

MUSUP YAMENG IN ADI COMMUNITY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA- ROLES, CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

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Abstract

Musup Yameng being one of the most inimitable and unique socio-political and cultural identity of the Adi Society. It is primarily a male youth institution which serves as multipurpose training ground for the youths who are mostly unmarried. It is the gateway of learning basics of oratorical skills, arbitrary or customary laws, mythologies, folktales, dances, crafts-making, rituals etc of Adi community by the youths. Musup Yameng plays myriads of roles in the society. They act as collectors, messengers, receptionists, security guards so on and so forth. Nevertheless, the contents and essences of this important youth institution are dwindling day by day. Urbanization, modernization, growing education and adoption of new religions have been some of the important factors that lead to shrinkage of its significance over the passage of time.

With this background, in this paper an attempt has been made to discuss major roles of Musup Yameng in Adi community. Moreover, it also endeavors to thrash out changes and continuity in roles and scope of Musup Yameng in Adi society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Adi; Arunachal Pradesh; Musup Yameng and Youth Institution

BACKGROUND OF DISCUSSION

Literal denotation of *Adi* is '*The Hill People*' or '*Highlanders*'. Being one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, *Adi* community has simply become tantamount to democratic society by default, not an upshot of political governance. Rather, the community is more prevalently known for brawny '*Kebang*'- the socio-political institution which is also the traditional village council system assuring equity, equality, justice and freedom to each member of the community. The *Adi*'s *Kebang* system has

been acknowledged by many of the researchers as one of the most democratic village council system among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There are four types of Kebang systems in hierarchical orders. Opin Kebang at the bottom, dolung and Banggo Kebang in the next respective subsequent levels and Bogum Bokang Kebang in the top level of the hierarchy. The members in the Kebang are selected on the basis of their oratory skills, experiences, command over the villagers and knowledge about traditions and culture of the Adis. The member of the Kebang are called as the '*Kebang Abu*'. With the change of time, the women are also appointed as the members of the Kebang these days. The *Musup Yameng* are a very important part of this Kebang system of the Adis.

Geographically, the *Adis* mainly inhabits in Upper Siang, Shi Yomi, Siang, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley and Namsai districts which constitutes the central parts of the state. It also inhabits in some parts of the West Siang and Lower Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Also, they inhabit in some patches of Lohit district and in upper fringe of the Assam too. Further, *Adis* of Arunachal Pradesh is popular for dormitory or pseudo dormitory systems for both, male and female. Notable of them are- *Raseng*, *Royup*, and *Musup* or *Deere*. *Raseng* is exclusively a female centered dormitory system exclusively for the unmarried young women. However, *Royup* and *Musup* or *Deere* is purely male centered dormitories which booked its existence through the ages. Amongst, the male dormitories, *Deere* or *Musup* are most popular where in, *Musup Yameng* or *Duar Koo* or *Deere Yameng* often sleep at night in *Musup* or *Deere*. Infact, the same institution is known differently across different areas of *Adi* inhabited districts due many sub-tribes within the Adis that constitutes the *Adi* community. Conventionally, *Musup Yameng* or *Duar Koo* brings into play the *Musup* or *Deere* for several reasons. It is used for educational, political, security, cultural, social causes so on and so forth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The paper endeavor to:

1. Discuss important roles played by *Musup* or *Deere Yameng* in *Adi* society.
2. Thrash out changes and continuity in the roles of *Musup* or *Deere Yameng*.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology adopted for the paper is as under:

- **Research Methods & Tools:** An effort has been made to make the study an empirical. Interview and observation methods have been adopted for the present study. Structured schedules, video camera, mobile phone and other stationeries have been prominent research tools to collect field data during the field study.
- **Sources of Data:** The study in its entirety is based on both- primary and secondary data. Personal interviews and observations have been the main sources of primary data. For better analysis of the topic, various secondary data have been used. Secondary data have been collected from various books, journals, reports of national and international repute. However, internet has been of the most used sources of secondary data for the study.
- **Sampling Technique and Size:** Convenience sampling under non-probability sampling technique has been applied during the study. Altogether, four sample respondents have been taken for the present study. These four persons constitute eminent priests and resourceful elders of the *Adi* community.

- **Universe of the Study:** The study covers the entire population of *Adi* Community.
- **Period of the Study:** The present study has been conducted over one year from March' 2020 to March' 2021.

DISCUSSION

Community hall popularly known as *Musup*¹ or *Deere* is the essence of every *Adi* villages which happens to be a very important component of the *Kebang* system of the *Adi* community, which not only have socio-political values but cultural and strategic too.

It acts as a solid rock for carrying out strategic social, political, and cultural activities. The *Deere* or *Musup* assumes significant places in *Adi* community. This important platform is used for various purposes; ranging from declaration of *Mimak*² to foes to *Mibo Yamrik*³ to cronies. The mythology of the *Adis* says that *Gumin Soyin*⁴ used to inhabit in *Musup* or *Deere*.

Captivatingly, the *Adis* is well known for a unique youth institution which is fully a male dormitory institution called *Musup* or *Deere Yameng*. Infact, they act as the two ends of a balancing rod that determine the economic, political, social, ethical and cultural development of a village to great extent. No wonder, in every *Adi* villages, every young male at the attainment of more or less the age between 14-20 years, becomes *Musup* or *Deere Yameng*. They are appointed through *Kebang* or by the village headman as dormitory boys for the time span of 3 to 5 years. However, the age to deem fit as *Musup Yameng* keeps on varying from region to region or sub-tribe to sub-tribe of *Adi* community. Earlier, some sub-tribes of *Adi* community even practiced *Royup* System. *Royup* serve as a training ground for *Musup Yameng* where, the boys gather every evening to discuss about the day-to-day happenings of the village and other socio-cultural issues. They are guided by elderly unmarried male members of the village in a particular hut of each clan. Interestingly, completion of the period of *Musup Yameng* marks the attainment of physical, emotional and mental maturity. Thereafter, they are considered deemed fit to take active participation in myriad of village activities- social, economic, political etc. The period of *Musup Yameng* offer realistic training ground to the *Adi* male youths to observe and learn their rich socio-cultural heritages, ethos, beliefs, folklores, dances, folksongs, taboos, practices etc. They have to attend in *Musup* in almost every evening after being taken dinner. Basically, they are to carry a bundle of firewood from their respective homes to ablaze every hearth of *Musup*. Also, they take up series of discussion on economic, socio-political, administrative and developmental matters of the village at night. So, every youth must go through and take bath with very experiences of being *Musup Yameng* once in their life that remain obligatory. *Musup Yameng* plays a very important role in bringing all round development of the village who keeps alive the strength; the beauty; and uniqueness of the high and mighty *Musup* and *Kebang*⁵ system of the *Adi* community. They play multifaceted roles; as a protector to messenger of *Adi* villages. Therefore, *Musup Yameng* has occupied a strategic position in *Adi* community which is beyond one's positive reception.

¹ Community hall

² War or battle

³ Reception of guest

⁴ The God of peace, prosperity and, protector of a village

⁵ Traditional socio-political institution

The role of the Musup Yameng is highly indispensable as per as the socio-political and cultural spheres of the Adi is concern. Traditionally, it is one of the most vital component of the Adi community. Some of the high-flying roles played by *Musup Yameng* are discussed as follow:

- A. Maintaining Law and Order in Adi villages:** Before the advent of the modern police system, the Dere or Musup Yameng were mainly delegated the role of maintaining the law and order systems in the villages apart from other important roles. *Musup Yameng* serves as Policemen or Security personnel in *Adi* community who were delegated the authority socially by the *Kebang* Abu or the *Kebang*. This was a very effective system to maintain the law an order in the *Adi* villages thereby, keeping the unity and harmony intact among the people of *Adi* community. The wrong doers were detained and produce before the *Kebang* for trial and on proving the crime the accused were punished in traditional ways. In other ways, the *Musup Yameng* always stands vigil and ready to enforce law and order made through *Kebang* or by elderly people of *Adi* villages. They were entrusted to implement or make people obey the law and order framed through *Kebang*. In case of non-compliance of law and order or declaration of war or any other problems threatening the very safety and security of the village, the Musup Yameng is at the forefront to defend. In this context, the *Kebang* may be understood as the legislative body and the Musup Yameng as the executive.
- B. Role as Messenger of Adi villages:** At the time when there were no means of communication unlike today's modern days, the Musup Yameng held a very prominent place as the Messengers for the people. They not only communicate the message of the *Kebang* decision within the village but, also in various other villages depending on the case and situation. Like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and rest of India, *Adi* community is also very rich in performing rituals and other cultural and traditional taboos thereby, maintain their age old traditions. At large, it is the duty of the Musup Yameng to communicate the message to the villagers for any community engagements like developmental or community work, community hunting & fishing, festivals, rituals or any taboos for the coming days. Generally, messages are conveyed at twilight in the form of *Googging*⁶ in every nook and corner of the village. In this regard, their special services to public in the form of informing the death of a person have been appreciated since the time immemorial.
- C. Role as Collectors:** *Musup Yameng* are also delegated the responsibility to act as a collector for various fines or monetary collections pertaining to the overall development of the village. They have to collect indemnity, fines etc, from those villagers who remain absent from the *Kebang* or community works, community hunting & fishing, festivals, rituals or any taboos. Many a times, the Musup Yameng are also engaged to collect the fines from the person who is given judgement of wrong doings and are penalized by the council.
- D. Role as Initiators of community dances:** *Musup Yameng* play important role in initiating *Ponung*⁷ of female and *Delong*⁸ of male in any *Gidi*⁹. Infact, they facilitate and take initiatives in organizing

⁶ Public announcement

⁷ Traditional women dance

⁸ Traditional men dance

⁹ Festival

any community dances during any occasions. They are also put to charge for organizing various community festivals wherein, the traditional dances like *Ponung* are an intrinsic part.

- E. Role as Receptionists:** Adi community is very rich in welcoming and hosting the guests. The practice is very much embedded in the value system of the Adi which have been handed down from the past to present generation. In this regards, *Musup Yameng* has been playing very prominent role as a receptionist. They perform *Mibo Yamrik*¹⁰ of guest or dignitaries in the village or *Musup*. In addition, they undertake embellishment of *Musup* or *Deree* with varieties of bamboo arts and wild leaves etc.
- F. Role as Caretakers of Community Fence:** It is fascinating to learn that, almost every *Adi* villages are surrounded by *Dolung Etors*¹¹, which is constructed and taken care jointly by the villagers. This fence helps in protection of agricultural fields from domesticated animals. Usually, domesticated animals of the villagers are kept strayed within the community fence. Further, it marks the beginning of agricultural fields thereby; indicate completion of the very settlement area of a particular village. Now, the responsibility of construction and maintenance of the community fencing system lies on the shoulders of *Musup Yameng*. They render series of services right from *Googging* to collection of fines from the public who kept absent during construction or maintenance work of the same.
- G. Role as Leader of Community Hunting:** Community Hunting or the *Kiruk Ruknam*¹² has been one of the community activities of the Adi people. It has got high cultural values which can be either in the form of hunting or fishing. In this noble job, they flaunt high degree of leadership to the public right from conveying the messages of community hunting till collection of fines from the public who remain absent.
- H. Role as Search Operator and Rescuers:** Moreover, they also provide yeoman services to the public and bereaved family in case of *Taleng Simang Lanam*¹³ and *Nyipong Simang Ago Papo*¹⁴. In some cases, even they devote more than a week to probe missing people who are feared of being drown, committed suicide, gone missing etc. In this situation, they are being trained to put up lion's heart and fox's brain to probe and rescue death or missing fellow beings.

CHANGES IN THE ROLES OF MUSUP YAME

The roles, position and functions of the *Musup Yameng* has come up with considerable changes with the advent of modernity. As there has been sharp shift in the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of the tribal people, the impact is quite visible with the role, position and functions of the *Musup Yameng* too. The probable factors for these changes are educational system, science & technology, influence of various religious movements, etc. Further, changes in their roles is also contingent upon changes in belief or philosophy systems. To great dismay, importance of *Musup Yame* is losing ground day by day. Modern education system has tremendous impact on their roles and

¹⁰ Traditional reception of guests and dignitaries

¹¹ Community fence

¹² Community hunting

¹³ Search drive of person who might have met an unnatural death

¹⁴ Performing last rites and rituals of a women who died due to delivery of a baby

responsibilities. Local youths who have taken admission in schools, colleges, and Universities hardly have a little time to serve the society with full strength, time, sincerity, and commitment as *Musup Yameng*. Even, traditional *Googging* has been replaced by announcement or dissemination of information via audio devices like, micro phone, amplifier, WhatsApp, etc, in modernized Adi villages. In this context, uses of mobile phone and its various Apps need special mentions. In many Adi villages, members of *Musup Yameng* have their Whatsup group created through which they receive and share information in recent times. Moreover, now a day *Musup Yameng* as security guard of an Adi village is also losing its social implication. Fact being, police and other security personnel have eventually replaced them. Miracle of religious propagations, teachings, and conversions also deserve special mention. As significant portion of Adi population have been converted from indigenous faith & culture to Christianity. It clearly gives gesticulation that, the roles and responsibilities of this youth institution are losing grounds as some of them stand against religious doctrines and practices.

Even though the *Musup* exists and still remains to be a very important part of the *Kebang* system in every Adi villages yet, the *Musup Yameng*, unlike earlier days, doesn't pay visit *Musup* regularly. Rather, they go to *Musup* only when need arises. Moreover, they no more sleep at *Musup* or *Deere* of Adi villages in present times.

Currently, the old aged practice of *Lepum Demmin Sunam*¹⁵ is also vanishing away day by day. They prefer to take money than beating the calf of a *Musup Yame* for keeping absent from community activities entrusted to *Musup Yameng*.

In some of the urbanized Adi villages, *Musup Yameng*- the unique heritage of Adis has almost wiped out. Simply, it has become a matter of rural Adi villages where it still books its existence and practiced to full strength and spirit. Consequently, the youth from remote and interior villages have better command over knowledge and experience as being a *Musup Yameng* than from urban villages.

Thus, the roles and responsibilities of *Musup Yame* are in transition negotiating various aspects of modernity and religious transformation. Of course, their duties as a member of this youth institution are dwindling down day by day. No wonder, the Adi society has to adjust themselves with the changing times and if resisted, they might fossilize. It does happen in Adi society with noteworthy socio-political and cultural transformation going around, as changes are natural with the evolution of men and their mind and *Musup Yame* is not the exception.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concept and significance of *Musup Yameng* or *Duar Koo* can never be overlooked in Adi community as it is one of most unique and interesting socio-cultural identity of the Adi Society. In another words, the *Musup Yameng* have a systemic role as per as the village council system of the Adis are concern.

So, it an ideal and multipurpose training ground and institution for the youths. As a matter of fact, it is the gateway of learning basics of oratorical skills, arbitrary and customary laws, mythologies, folktales, dances, crafts-making, rituals etc. However, the contents and essence of this important youth institution is diminishing day by day. Urbanization, modernization, growing standard of education and adoption

¹⁵ Beating the calf of a person for remained absent from community activities.

of new religions have been some of the important factors. The need of hour is to work upon its restoration and to bring about drivable changes in its contents and scope in response to changes in environment if, it has to travel deep into the future as a distinct identity among *Adis* of Arunachal Pradesh. As a matter of fact, 'change is the only unchanged law of the Universe'.

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