Migration and Tribal Political Organisation : Case of Arunachal Pradesh

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Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh is predominantly a tribal state with more than 25 tribes who constitute 68.2 per cent of total population of the state (Census 2011). The socio-cultural matrixes of these heterogeneous groups hold uniqueness and provide interesting areas of research investigation. The uniqueness lies not in the diversity of the socio-cultural life, but the scope they provide for theoretical understanding of social phenomenon. It is in this context that a study of political systems of tribal communities assumes significance. A cursory look at the political systems presents a picture of a complex reality in that similar religious groups do not have similar types of political system. For example, the Buddhist Monpas and Khamptis do not have similar type of political systems; while the Khamptis have chieftaincy, the Monpas have an acephalous society. The Tani groups of tribes who consider Tani as their common ancestor do not have similar systems; the Adis have a three tier system at territorial and tribe levels while the Nyishis have an arbiter type of political system at village level. Even within the Nyishi community, the political system varies from *Dupam* in Koloriang area (Soring, 2004) to *Nyele* in Seppa and adjacent areas and in between the arbiter type. However, different tribal groups like the Mishmi and the Tagin have similar arbiter systems. Similarly, Khamptis and Noctes are different not only in their faiths and beliefs but also in their racial identity. The Khamptis while belong to Shan race (Behera, 1994:18), the Noctes belong to Naga group of tribes. Besides, the Akas in spite of being a single tribe, have two different political systems namely *Nyele* of the Khoro group and *Mele* of the Hrusso group (Hissang, 2005). Thus, the existence of similar political systems under some heterogeneous conditions and different systems under similar conditions trigger of the research interest of social scientists for an understanding of the phenomenon.

It is in this context that the present study is taken up as a preliminary enquiry into the causes of such differences. The analysis of this paper is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source of data is based on observation and interview. For secondary data, earlier writings on the topic have been consulted. The earlier writings relate to both synchronic studies during the period from 1940 to 1960 and diachronic studies after 1960 (Smith, 1960). The synchronic study of political structures that began with the publication of *African Political Systems* (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940) assumed static equilibrium and creation of typologies. The diachronic study particularly began with Smith (1960),

though the shift was signalled in 1954 with the publication of Edmund R. Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* wherein Leach emphasized the existence of political alternatives and the search for power as the effective basis for individual choice between alternatives.

Approaches & Perspectives to Study Tribal Political Organisations

In conventional anthropological literature kinship relation (see for example Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940; Leach, 1954, etc.) plays a crucial role to explain   traditional tribal political organisations. Nevertheless, a number of approaches have been advance to study these organisations. Among these approaches typological and terminological approaches and functionalist and structural approaches are widely discussed.

Typological approach involves the classification of societies into different types such as band, tribe, chiefdom and state. Interest in political typology began practically after Maine's (1963/1861) attempt to correlate political aspects with other aspects of social life. Elman Service (1978) played a leading role in advancing the idea of evolutionary of political structures from simple to complex. In a band society the disputes are discussed among the band members who arrive at a solution to which disputing member abide by. A typical example is the G/wi Bushman in the Central Kalahari Desert (see Silberbauer, 1981) who traditionally lived in bands of averaging 50 to 60 souls. The members of respective bands settled any disputes arising in the band among themselves.

Tribe as a category has both cephalous and acephalous type of political organisations; the social structure being based on clans or lineages that influences the political structure.   The Adis of Arunachal Pradesh with their Kebang structures can be taken as a typical example of acephalous community (Roy, 1960/1997). Another well-known example is the Nuer of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Traditional Nuer community presents an acephalous political structure in which the authority rests in the hands of lineages and local groups. These groups are loosely linked with kinship bondage. The other variant is the cephalous political structure in a tribe. The well known example is the office of the chief held among Trobrianders (Malinowski,1922 &1926; Weiner,1988). The office is held by males but is hereditary in the female line, normally mother's brother. The chief exercises power by controlling the distribution of yams and performing magical spells.

A more complex stage in evolutionary perspective of   political structure in traditional communities is state formation with hereditary or elected leaders. In the Northeast India Jaintia Kingdom in pre-colonial period is an example (Gait,1906) of a state based political structure   which evolutionists consider   to e at

the apex of evolution of political organisations. However, the Swazi kingdom in Southern Africa (see Bonner,1983; Kuper, 1986 and Gillis,1999) represents one of Africas many pre-colonial kingdoms. The kingdom is one among the few pre-colonial kingdoms to acquire the status of a nation-state, namely Swaziland, in recent time.

The terminological approach which mainly associates with M.G. Smith (1960) emphasises the definition of concepts for a general explanation of varied political typologies. Smith sought to explain political action and political power, authority and administration, legitimacy/legality, etc. on Nigerian state politics with a view to give them a general significance and to make them applicable to the most varied political typologies.

Functionalists, (see the works of Radcliffe-Brown, 1922 &1952 and Malinowski, *ibid*. Schapera, 1956; Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940, etc.), however, emphasise the ways in which politics and governance are interconnected with other aspects of social structure, such as economics, kinship and religion. Political organisation, to them, is not considered as a separate domain of activity, rather is situates as a specific aspect in the domain of all activities of the community. As a critique to it, there stands structuralist approach that emphasises social relations while seeking explanation of political structure. In the study of political structure Sir Edmund Leach's (1954) perspective figures prominently. In his study of political system of the Kachin of Burma, with reference to diachronic process, he informs us of social dynamics which creates oscillation between two types of social organisation- *gumsa* and *gumlao*. The former is a hierarchical arrangement while the latter is egalitarian in nature. He has discussed social process with reference to social relations in the context of structures of belief in the political order. In his discussion, general interpretation of myths to uncover their political meanings plays a significant role. According to him, 'myths integrate the contradictions that man must confront, from the most existential to those resulting from social practice'.

Another variant of structuralist approach is dynamic perspective advanced by Gluckman (1963). He recognises rebellions as permanent process that replaces incumbents of political offices, but maintains existing systems of political relationships, since rebellions are competitions among rivals for positions which remained unquestioned. Later (1965) he linked instability in political situation due to rebellion with modes of husbandry, problems of the devolution of power, types of weapons and the law of treason and advanced the notion of 'oscillating equilibrium' to explain the dynamic of political system of traditional African societies he studied. In doing so he introduced greater flexibility to the understanding

of traditional political societies. His proposition was an attack on the oversimplification of functionalists who saw traditional political systems as simple and static.

In fact there are many theoretical and methodological approaches to study political organisation of tribal societies which relate to different societies in Africa and elsewhere. I have just mentioned a few which would be useful to understand the present discussion either in their presence or absence or both.

Frame of Analysis

To put the political life of the people in a tribal community into a category is difficult. This is because our efforts to study the traditional way by applying the modern concepts of political science lead us to either too narrow or too general of an understanding. For example, democracy is contested when women are not allowed or not facilitated to participate (Elwin, 1957/1988:157) in the 'village council' like *Kebang*. The use of the term democracy (Elwin, 1965; Thungon, 1997) restricts its meaning to include male population only and contradicts the rhetoric (Dubey, 1998:2.22; Roy, 1960/1997, 218). Similarly, interpretation of the *Kebang, the* Adi Council of governance, as a government by the people and for the people (Dubey, 1998:2.22, Roy, 1960/1997) is too simplification of an explanation, for term 'council' normally carries the connotation of something formal. Whether from this point of view the village political life can be understood within the conceptual frame of the council (cf. Thungon, 1997) needs to be addressed with more theoretical rigour, for the system is very much informal (Dubey, *ibid*. 2.3). Moreover, the institutional arrangement of political life is not restricted to village level as can be seen from following discussions. It needs to be debated whether the institutional arrangement of political life of tribal community can be understood under the blanket term 'village council' or not. Similarly, a conceptual problem arises to understand the traditional political arrangement of the tribe as 'self-governing institution' (cf. Goswami, 2002; Roy Burman, 2002:24-27; Father Krick, quoted in Elwin, 1957/1988; Dubey, *ibid*. 2.1). Because the conceptual connotation of the term 'self' is intriguing in many cases. If we consider the 'self' to refer to the tribe as a whole, then the political arrangement that is conterminous with village divides the 'self' i.e. the tribe into spatial categories. The connotation of the 'self' for the tribe carries an understanding which is not same for the 'self' in the spatial context, precisely with a 'self-governing institution' at village level. The 'self' has also limitations in understanding the political arrangement in its totality for the tribe when viewed from general perspective, because the exclusion of women reduces the 'self' of the tribe to include adult males. Moreover, 'self government' especially in traditional society has been contested (Roy Burrman, *ibid.).* In order to avoid this conceptual confusion the political arrangements in the tribal communities have been referred to as political systems for the

purpose of our analysis. The word 'system' is used as synonymous for the pattern of arrangement or informal organisation. There is another reason to use the word system, because "what we call political'' in fact is not a culture-isolated phenomenon; it is rather embedded in the culture of the people. Faiths and beliefs, rituals and the world view of the people as such manifest in the behaviour of members of a group which we call "political''. In other words, behaviour is inclusive in the sense of its embeddedness. The term system is, therefore, used to mean the political life in a wider and inclusive sense, though it is not a formal institution.

Not only we have avoided the use of the concepts like 'village councils' and 'self-governing institution', we have also avoided analytical concept like 'democracy' as the basis of classification of political systems. Instead we have classified the political system in a binary scale into chiefdom and acephalous society (Marsh, 1988:10). This does not, however, negate the usefulness of the concepts like democracy, gerontocracy, etc. in explaining the phenomena. These terms are used not as tools of explanatory category but in explaining the political system in an inclusive sense. The word 'system' being used in an inclusive sense has another theoretical implication for our analysis. It is used to emphasise the expressive aspect. The political system here is not studied as the object of a functional analysis to find out what it contributes to the whole system i.e. the culture, but to understand it by relating it to other aspects of the culture (Bhakhry, 1992:271-274) as discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, the analysis of this paper draws on the frame of functional analysis (cf. Radcliffe Brown, *op.cit.* and Malinowski, *op.cit.*), for new place of settlement consequent of migration required a type of functioning for which the system emerged. Obviously, migration as an analytical tool is employed in its relation with the dynamics of functional needs in new settlements to explain difference in political organisations in tribal communities.

 The   the term political organisation is not technically used. I have used terms like 'political organisation', 'political system', etc. interchangeably. Even the phrase political organisation present different perspective when approached structurally or functionally. Structurally,   a political organisation refers to   institutions that regulate the use of force (Radcliffe-Brown 1940;   Almond 1960), and functionally   to social cooperation and leadership (Schapera 1956; Mair 1962). It can also be explained in terms of the processes of decision making found in a given population (Easton 1953; 1957; Macridis 1955). We can also approach the organisation from cultural perspective in view of its embeddedness in other aspects of community life. In this line of argument   a political organisation is a structure that facilitates the function in the process of decision making, especially in societies we have taken for discussion where political institutions are confined to community boundary and socially instituted, In this context I have used the terms like organisation or system interchangeably.

Hypothesis

An obvious line of reasoning, with reference to previous discussions, shows that religion cannot be a factor to explain similarities or differences of the political systems. Similarly, ancestry also cannot help in explaining the differences. Even culture as a factor cannot throw much light in understanding such differences, as we have seen that cultural differences among Khamptis and Noctes have not given the two communities different political systems. On the other hand, to some extent, the differences in political system have attributed different cultural identities to different communities. For example, the political system i.e. Buliang of the Apatanis is different from that of arbiter system of the Nyishis. This difference is markedly evident in their cultures because a political system in itself is a component of culture. It can be further reasoned out that the cultural similarities between any two tribes have not been powerful enough to affect the political system in a similar line. In other words, similar material cultures or similar faiths in supernatural being have not been able to evolve similar political systems, say for example in Adi and Mishmi communities. This does not suggest that the differences in political systems can be studied outside their present cultural boundary. It is not the interconnectedness of cultural factors which can be used for the analysis purpose; rather the answer is to be sought among the interacted factors which built up the distinct cultural identity of the group after migration. Obviously the focus is not on the interconnectedness of various components of the culture as we see, but on the events and situations which interacted in the past to shape the present cultural identity. No doubt the analysis refers to a diachronic understanding in that a phenomenon, that is the political system, is attempted at an explanation with reference to a social process which in our study is assumed to be migration and interaction with the environment.

Of all factors, the most important one which shapes the cultural identity of the community is human interaction with the surroundings. The dynamics of interaction between human and nature resulted from human migration. It can be argued with some degree of certainty that migration happens to be a major factor that defines human-nature interaction especially when tribal communities were nomadic or semi-nomadic. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have the treasure of their migration stories. Hence, the hypothesis is that migration and resultant interaction with environment resulted in the origin of specific types of political system in the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

Nature and Type of Political Systems

Without taking help of different concepts of political science, the political systems have been categorised with references to the nature of societies on the basis of the existence of central authority (cf, Sinha,

1962:100). The societies with some sorts of central authority have chieftaincy, while those without any central authority are acephalous types of society. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Noctes, the Tangsas, the Wanchos, the Khamptis and the Singhpos have chieftainship type of societies. The chieftainship is hereditary in the family among the Noctes,Tangsas and Wanchos while it is in the clan among the Khamptis. The *Chautang, Lungking and Namchum* are the royal clans among the Khamptis in India. The chieftainship has two aspects; territory and community based. In case of the Noctes and Singphos, there are territorial chiefs. For example, among the Noctes there are two paramount chiefs namely the chiefs of Borduria and Namsang. There is no chief for the entire Nocte community. However, every Nocte village has a chief. But among the Tangas there is no instance of a territorial chief or a community chief either at tribe or sub-tribe level (Taisam, 2004:35). Every Tangsa village, however, has a chief. A chief in a Tangsa village is not subordinate to any other chief of any Tangsa village. However, the chief of a new village may have some social relation with the chief of the parental village (*ibid.*). This relation is basically due to clan bondage.

Like Noctes, beside village chiefs, the Singphos also have territorial chiefs. The Singpho chief who is called *Agi* or *Mireng* is both a clan chief and also territorial chief. For example, the Ningroo chief and Bisa Gam are territorial chiefs in the Singpho community. Unlike Noctes and Singphos, the Khamptis have a chief at the tribal level known as *Chaukha-Kongmong*. In addition to the tribal chief, each Khampti village has a chief known as *Chauman.* The chiefs have their own councils through which they discharge their various duties in the matter of settling disputes, organizing wars, and organizing economic pursuits. The council of the Khamptis is known as *Mukchum*,; among the Tangsas it is known as *Ruung, Rangtun* and *Rungkathin* by the Longchang, Muklum and Yogli sub-tribes respectively, while that of among the Noctes *Ngongwang*.

Acephalous communities have body politics of varied nature. No single conceptual frame can be applicable to explain the body politics in these communities. There are elements of democracy, gerontocracy and oligarchy, combined in different degrees. Even the oligarchies too have some elements of democracy in them while all the systems have a gerontocratic tendency in their constitution (Talukdar, 2002:164). There is also the practice of intermediating between conflicting groups. In Adi and Galo communities, the body politics is known as *Kebang* (*Keba* among the Galos) at three territorial levels. At village level, there is *Dolung Kebang*, beyond village level, at the level of group of villages, there is *Bango Kebang* and at the tribe level,   *Bugum-Bokang. Kebang* is is known as village council in many earlier writings. It is difficult to explain the *Kebang* as a council as its constitution is not formal. Whenever there is a dispute, on the report of a plaintiff, village elders conduct a meeting which is called

Kebang. The literally meaning of *Kebang* is 'a gathering'. *Kebang/Keba* is also known as oratory. The members are also not elected. They are the clan elders who assemble together and deliberate upon the issue of a dispute on the basis of evidence and with reference to convention and customary practices. Usually, the clan elders with oratory or knowledge in traditional lore are practically the *Kebang* members, though in principle all the adult male members have the right to its membership. Women are not allowed membership though they can lodge complaints, provide witness and watch   the proceedings of the *Kebang* session. There are earlier writings which inform us about the women membership in the *Kebang*. However, in practice female membership in *Kebang* is not a usual feature. Obviously, membership in *Kebang*, though open to all, members are restricted by gender, age and knowledge considerations (Wilcox quoted in Elwin, 1957/1988: 156-157). In spite of all these qualifications, *Kebang* displays the characteristic of a limited democracy, as there is no hierarchy among the members. Moreover, it is a village level infromal institution in the Adi community (also see Talukdar, *op.cit*. 174). In inter village disputes, however, the expert *Kebang* members of the villages form into *Bango Kebang* or *Bogum-Bokang*. At the village level though the members are clan elders, they do not represent the clan as such, because during deliberation they do not side their respective clans.

The political system of Apatanis has a different arrangement. There is *Buliang* at village level whose members (also called *Buliangs*) are more or less hereditary. The *Buliang* also exist at inter village level and at tribe level. Besides, there is also *Gondu* who is an intermediary between the conflicting parties. He can settle the dispute without calling the *Buliang*. The Sherdukphen mythology tells that the descendent of a Tibetan chief established the community. The Sherdukpen community has two social divisions, namely *Thong* and *Chao*. The clans in the Thong group are the descendants of the chief who migrated and established the community. In a Sherdukpen village the body politics is called *Jung* which has a member from the Thong group of clans as the chief. The chief is not hereditary in the family or in a particular clan but is hereditary in the upper division of   the community, i e. *Thong*. There are also members with specific assignments. The village body politics of the Sherdukpen contains some elements of oligarchy and gerontocracy like that of the Apatanis (Talukdar, *ibid*. 170). The Monpa body politics can be viewed as a council as the *Tsorgen* is elected for a period of three years. The other members are also either elected or appointed. In the Monpa village council a Lama or a commoner can be the *Tsorgen*. Moreover, the village council does not function according to Buddhist tenets and hence is not a theocratic as mentioned in some earlier writings (Talukdar, *ibid.;*Dubey, *op.cit*.,2.19). The Mishmis and Nyishis have an arbiter system. The *Gingdung* i.e. the mediator settles the disputes by himself or by calling a meeting

of the elders known as Nyele. The *Gingdungs* are professional intermediaries; they negotiate the issue between the parties and try to find out a solution which is bilaterally acceptable.

Observations and Analysis

The Nyishi and the Mishmi have clan based villages. Though in recent years they live in multi-clan villages, all the traditional villages happen to be of single clan. A village may consist of one or two long houses. This means that married brothers and their children, even after marriage, live under the same roof with separate hearths under the leadership of the family head. Two implications follow. May be one family or few families of the same lineage migrated to form different settlements. That is why in traditional villages there are not many houses. This implies the migratory nature in Mishmi and Nyishi communities. Because of the migratory nature and formation of village with family members, the need for an institution like *Kebang* or *Buliang* is not felt. Moreover, the family head is considered to be the authority for all other members. However, when the population is more in a Nyishi village or more than one clan or families belonging to more than one clan live together there evolved a system like *Kebang*. That is why *Nyele* and *Dupam* exist in some Nyishi areas.

The Adi villages are multi-clan villages with comparatively more population. They migrated in groups without any individual leaders. That is why they have evolved a village body politics. Most of the traditional Galo villages are single clan villages. The ancestor of Basar and Riba clans namely Kore is believed to have migrated and settled along with his family members in different places. Inspite of that, the Galos have a village level body politics. Probably, in a short period the population of the settlement increased. That is why the Galos evolved the *Keba* system. There are also myths and legends which tell about disputes even between brothers. There is another characteristic of the Galos i.e. the Galos do not live in the long house. They live in joint families or nucleus families. Because of more families and disputes over resources, an institution beyond the family level became necessary. As per the legend, the sons of Bate and Babi had quarrel over the ownership of *Hire*, a tributary of Hirik River on the way to Kamba owing to distribution of fishes caught. It implies that though Galos have single clan villages there were disputes between the families of the cousin brothers which necessitated the *Keba* institution. There is another aspect relating to the migration. Though there are legends of a single Galo family migrating, it is found that the single family migrated from a group which might have the *Keba* system. Infact, there is a legend to substantiate the point. The Galos are the descendant of Topo. Topo and Karbo used to live in *Golo-Yorbo*. Karbo is the ancestor of Bokars. When the population of two families increased they quarrelled to command over resources available in the village. In order to avoid the dispute they decided

that one group would migrate for which they depended on some tests. It was the Topo group which migrated southward from *Golo-Yorbo*. No doubt, the Galos who live in single clan villages have evolved and adopted a *Keba* system.

Like the Adis, the Apatanis are also living in multi-clan villages who migrated from their original place of settlement in groups consisting of different clans without any single leader. Though the Hage clan and a few other clans migrated alone they had a comparatively large group for which an inter-family organization was necessary to settle disputes. When the population was manageable perhaps the clan head mediated between the disputant parties. That is why both arbiter and village body politics exist in Apatani community. The Khamptis, the Noctes and the Tangsas (Taisam, 2004, 21-41), the Singphos (Singphos, 2005: 41-42) migrated in groups consisting of different clans, each group under a single leader. This leader became the chief and there evolved chieftainship institution at territorial and tribe level. The Tangsas migrated in different groups, each group under a leader called *Saria* who was any individual with courage, intelligence, brabery and strength. This *Saria* later evolved into a hereditary chieftain in Tangsa villages (Taisam, 2004:22-36), thereby developing chieftaincy. The first batch of Khamptis migrated under the leadership of *Chao Cham, Lungkeing Kham* (Behera, 1994:21). But, the Noctes who migrated in batches established their settlements under their group leaders. In later years some of these villages accepted the leadership of the chiefs of Borduria or Namsang due to one reason or other. There are legends which tell that many villages accepted Borduria chief only to get salt from his area. Moreover, the family members of Borduria chief established other villages with allegiance to the parental chief (Taisam, 2004:25-29).

When a family migrated to a different settlement and subsequently the population increased a political institution became necessary. A pertinent question arises as to why they developed a non-chieftain form of institution, but not a chieftain type of institution. The societies in Arunachal Pradesh being patriarchal, the family, the lineage or the clan patriarch could have assumed authority over other members. In that case a form of chieftaincy could have emerged. There are also legends to substantiate to the point that such a type of institution was in the making. In Damro, the Padams have different ancestral origin. Perme, Pertin, Ratan and Borang clans have Kepang as their ancestor. Other clans like Yirang, Lego and Tayeng have their respective ancestors who migrated to Damro much later than the Kepang group. There are legends which tell that *Paper*, the son of Kepang, was a legendary hero in the Kepang group. In fact he used to exercise his authority over his group members. In spite of that the group could not evolve a chieftainship system. There could be two reasons. The settlement from where ancestors of Kepang migrated had acephalous society which did not allow the emergence of chieftain in the family or lineage.

Secondly, when other clans came and settled, they probably diffused the nascent central authority in *Paper*. That is why migration of individual family did not have an   evolution of central authority.

The instances of clan hero at one phase of migration of one or some families probably made some earlier writers to believe that Adis and Akas 'used to have chiefs' (quoted in Dubey, *op.cit*. 2.22).

Conclusion

To conclude, migration though has a major influence on the pattern of political system; it is not the only factor. There are other factors like population size and frequency of migration (migration batch by batch) which contributed to evolution of political systems in Arunachal Pradesh.

Apparently, relation among the members of a group in the process of migration   to a new settlement, subsequent population and social dynamics along with environmental factors, separately or acting upon one another, determined the growth of political organisations among tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh.   Territorial chieftaincy in Nocte society, for example, emerged from village level chieftaincy as salt was not available in all the villages.

However, more researches in the above line of reasoning are necessary for a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the pattern of migration and evolution of political system. What seems more logical is the functional necessity, which cropped up consequent upon the pattern of migration, affected the emergence of diverse political systems in the state and thus justifies different institutions in similar cultures and similar institutions in different cultures.

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