, meshes the spiritual with the material domain (Mauss, 1966:7).

It is through the patañ that a bond of friendship develops within its members. The composition of the patañ cuts across family and clan affiliations'. This beyond the clan bonding that is permanent in nature. Its ties extend beyond the time period of their productive exercise in the fields into the arena of leisure too. The friends sleep over in each other's houses by

rotation, which is known as Doi Ajiñ. This practice was prevalent among both the men and women. The friendship within the patañ also develops into bonds of matrimony, which C V F Haimendorf alludes to thus: "...in some patañ there are girls and boys of different clans and there it happens quite often that working companions became (sic) lovers and marry when they grow up" (Mammu, 2010: 39). During such weddings the coworkers' of the patañ on the side of the bride and groom help each side out during the ceremony. When a female member of patañ gets married, her friends demand that since the friends 'keep each other warm' during the night during their sleepovers, therefore for taking her away, the groom is asked to compensate for it (Mammu, 2010). Traditionally the brides' patañ mates were provided with the best piece of bacon, which has been replaced currently by a gift of blankets.

In the eventuality of the fire accident generally the community pools in for rebuilding their houses and provides them with other material support. The members of the Patañ are particularly obligated towards providing both material and emotional support. During the period of death rituals, the members of the community go back to their respective houses at the end of the day, while it is obligatory on the members of the same patañ to stay in vigil overnight as the funerary rituals proceed. In the event of conflict within the clan represented by each member, the members try to negotiate on behalf of their respective clan. This ensures an additional layer of bonding to ensure cohesiveness within the larger village community, which houses multiple clans (Mammu, 2010: 42).

The aspect of merry making is crucial to this friendship. Such a practice is a recreation of the activities of the first couple who initiated agriculture as well as the Don Khallo, and therefore considered as a spiritually sanctioned activity. The associates of Don Piisang, Abyo Habyo Taney and Ayo Hising Piisang had indulged in merry making during the post-harvest season for which they prepared local

¹¹ Groups identify themselves with the symbols of specific animal spirits is known as a spirit.

wine called 'O' which they drank through the night. Through the night, they enact their traditions by narrating tales, songs and lore's of their respective clans. This practice through an informal network helps in transmitting life's lessons and other social values and ensuring continuity in a transmission of the indigenous knowledge. It helps to ensure harmonious social relationship, inculcates discipline and the spirit of dignity of labour. More generally, the material, social and spiritual world works through this overlapping cycles of giving and receiving.

The members of the patañ receive a wage for rendering their labour for agricultural activities. When three members of the patañ are hired, they receive one large basket measure of paddy called Paro Yagii. All the ten members get paddy equivalent to half the value of a Mithun (*Bos Frontalis*). The tradition among the members is that they pool in their wage and increase their assets by purchasing the Mithun, an animal to which great cultural value is attached. A variety of paddy, which is a part of the remuneration is dried and husked to brew local wine. Whenever a member of the patañ decides to sever links with especially among the women, the traditional beads are snatched from her and kept as an asset. This is a way to dissuade a person from severing links with the patañ, unless it is in the eventuality of being married off to a neighbouring village.

Radcliffe Brown argues that beyond pure kinship, for the objective of social equilibrium, a man is connected with a large number of other persons. With some of them, he finds himself in a definite and specific jural relation, which can be defined regarding rights and duties (Brown, 1952: 101). The same set of obligatory relationships can be extended over a considerable range to all the members of a lineage or a clan or anage-set. In addition to these networks, he uses the term 'alliance' or 'consociation' for relationships beyond the family ties, which create networks both horizontally and vertically (Lowie, 1920).

To quote Robert H. Lowie, "sex moieties, divisions on the basis of matrimonial status,

social clubs, secret fraternities, all crisscross the bonds of the family and the sib (clan) creating new units of incalculable significance for the individual's social existence" (Lowie, 1920: 296). Therefore, the association assumes equal or greater significance than the classificatory clan ties. Mauss, in his thesis, discusses the physical aspect of exchange of goods through social rituals, and trade and underline its significance. He states that "they exchange courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts rather; and fairs in which the market is but one element and the circulation of wealth but one part of a wide and enduring contract" (Mauss, 1966: 17).

Although these anthropologists did not directly deal with the dimension of friendship, yet brought to the fore the aspects of relationships beyond the family and clan which aimed at maintaining social equilibrium. The obligatory contract of the patañ helps ensure inter-clan bonding in the light of recurring, inter-clan and inter-village conflicts. For the Apatani, such crisscrossing bonds was crucial for their livelihood and ultimately for social order. Alluding to mythical associations in the forming of such bonds and its sustenance is a way of being in relation to human and supernatural others that is learned from childhood, and is aculturally embedded standard for evaluating actions (Vleet, 2003:491).

Myoko and Ceremonial Friendship

In traditional Apatani society, there are a series of agricultural cycle rituals. Since they are practitioners of sedentary agriculture, the rituals are elaborate, largely undertaken at the level of the community. In organising these rituals, the Gorras (composed of an elder representative from each clan within a village) play a leading role in addition to the priest (Nyibu). The first ritual of the agricultural cycle is Myokuñ, where all the spirits are invoked in order to seek blessings for 'warming of the soil to retain its fertility' (Habung 2009:: 93). In the period following India's independence and the introduction of the administrative apparatus- which was practically non-existent during the

colonial period- this ritual has been converted into a festival, celebrated on a fixed date. The original villages of the tribes continue to be significant in terms of these ritual observances. Despite the multiplication of villages, it is during community rituals that the villagers renew affiliations to their original villages. Myokuñ is celebrated by rotation among the villages with Hari, Bula and Tajang forming one group, Hija, Duta, Mudang Tage, Bamin Michi forming the second group, with Hong the largest village forming the third (Kaning, 2008: 40).

The Apatani society is known to ceremonially initiate relationships within and outside the villages. They are the Subu Piinyan initiated during the Subu and Muruñ rituals (currently festivals); Lyichu Piinyan, established by sacrificing an animal with no specific period (Kaning, 2008). Both these ceremonial relationships occur within the village with a view to maximise on avoidance of conflicts within. In the context of friendship, it is the ceremonially sanctioned Biine Ajiñ' formed with individuals outside the village during the Myokuñ festival, which is important. The implication of this relationship is that the Biine Ajiñ should belong from outside the village grouping, which occurs for celebrating Myokuñ. New friendships are initiated during the festival and the friendships of the earlier generations too are sustained. When a friendship is contracted, it is generally under an oath. Each individual also utters a curse that would befall a person in the eventuality of severing the friendship. It works under an element of fear that their lineages would vanish if they failed to honour the oath. This tie once sanctified by the family or individual is permanent.

This ritual friendship has its roots in the life stories of their cultural hero Abotani and his companions. The entire ritual is an enactment of moral codes is situated in the mythical past of, derived out of a series accomplishments, and failings of their cultural hero and his experiences. The myth seeks to provide lessons for the community to maintain mutuality between humans, and humans and spirits and

at the same time define what is expected of them as social norms.

The myth goes thus: Abotani, the cultural in course of his roaming in the material world had to encounter a large number of adversaries and also had friends. Among his friends, Siiki was prominent. He accompanied Abotani and constantly had to encounter challenges in terms of physical and mental prowess. On one occasion, Siiki was asked to traverse a deep gorge, which he feared he would not be able to achieve. Abotani offered that he could achieve the feat by holding on to his loincloth. As they were traversing the gorge, Abotani let him go, and he fell into the gorge and died. He regretted this act of killing his companion. Fearing that his spirit would return to haunt him, Abotani initiated a series of rituals with the view to appease his spirit. To please the spirit of Siiki in a recreation of the attempt to rescue him from the gorge, he was offered the sacrifice of a Mithun. His spirit did not respond to the sacrifice, and he was subsequently offered a pig, which failed to appease his spirit. It was when the twig of a wild tree called tapar was offered, the spirit responded as a sign of forgiving Abotani for his act. The twig was symbolic of the physical attempt in trying to rescue a person who falls into a gorge (Mammu, 2010).

As the Myokuñ festival commences, a ritual is performed as a re-enactment of Abotani's penance. On the third day of the festival, a ritual called Tapar Liinii begins. At the centre of a village is the community platform called the Lapang, over which a ritual hut called the Nago is created. All the adult males collect the tapar from the forest and in a procession move towards the ritual hut. Inside the Nago the priest puts the tapar into the monkey skull through its nose.¹²The priest then begins the

¹² Monkey skulls are traditionally kept in households for ritual value and is generally used as a hold for bow and arrow.

chants replicating the tradition of Abotani, invoking Ato Siiki considered the ruling deity of Myokuñ. As the incantations reach a feverish pitch, the tapar in the skull vibrates indicating the arrival of the spirit of Ato Siiki. When the priest formally declares the arrival of the spirit, all the males who are carrying the tapar put it over the nago and offer libations of the ritual drink, 'O' over the twig symbolising the appeasement of the spirit. It is with the performance of this ritual, which serves as means for balancing and adjusting the relationships between human and supernatural beings. As an act of completing the ritual, each individual gets a pig sanctified by the priest, which is later offered as a sacrifice (Kaning, 2008: 171-172).

Thereafter the respective Biine Ajiñ's are invited to the village. A person could have between 6-7 Ajiñ's from outside the village, which would include relationships from earlier generations and creating new bonds. Traditionally, such bonds were created are retained through the males. Currently, all members of the family form their friendships across the village and visit separately to maintain the ties, which once contracted cannot be severed. The Biini Ajiñ's visit their friends and are offered a special fare of the best food and local wine village. After being entertained for the day, as they leave they are offered uncooked meat from the sacrifice, the best piece of bacon (Yoh Asho), good quality home brewed wine (O Alah) and a local substitute of salt (Tapyo). There is also a competition in singing where the mythical stories are performed through a series of questions and answers from amongst the friends. Through this competition, the traditional knowledge gets transmitted, and its continuity is ensured (Kaning, 2008).

This tradition of ritualised friendship across villages helps in minimising inter-village conflicts in early times. In the eventuality of individuals being embroiled in conflict across villages, his Bine Ajing would negotiate on his behalf. In the eventuality of fire accidents, which is rampant in the closely cloistered

Apatani villages, they help out their friends. During certain festivals like Subu and Muruñ when individuals find difficulty in getting eggs, fowls and Mithuns within their village the BiineAjiñ helps in procuring such articles. A person who fails to retain this friendship is socially looked down upon, as it is believed to be a violation of the code set down by their ancestors.

Society in Transition

Culture is a dynamic as terms like continuity; adaptation and change are used to capture its complexities. The Apatani society with the onslaught of economic changes and modern value systems is in transition. Modernisation and the encounter with alternate cultures have radically impacted their traditional culture and practices. Being a pre-literate society, the myths and legends in which are encoded the stories of the spirits, human encounters and negotiations with the spirits and the cultural hero representing the triumph of the human spirit survive in oral forms. As the traditional ritual practices are encountering newer forms of institutionalised religion, which are codified, there is a substantial loss in the transmission of knowledge as populations have moved beyond traditionally bounded spaces, which are markers of their ethnic identities.

The livelihood patterns have been altered with the governmental insistence on abandoning the socially embedded shifting agriculture. The alterations in the demographic mobility occurred due to the demands of modern means of livelihood. Those who remained within the Ziro valley are engaged in modern professions like government sector, contractors and business enterprise. Consequently, they were subjected to a temporal measurement of time through the devices of chronometry and the solar calendar, replacing the time defined by cycles of agriculture and supplementary occupations. There was a gradual withdrawal from traditional activities in adapting to newer livelihood patterns. Those in governmental jobs moved out into different parts of Arunachal Pradesh, severely affecting the labour pool so crucial to their agricultural practice.

Children who go to school are no longer able to participate in the Konchi Patañ as Hime Patañ. The older population with diminishing energy levels and middle age women now constitute the core of the indigenous population. It is the women who take the burden of continuing with the tradition with work in the fields no longer in a structured manner. Its composition is uneven in terms of numbers, gender and age. Women are also taking upon themselves to take up the heavy work and irrigation activities earlier taken up by men. Though the aspect of reciprocity remains, yet it entails a heavy pressure on the small population attached to agriculture. The extension of the activities of the patañ from the economic activity to a social one has ceased to operate. It is during the vacations that young boys and girls go back home and contribute to agricultural operations through affiliation to their respective patañ.

The institution survives in its functional aspects with severe modifications is reflective of the resilience of the institution in adapting to current social realities. What is lost in the process is the camaraderie and friendship sustained through this institution and loosening of bonds within the villages where a certain section of the population still live in. A substantial section of the population has converted to Christianity. They are just severing their associations with traditional institutions by not participating in community activities as they have rituals embedded within, which their new religious affiliation declares as Satanic. Therefore, social cohesion as maintained through this institution where the material and spiritual worlds overlap is under severe threat.

The friendship maintained through the BiineAjiñ however, continues to be reaffirmed at the-Myokuñ festival through the performance of the TaparLiinii ritual. It is the bounden duty of each individual to honour his friend and those acquired from earlier generations. Three days of the festival, which stretches for over a month, are dedicated to visits of friends. In case the immediate family of the friend is not present, distant members of the same family are ushered in and honoured.

Their role as representatives of their friends in inter-village feuds still continues. In terms of the day-to-day responsibilities of the Biine Ajiñ whose presence is expected for resolving conflicts, family members stationed at Ziro valley represent them. The traditionally valued items like the smoked bacon which the Biine Ajiñ carried back home are being replaced by money payments. The Biine Ajiñ's presently supplement their absence in times of calamities by financially pooling in. It is the fear of the spirits and the curse that dissuades people from severing this ceremonial friendship.

A new form of friendship called Tu Ajiñ has emerged which is not sanctified through ritual. The strict code of the Biine Ajiñ makes it difficult to sustain with the population spread out into other parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The newly converted Christian members of the society dissociate themselves from such ritual aspect of the friendship reciprocate by gifting sugar. They do seek to sever links through a mutual agreement of compensating the friend for the abandoning the institution under altered social conditions. However, the embedded fear acts as a deterrent in severing this tie unless it is mutually agreed upon. So long as the celebration of Myokuñ continues, this institution shall survive in its current form. There are fears within the community that the pace at which conversion to Christianity is taking place, this institution of friendship reified by their traditional faith will totally get effaced.

Conclusion

All traditions that operate within tribal societies are centred on an awareness of the integral and whole relationship of symbolic and material life. It becomes difficult to a separate subsistence, kinship structures, language, governance, and landscape from the system of beliefs and ritual practices. Within such an overlap of realms, that we find the culture of friendship is located in the Apatani lifeways. Each of practices through which friendship is structured seeks to create networks of goodwill at a variety of levels ranging from family, clan, and village to tribe. These associations intersect

with other socially sanctioned institutions strengthening relationships very essential for the sustenance of their livelihood patterns, for a population concentrated within a small area. There is also a constant endeavour to minimise conflicts. Reciprocal exchange, the comprehensive principle governing conduct of a social relationship is extended into the domain of friendship.

The fact that each tradition was sustain through a myth is symbolic of the relationship between humans and non-humans. The stories try to capture the second phase of their mythology when humans, animals and spirits roamed the earth chronicling their encounters with each other. The myths also allude to conflicts, negotiations between the humans and the spirits and the final segregation of the realms of the humans and the spirits. The myths abound in the emergence of a cultural hero who guides the community through their earthly sojourn to their present abode. The stories of the trials and tribulations and the frailty of the human spirit as revealed in these myths are a window to the occasional disorderliness in the universal order. The myths and rituals that are enjoined upon the tribe are for the purpose of maintaining a semblance of order between humans, and between humans, non-humans and their environment, and between humans and spirits. The activities guiding the communities embody within it expressions of the constant underlying quest for the sustenance of a universal rational order. The essence of these myths and rituals, which support the sustenance of an institution is a means of determining self-awareness and awareness of others, and are thus, expressive of what each culture perceives as morality.

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